ETHICS AND MORAL SCIENCE

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CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL ETHICS HAS NOT AND CANNOT HAVE ANY EXISTENCE

I

General conditions of the distinction between the theoretical and the practical point of view—The distinction is made more slowly and with greater difficulty when the questions involved appeal to our feelings, beliefs and interests—Examples drawn from physical science, and particularly from medical science.

THE distinction between science and art, or, more exactly, the distinction between the theoretical and the practical point of view, is, in some cases, simple, in others subtle. It is easily made, as we well know, when the subject with which it is concerned appeals almost exclusively to the intellect, and little, or only indirectly, to the emotions and passions. We easily understand pure mathematics, pure physics, on the one hand, and, on the other, applied mathematics and applied physics. It may be that all science is, as Comte says, born of a corresponding art, and possibly, mathematics themselves in their beginning passed through a period in which acquired truths were only regarded as useful knowledge. At least, for many ages, the geometrician was accustomed to separate the speculative study of mathematics from their application.

The example offered by mathematics is of great value for the other sciences. For, whatever the natural phenomena to be studied may be, the more that theoretical research is separated from practical preoccupations, the more certain and fruitful is the application likely to prove. In some cases, of course, research may have

reference to special problems, which are the outcome of urgent practical needs : some of Pasteur's great discoveries, for instance, were thus originated. But the scientific pursuit of immediately utilizable results is only possible, as Pasteur's works themselves prove, when there exist earlier researches of a purely speculative kind, in which the student merely aimed at the discovery of the laws that governed the phenomena.

In fact, as we ascend the ladder of the sciences in the order of the growing complexity of their subject matter, the distinction between the theoretical and the practical point of view becomes less clear and less easily determinable. The change is particularly felt when we reach organic nature. Claude Bernard would not, undoubtedly, have so emphatically insisted that medicine ought to be experimental, that is, that medical art ought to be based on a scientific research from which it is distinct, if that truth had been universally admitted in his day. Physiology was only established as an independent science at the end of the eighteenth century. General biology is still more recent, and so is the greater number of the sciences connected with it. Many causes, it is true, especially the extreme complexity of biological phenomena, contributed to retard the definitive formation of those sciences. But, among those causes, the immediate exigency of the practical was not the least decisive. The interest at stake—health or disease, life or death—is too urgent, too imperious. For long ages, and until a quite recent epoch, it patiently subordinated itself to the purely speculative and disinterested study of facts.

The substitution of rational geometry for empirical geometry, a revolution big with consequences for humanity, passed unobserved, except among the experts whom it interested. Nothing was at first changed in the measuring of land, nor in the marking of boundaries of property. An analogous substitution in the science of medicine demanded centuries, and is not yet fully established. In the latter case, if practice is to become rational, it must be separated from a complex mass of beliefs and customs, and consequently, also, of emotions and passions, the antiquity of which renders

men particularly tenacious of them. Sociology has established that, in the beginning, the physician and the sorcerer were one with the magician and the priest. It was their task to fight against maladies, many of which through their epidemic, or sudden, or disagreeable character suggested the introduction of one or more maleficent principles into the body. And how were such principles to be influenced except by the usual methods of coercion, exorcism, persuasion or prayer? The division of social labour and the progress of the knowledge of nature have gradually separated the sorcerer from the priest and the physician from both. But the distinction is not so thoroughly established that we do not still find sorcerers and bone-setters in the country and even in the towns in no negligible numbers. There are very few persons among the so-called educated classes who do not complacently listen to stories of marvellous and inexplicable cures. How many accept, more or less openly, the hypothesis of a miraculous intervention of the Virgin or of a saint during the course of an illness! They reject the idea that mechanical or physical laws can actually permit any exception. But they easily agree to a striking exception to biological laws, without perceiving that the miracle they accept necessarily implies several of those that they do not accept.

Many beliefs originating in an extremely remote epoch persist side by side with a general conception of nature which excludes them. That so many intelligent persons should still at the present time accept so gross a contradiction is to be explained by the ardent desire of escape from suffering and death. Can we wonder if the same desire makes the distinction between theory and practice very slow in coming and very difficult wherever the art of healing is concerned? It is not as if the ancients did not possess physicians endowed with a remarkable scientific spirit. The authors of the Hippocratic writings, to mention them only, well understood how to observe, and, in certain cases, how to make experiments. In the dark ages of mediaeval times, admirable clinical physicians were to be found in Europe and in Arabia, and, from the sixteenth

century onwards, medical science has made unbroken progress. But purely biological research, unconnected with any immediate medical or chirurgical application, was not yet established. That is an entirely modern idea, and was scarcely accepted before the nineteenth century. Too many obstacles stood in the way. Above all, the pressing necessity was more and more felt of substituting a more rational practice for the empirical processes and prescriptions of tradition, and, consequently, the desire followed of making every new acquisition of science of immediate utility.

The progress of biological and natural sciences in the nineteenth century, and especially of those of comparative anatomy and general physiology, gradually modified those conditions. A more important effect in that sense was produced by the discoveries of Pasteur, who was not a physician, and by those of his successors, most of whom are physicians. Those discoveries have proved by facts in the most decisive and striking manner that in this domain as in the others researches apparently entirely unconcerned with and foreign to practice may become extraordinarily fertile in applications. After Pasteur came Lister. They show that microbiology and biological chemistry are not less indispensable to the art of healing than pathology and physiology. It follows that the scientific knowledge on which medicine and surgery are based is not reduced to a segment, arbitrarily cut out of the whole of biology by the immediate and ill-understood interests of practice. Their theoretical basis, on the contrary, is increasingly extended, without prejudicing the practical and technical preparation which is indispensable to the physician. But that result has only just been obtained, and, although henceforth assured, it is not wholly uncontested.

Without sketching even hurriedly the history of the relations of medicine with the sciences on which it depends, we see how theoretical research has gradually become separated from practical research. We can even mark the principal stages of the advance. The distinction was established, and afterwards precisely stated in the proportion in which

science, properly so-called, " desubjectivized " itself, that is to say, in the proportion in which dissociation worked, on one side, between the phenomena and laws to be studied, and, on the other, beliefs, sentiments, practical exigencies which were originally inseparable from them. Thus it required: (1) that the conception of these phenomena should cease to be religious (disappearance of the belief in spirits or divinities which cause or keep them away by their mere presence, or according as they are well or ill-disposed with respect to such or such an individual, or to such or such a group of persons); (2) that it should cease to be *metaphysical* (end of the " vital principle," of a special chemistry for organic beings, of a *vis medicatrix naturae*); (3) that those phenomena should at length lose their specifically human character in order to be reintegrated in the whole mass of biological facts. Then only were the theoretical sciences of life clearly separated from the arts which receive from them their means of action. Then only the exigencies and immediate needs of practice ceased to impose themselves on scientific research as directing principles Only then, in short, did biological phenomena begin to be studied with the same objectivity and in the same spirit as that in which the phenomena of the inorganic world have long been studied. Experiment once again quickly proved that the clear and methodical distinction between science and practice, and the establishment of rational relations between them, are not less profitable to one than to the other. But history also shows how difficult it was to gain that point.

II

Application to the case of ethics—Particular meaning that philosophers have given to the words " theory " and " practice " —Ethics should be a normative or legislating science as much as a theoretical science—Criticism of that view—In fact, theoretical ethics is normative but not theoretical.

Will the difficulty be less when we leave the domain of biological facts and pass to that of social facts, of which

ethical facts are a part ? It would be rash to hope so. Social facts, by general confession, offer a greater complexity than biological facts : they are more difficult to study scientifically. The reasons have been stated often enough in detail since the time of Auguste Comte ; it is not necessary to repeat them here. It is sufficient to emphasize the fact contested by scarcely any one : the positive science of social phenomena is not yet out of its incubative period. In such matters, practice has appeared to depend only on acquired experience, and to pay scant attention to the works of theorists, at least until a quite recent period. But ethical facts, properly so called, touch our feelings, our beliefs, our passions, our fears, and our individual and collective hopes, in constant and intimate fashion. It is from that point of view alone that they are generally regarded.

Undoubtedly, if ethical facts are considered from the outside, objectively, and in their relation to other social facts, they seem to belong to the same category, and consequently to be objects of science as they are. But so long as they are manifested subjectively in consciousness under the form of duties, remorse, feelings of blame, praise, etc., they possess an entirely different character. They seem to relate exclusively to action, and to depend solely on principles of practice. Of the two conceptions the first is unusual, the second universally received. It is not less familiar to philosophy than to common sense, and has never shocked any one. The other is proper to scientific sociology which puts forth as a principle that ethical facts are social facts, and which concludes that the same method applies to one as to the other. It nearly always awakes a feeling of instinctive distrust in those who are not accustomed to look at things in that manner.

Far then from the distinction between theory and practice in ethics being clearly established, it is scarcely formulated, and, before it attains its rightful place, it will have to overcome a strong opposition. That fact should not be surprising. The distinction is scarcely definitively accepted in questions of biological phenomena which are projected in space, and evidently governed by laws independent of our will. Is it

likely that such a distinction should already be admitted in the case of ethical facts which are revealed only to consciousness, and which appear to have their origin in the free will of the human being? Besides, we easily separate, at least in thought, science which compels us to know natural phenomena, and methods of art which modify them. We conceive one without the other. A constructor of engines uses formulae established by pure analysis; the anatomist and the physiologist only seek to know facts and laws, leaving possible therapeutical applications to others. But when it is a question of ethics, the subordination of practice to a theory distinct from it, seems suddenly to be effaced. Practice is no longer understood as the modification by the rational intervention of man of a given objective reality. Conscience seems to testify that it derives its principles from itself. A long exercise of the reflective powers is required to accustom us to conceive that it is our practice itself (that is, what seems to us subjectively in the conscience as a compulsory law, a feeling of respect for that law, for the rights of others, etc.), which, considered objectively, constitutes (under the form of morals, customs, laws), the reality to be studied by a scientific method in the same way as the rest of social facts.

There are, in truth, two entirely distinct senses of the word "practice." In one sense "practice" designates the rules of individual and collective conduct, the system of rights and duties, in short the moral relations of men to each other. In another sense, not peculiar to ethics, "practice" is in a general way opposed to theory. For example, pure physics form a theoretical research, applied physics are related to practice. The second meaning can be, and should be, extended to ethical facts. It suffices that the whole of those facts, namely "practice" in the first sense of the word, becomes itself the object of speculative study, disinterested and entirely theoretical. And it is only when that "practice" is sufficiently known, that is when we are in possession of a certain number of laws governing those facts, that we may hope to modify it by a rational application of scientific knowledge. Then, but not till then, will

the relations between theory and practice in ethics be normally organized.

But, it may be said, the distinction between theoretical ethics and practical ethics does not require so much effort. Is it not of current usage and perfectly clear ? The first establishes speculatively the principles of conduct, the second derives applications from those principles. Practice is here as everywhere regulated by previously established theoretical knowledge. The considerations invoked just now can do nothing against that fact. Far from the distinction between theory and practice in ethics being specially difficult, and scarcely visible, nothing can be clearer or more familiar to cultivated minds. The distinction is certainly current ; but is it a fact that it is established ? Of what nature is " theory " in theoretical ethics ? What kinds of questions does it propose to solve ? Either it must be intuitive, and proceed *a priori*, or it must be inductive and employ an empirical method ; they must only treat problems having direct relation to action : to determine for example what ends a man should follow, to discover the order in which those ends should be subordinated one to the other and if there is one supreme end ; to establish a scale of good ends ; to determine the directing principles of the relations of men between themselves. It is always a question of obtaining an order of preference and of founding, according to Lotze's favourite expression, *opinions of worth*. But is that the duty of science, of properly theoretical research ? According to definition, science has no other function than to know what is. It is, and can only be the result of the methodical application of the human mind to a portion or to an aspect of a given reality. It leads to, and borders on, the discovery of laws which govern phenomena. Such are mathematics, astronomy, physics, biology, philology, etc. Theoretical ethics has an entirely different object. It is essentially legislative. Its function is not to know, but to prescribe. At least, knowing and prescribing are for it one and the same thing. Its aim is, so far as it is possible, to reduce the guiding rules of action to a sole principle. Doubtless such a systematization can, if it is desired, be

called a " theory." But it is under the condition of taking that word in the narrow and special sense in which it means the abstract formulation of the rules of an art : theory of naval construction, theory of the utilization of waterfalls—and not in the wide sense in which theory signifies the speculative study of an object for the sake of scientific and disinterested investigation. Theoretical ethics do not respond to that definition. They even defend themselves from responding to it.

Some philosophers, and especially Wundt, propose to place ethics among the " normative sciences." But the question is to know if those terms are compatible, and if normative sciences really exist. Every norm is related to action—that is, to practice. It depends on knowledge only in an indirect fashion by right of result. Empirical, it proceeds from traditions, beliefs and ideas, the relation of which with objective reality may be more or less slight. Rational, it is founded on the exact knowledge of that reality, that is on science ; but it does not thence follow that the science, considered in itself, is " normative."

Science merely provides a solid basis for application. Otherwise it must be admitted that all sciences which give opportunity for application are normative, beginning with mathematics. But mathematics represents pre-eminently the speculative and theoretical type of science.

To declare that science is normative as science, that is as theory, is to confuse in one, two periods that can only be successive. All actually existing sciences are theoretical *at first :* they become normative afterwards if their purpose allows of it, or if they are sufficiently advanced to permit applications.

It can undoubtedly happen that the distinction between the speculative and the applied point of view takes a long time to establish itself, especially when the imperious interest of practice does not allow the rules, the use of which seems indispensable, to be separated from all the knowledge, more or less scientific, acquired up to that moment. Knowledge may then appear to be indistinguishable from the rule of action. In that sense, medicine, as we have just

seen, was a sort of normative science until a quite recent epoch.

But ethics is not thus represented. It would be a normative science precisely by its theoretical side, would be "legislative in as far as it is science." It is confusing the effort to obtain knowledge with that to regulate action: it is a claim that it is impossible to realize. In fact, systems of theoretical ethics are never realized, never at any moment are they properly speculative. They never lose sight of the practical interest, which is to discover in a disinterested fashion the laws of a reality (empirical or intelligible) taken as an object of knowledge. In short, ethics, even when it desires to be theoretical, is always normative; and for that reason is never really theoretical.

Thus theoretical ethics and practical ethics do not differ like pure and applied mathematics. In fact, the object of both theoretical and practical ethics is to regulate action. Only, while practical ethics descends into concrete details of particular duties, theoretical ethics seeks to raise itself to the highest formula of obligation, good, and justice. It presents a superior degree of abstraction, generality, and systematization.

Besides, as a rule, practical ethics is homogeneous, theoretical ethics is not. The first is exclusively confined to the examination of concrete questions of ethics; and if the number of those questions is illimitable, they all lie within a well-defined area. Theoretical ethics, on the other hand, almost always contains elements of diverse origin, more or less amalgamated with what is properly ethical. Sometimes they are religious beliefs, or metaphysical reflections on man's origin and destiny, or on his place in the universe; sometimes, psychological researches on the nature and relative force of natural inclinations; sometimes juridical conceptions and analyses concerning the relative rights of persons and things. Those elements lend a theoretical appearance to philosophical speculations on ethics. But it is only an appearance. As a matter of fact we shall see that later on such theoretical reflections do not really give rise to the rules of action with which they are united. There is

no relation of principle to consequence, but only a complex, obscure relation, a relation which often cannot be made clear without the assistance of sociological analysis. But it remains true that the mingling of propositions of a speculative character with general precepts of ethics which seem to be closely connected with or even to be deduced from one another, contribute not a little to keep up the illusion that causes ethics to be regarded as a " science both theoretical and normative."

Since a science cannot be normative as well as theoretical, no theoretical science of ethics exists or can exist in the traditional sense of the words. Is scientific research in respect to ethics impossible ? On the contrary, the rational distinction between the theoretical and practical points of view permits us to define the object of that research. While the confused conception of a " theoretical ethics " is destined to disappear, another conception, clear and positive, begins to be formed. It consists in the consideration of ethical rules, obligations, laws, and whatever generally is contained in the conscience, as a given reality, as a unity of facts ; in short, as an object of science that must be studied in the same spirit and by the same method as other social facts.[1]

III

The ethical antithesis between what is and what ought to be—Different meanings attached to " what ought to be " in inductive and intuitive ethics—Impossibility of a deductive system of ethics *a priori*—The reasons—due to sentiment and to social forces—that have until now hindered scientific research in ethical matters.

It will perhaps be objected that the general definition of the relations between theory and practice given above does

[1] See E. Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, 2nd edition : Paris, F. Alcan, 1901. We are in entire agreement with the spirit of that work, and are glad to acknowledge here what we owe to its author.

not apply to ethics. So far as "physical" nature is concerned, rational intervention depends almost exclusively on the knowledge of facts and their laws. But practical ethics bears no resemblance to that intervention. It relates to good and evil which depend on us. Its problem is not to modify a given reality: it does not depend on the scientific knowledge of that reality. It follows then that theoretical ethics has a special character of its own. Its object is not to know what *is*, but to determine *what ought to be*. Therefore inferences founded on a presumed analogy between that science and the natural sciences have no value. All that was demonstrated above is resolved into the proposition that theoretical ethics employing the same methods as the physical and natural sciences cannot have any existence. But that demonstration was useless. It is clear that theoretical ethics has an entirely different object, and must be in itself very different from those sciences. Normative, it is also necessarily constructive. It has not to analyse a given reality, but to build up conformably to its principles the order which must exist in the soul of the individual, between individuals, and between groups, and groups of groups of individuals.

The objection may be made that we are only developing under another form the definition of theoretical ethics which has just been criticized. "Knowledge of what ought to be" is in fact equivalent to both theoretical and normative knowledge. But let us leave the form and consider the grounds of the objection.

What ought to be, as opposed to what is, can be understood in two principal senses. In both cases a moral order —whether in the soul of the individual or in society—is imagined as superior to the natural order, is represented as an ideal, is felt to be the obligatory aim of our efforts. Sometimes that moral order has its necessary, if not sufficing, conditions in the natural order from which it claims to be distinguished; sometimes, on the contrary, it differs from it *toto genere*, and in an absolute manner. It then introduces the free and reasoning being into a world which has nothing more in common with that of experience. All

theoretical ethics regarded as the science of what ought to be is an effort to develop logically one or other of those conceptions.

Now the theoretical ethics of the first category are, it seems, inadequately defined by the expression : " Science of what ought to be." For, what ought to be, being conceived in a constant relation with what is, that science supposes another before it, into which knowledge of human nature, knowledge of certain laws of the physical world, and sociology in general enter, according to the doctrine under consideration, in varying proportions. In short, the science of what ought to be, which claims to establish how psychological and social reality must be modified, depends on scientific knowledge of that reality. Better still, history shows that the idea of " what ought to be," considered in its content, varies in relation to that knowledge. When it is scanty and rudimentary, the imagination does not feel itself restrained, and finds it easy to construct an ideal order which it likes to oppose to the real order—or disorder—that experience seems to present. Inversely, in proportion as social reality is better known, in proportion as the laws which rule its phenomena become more familiar to men's minds, it will be impossible to represent to oneself what we know to be impracticable as desirable or obligatory.

The idea of what ought to be is thus conditioned, so to speak, more and more closely restricted by the knowledge of what is. Finally, the science of what ought to be should yield to reasonable applications of the science of what is, for the well-being of all. What is there to say, except that the " speculative " and the " normative " of so-called ethical science should be separated ?

In fact, theoretical ethics of that type is normative in essence, and theoretical by accident. It is normative in essence because it claims to establish a guiding principle of action, to determine the hierarchy of duties and laws and to found justice : if it renounced that, it would, by its own confession, renounce being ethics. But it is only theoretical by accident. For knowledge of the world, of human nature, of social organization on which it

rests, is not the result of its own researches, but comes to it from other quarters. It owes it, in differing degrees, to metaphysics and the positive sciences. For instance, in the systems of Spinoza and Leibniz, ethics, properly speaking, consists of practical conclusions drawn from the knowledge of certain metaphysical truths. That knowledge is doubtless entirely speculative, but it does not as such belong to ethics. Has it not been long believed that Spinoza's *Ethics*, in spite of its title, expounds metaphysics rather than ethics ?

The same observation applies to inductive and empirical ethics, which borrow the knowledge of the facts of which they have need from historical, psychological, and sociological sciences. They profess to be founded on experience and not to introduce any mystical sense into the expression " What ought to be." They should therefore recognize that they are in fact normative, and not speculative, and expressly subordinate their prescriptions to the scientific knowledge that comes to them from some other place. But they have not yet arrived so far. They persist in presenting themselves as properly speculative, and in attempting to legitimize the rules they formulate by their demonstrations. Notwithstanding the considerable place they give to the knowledge of the real, they lack the essential idea without which the distinction between theory and practice is, in ethics, confused : the recognition that ethical facts are social facts, differing in function from other social facts, and, like them, subject to laws ; in short, that the object of theoretical knowledge, in ethics, is practice itself, studied objectively, from the sociological point of view.

In the theoretical ethics of the second type what ought to be is no longer considered in its relation with what is. It is an entirely distinct order of reality. It has its own existence and suffices to itself. The virtue of ethical intention alone gives access to it. Such is Pascal's conception when he says that all the universe and all the intellects put together are not worth an impulse of charity, for " that is of another order." Such is Kant's teaching, according to whom ethical good and evil differ absolutely in essence from natural good and evil ; good-will is the only thing in

the universe that has an absolute value; moral law commands solely by its form, an abstraction made from its matter; the reasonable will is autonomous and legislative *a priori;* by it man knows that he belongs to the world of noumena, and he escapes from the determinism of the world of phenomena. Thus understood, theoretical ethics, the science of "what ought to be" in the full meaning of word, constitutes itself entirely *a priori.* It establishes universal and necessary principles without borrowing anything from experience.

But it owes something to it. Perhaps that will be granted without once again criticizing Kant's ethics. It is now generally recognized that Kant, whatever he may think, does not in the construction of his ethics keep to the one consideration of the autonomy of the will. He takes into account not only the form but the matter of the law. Even with the postulates of practical reason, he re-introduces a whole system of metaphysics. *Per contra,* he is allowed to regard that proof as decisive. There is small probability that the enterprise of constructing a "theoretical ethics," entirely *a priori,* will ever be pushed with more vigour and resolution than it was by Kant. Yet it is apparent with Pascal, and perhaps also with Kant, that it is inspired at bottom as much by religious as by philosophical reasons.

There remains, it is true, a last conception found in Locke and Leibniz in spite of the general contradiction of their teaching. The "science of ethics" should take a form analogous to that of mathematics. It would suffice that it should commence by putting forward, says Leibniz, a certain number, the smallest possible, of definitions, axioms, and postulates to which no one could object. They would afterwards be constituted in a series of theorems, without the necessity of having recourse to experiment. Leibniz was led to this by the consideration of juridical demonstrations. He found them logically immaculate and entirely comparable to those of mathematics; he did not see why what succeeded in the science of law should not also succeed in the science of ethics. Locke, on his part, only considered as certain, truths proximate or provable without the help

of experiment; truths of fact, according to him, being invariably provable. As the truths of ethics, although they are not all proximate, did not present any element of doubt to him, he admitted the possibility of a demonstrative science of ethics.

But no attempt of the kind has ever succeeded, even for a time. None indeed has ever been seriously undertaken. The demonstrations in use in Roman law, the example of which Leibniz invokes, are doubtless very rigorous. But the propositions they establish are only of worth in a social system in which the authority of the elemental ideas of Roman society has been preserved. They share the local and historical character of those ideas. They do not pretend to the universality that philosophers claim for the truths of ethics. In fact, what makes the analogy between mathematics and an ethical deductive science entirely illusory is the difference presented by their fundamental notions. In mathematics the axioms and definitions only comprise ideas that are perfectly clear and simple, at least so far as regards the use made of them. In ethics notions of good, of obligation, of merit, of justice, of property, of responsibility, etc., are concepts of extreme complexity, implying a large number of other concepts, impregnated with feelings and beliefs more or less perceptible to the conscience and the mind, burdened, in a word, with a whole past of social experiences. Clear enough for action for which tradition teaches their use, they are strangely obscure for scientific analysis. Far from the possibility of founding on them a series of theorems analogous to those of mathematics, slight dialectic skill could deduce from them what it desired, as Simmel has well shown in his *Introduction à la science morale.*

Thus in whatever way we look at it, speculative philosophy necessarily fails in its continually renewed effort to constitute a " theoretical science " of ethics. That science ought to be both speculative and normative, that is, to satisfy two incompatible exigencies if they are simultaneous, at the same time. And as the second of the two exigencies is the most imperious, as, above all, ethics must formulate

the fundamental rules of conduct, the first is sacrificed. So-called ethical science is only speculative in name, or by borrowing.

But how has so grave an illusion so long escaped, as it still escapes, the attention of philosophers ? We should be more astonished if we knew how many even palpable confusions pass unobserved when no practical interest is to be distinguished, and especially, when there is a practical interest in not distinguishing them. Thus in the use of our senses we tend to perceive not in the most accurate manner, but in the most economic and advantageous manner for ourselves. Indeed, no practical interest demands a real separation in ethics between theory and practice, and as a matter of fact pressing interests oppose it.

For a proof, we need only return to the comparison between the evolution of medicine and that of ethics. Medical art in the beginning was not separated from the beliefs and traditions which inspired it. Gradually there appeared a theory distinct from practice, and now practice tends more and more to subordinate itself to science. The scheme of that evolution may be thus summed up : in the early period, the art was irrational, purely empirical ; in the next, that through which we are passing, a period which will probably last a long time, it is rational in one part, and traditional and empirical in the rest ; in a third period it will approach nearer to a goal which will doubtless never be reached, and will tend to become entirely rational. Does not practical ethics go through an analogous series of phases ? No, for leaving aside the difficulties peculiar to sociology it is opposed by one powerful interest. In every society, no matter what it be, a strong conservative tendency prevents, or at least retards, the separation of practical ethics and beliefs. It endeavours to preserve indefinitely a religious or mystical character in ethical rules. It opposes with all its might whatever could despoil them of that character, for instance, that they should be submitted to the control of a science independent of them and purely human. But, above all, it turns away from the idea of a transition period, evidently very long, in which some of those rules would

continue to be of value, while others would be gradually modified by a scientific knowledge of social reality. Would it not appear both sacrilegious and impracticable to proclaim in principle the more or less near decay of rules the observation of which is now imposed on us as a duty ?

We are resigned to a semi-empirical, semi-rational medicine. We are consoled for its ignorance by shuddering at the idea of what it thought it knew formerly. We understand that it refrains from treating certain diseases in which it can do nothing ; we only hope a day will come in which it will be able to apply a rational and efficacious treatment. But who would approve a similar attitude in regard to problems of individual or social conduct ? Social interest would condemn it as both guilty and extravagant. A very strong feeling—we shall see later if it is well founded—prevents us from admitting that we do not know " what to do " in a given case, or from deriving arguments from our ignorance which bid us refrain. Lack of theoretical knowledge is never invoked as an excuse. On the contrary, do we not see the greatest ethical theorists, Kant, for instance, asking seriously if what they do is of any use, and if the conscience of lowly and ignorant persons left to itself does not know as much as the most learned philosopher ? That is a significant scruple, and one which throws a bright light on what the " theoretical science of ethics " really is.

If practical ethics is to be subordinated to a theory, it must be done without compromising its authority, without the loss of its imperative character. There is no question of a progressive evolution of an indefinite duration in which social science is gradually built up and will at last render a more rational practice possible. Social interest does not tolerate rules of action both provisional and compulsory. But on the other hand, the human mind, arrived at a certain degree of scientific development, experiences the need of discovering everywhere order and intelligibility, the principle of which it carries in itself. It seeks to organize, to systematize, to legitimize logically the rules which are, in fact, imposed on the conscience, and direct our actions. Lacking a rational

practice, it has "rationalized" practice, and so we have the speculative ethics of philosophers.

It is then inevitable that the relations between theory and practice are not the same in ethics as they are elsewhere. But if ethical practice is not so far subordinated to a theoretical knowledge clearly distinct from it, that is to say, to a positive science of social facts, it is not a privilege of ethics, the only domain in which man's activity can find its rule without a long apprenticeship to science. It is, on the contrary, a proof that in ethics criticism and science have still almost their whole work to do.

IV

Idea of an ethical reality which shall be an object of science like physical reality—Analysis of the positive idea of "nature"—How the limits of "nature" vary according as scientific knowledge progresses—When and under what conditions a given order of facts becomes part of "nature"—The characteristics peculiar to ethical reality.

The new conception of the relations between theory and practice in ethics implies that there is a social objective reality, as there is a physical objective reality, and that man, if he is logical, should assume the same attitude to the first as to the second, that is, he should endeavour to learn its laws in order to be as much master of them as possible. Everybody does not accept that conception or that result. Ethical order, which has its origin and development in conscience, and in which man's freedom interferes, is often opposed to the order of physical nature, invariable and independent of us. It is one of the essential points in the dispute between sociologists of the school of Durkheim and the representatives of the ancient "ethical sciences." Are ethical facts social facts, and can social facts in general become the object of a science properly so-called, or is an ever-renewed and irreducible element of contingency opposed to the constitution of such a science?

We have no desire to add to the number of works in which the definition, the characteristics, the possibility, the legitimacy of sociology has been so often examined. Essays of that kind have only one time, and the time is over. What is the use of proving in the abstract that a science is possible when the only decisive argument in such matters is to produce works which have a scientific character? A science proves its legitimacy by the simple fact of its existence and progress. And in the same way, what is the use of disputing dialectically the possibility of a science which gives positive and repeated testimony of its existence?

The representatives of scientific sociology have wisely determined to support their teaching by effective works rather than by abstract reasoning. Its universal acceptation is, we must admit, still far off. But their attempt is quite recent, and they have to contend with strong traditional opinions, rooted prejudices, and poignant feelings. Besides, we have much more difficulty in conceiving phenomena that we can easily modify by our voluntary interference to be ruled by immutable laws. The philosophical idea of necessity comes to us, as it seems, from mathematics, logic, astronomy, by the experience we have of "not being able to be otherwise." Inversely the philosophic idea of contingency or of imprevisibility doubtless derives its origin from the observation of biological phenomena, and especially of ethical phenomena. In that domain it often seems to depend on us whether a thing shall or shall not be. What is easier in general than to destroy the life of plants or animals? What is more at our own discretion, apparently, than our own conduct? Whence we immediately infer, although wrongly, that those phenomena are not subject to laws like the first. However, whether we suffocate an animal or let it breathe, it lives or dies through immutable laws. Whether in a given circumstance we do our duty or leave it undone, it does not depend on us that this duty seems to us obligatory, nor that our action in the one case as in the other entails consequences that can be foreseen. For instance, if I knowingly fail in my duty, penalties of different kinds will result (remorse, social reaction under the form of

public disapprobation or punishment), and the forces thus set at play were acting before under the form of ideas and feelings.

If we only consider ourselves, and the society in which we live, we may believe that our ethical opinions and our feelings are born in our conscience, and that their origin is not to be sought beyond nor outside it. That origin seems amply proved by the imperative character of the duties that conscience imposes on us. But let us examine the ethical opinions and the feelings of an uncivilized man, or of a man belonging to a different civilization from that of our society: of a Fuejian, a Greek of the Homeric period, a Hindoo, a Chinaman. Some actions appear obligatory to that conscience, so different from ours, others forbidden. Whether those obligations and interdictions seem to us reasonable or absurd, humane or barbarous, we do not hesitate to take into account the religious beliefs, the intellectual condition, the political and economic organization, in short, the institutions as a whole of the society in which those men live. And when they would be persuaded only to obey their conscience in accomplishing such or such an act, we, who see at one and the same time both the act and the social conditions which determine it, judge better. We know what relation unites the individual conscience to the social conscience of which it is the expression. We understand their conviction and its reason.

If those reflections are accurate, they are of as much value in our case as in the others. We cannot see why scientific investigation can be applied to all human morals except to ours. On what is such a pretension founded? *Mutato nomine, de te. . . .* Western nations appear barbarous to the civilized nations of the Far East. Our civilization, in some aspects, will doubtless seem as repulsive to our descendants of the fiftieth century as that of Dahomey seems to us. A more learned, and probably a more gentle humanity than that of the present day, will understand not only our ethics, which will not be theirs, but also the fact that we explained them quite differently from the way in which they explain them.

In spite of those reasons, the objective and scientific study of "social nature," like the objective and scientific study of "physical nature," remains a conception of paradoxical appearance. The assimilation of those two natures seems forced and false. It shocks the traditional idea, still universally accepted, which places man at the point of contact of two distinct and heterogeneous worlds: one physical, in which the phenomena are ruled by immutable laws; the other moral, which is revealed to him by conscience. Only the first of these two worlds, it is believed, can be conquered by positive science. The second escapes it, and only lends itself to speculations of a different order. The name of "nature" belongs only to the first.

In our metaphysics the distinction is bound up with the immortality of the soul, man's free will, beliefs which are of capital importance in our civilization. Like those beliefs, it is defended with passionate tenacity. But putting sentiment aside, it is difficult to justify it from a purely rational point of view. If by "nature" we do not mean the totality of the given reality, if the meaning of the term is restricted to that part of the reality which we conceive to be subject to immutable laws, there is some temerity in claiming to fix the point where nature ends. For the boundary line has been changed several times. What we call "nature" has gradually been established for our own understanding. It is not impossible to trace the successive phases which that nature has traversed in order to be extended. Lasswitz, in his admirable *History of Atomism*, has clearly shown a few periods of the evolution. He demonstrates that parts of the external reality of which man has always had knowledge by sensation, were only incorporated in nature in the strict sense of the word, since the time when phenomena have been represented in a properly intellectual objective fashion, that is, conceived as subject to laws. The ancients, for instance, had, like us, sensible perception of light and colours. Light and colours, however, only really entered into our *conception of nature* after the analysis of the spectrum and the later discoveries in optics. For then only did we have an objective conceptual idea of those pheno-

mena, forming part, according to our understanding, of the rest of the laws of nature.

What Newton discovered for light and colours, the Greeks had already discovered for sounds. Some day, perhaps, a physician of genius will do the same for odours. Then, the sum of possible perceptions for our senses will not have varied, yet, nevertheless by the mere fact of the objectivation of perceptions which were formerly purely sensible, something will be changed in the conception of nature. The example of optics shows that, objectivation once started, a vast region of discoveries may be opened up, discoveries of which no one could have the least idea before, and which singularly enrich our idea of nature (double refraction, diffraction, polarization, spectrum analysis, infra-red and ultra-violet rays, chemical action of light, X-rays, electro-magnetic theory of light, etc.).

In a general way our conception of nature is enlarged and enriched each time that a portion of reality, given to us by experiment, " desubjectifies " itself in order to objectify itself. That conception is not always like itself nor is its content unvarying. On the contrary, it has never ceased to vary since the remote epoch in which it was born. For it was born. There was a time when scarcely any sequence of phenomena appeared infallibly regular: spirits and gods could produce and prevent nearly everything by their arbitrary action. At that time the domain of nature, if nature was conceived even in a vague manner, was extremely small. It was indeed *minimum*. Gradually it was formed, it grew, and now it comprises the largest part of whatever space presents to us. But by what right, in the name of what principle, should we now fix the *maximum* beyond which it will not go? Why should we exclude *a priori* from nature thus conceived, any portion of the real, social phenomena, for instance? Because we do not just now feel the need of giving them a place there, because a spontaneous feeling is opposed to it? Poor reasons: for without criticizing the part that feeling plays in it, we see, through the history of science, that the human mind is always satisfied with the intellectual conception of the uni-

verse, whatever it may be that is transmitted to it. It follows the line of least resistance, and tends to preserve whatever intellectual heritage it has received. Far from desiring or claiming any enriching of the traditional conception of nature, it scarcely ever accepts without resistance that which is offered it, and only after a more or less long period of time.

Nothing then prevents *a priori* the process of objectivation being carried on, or that new portions of the given reality should enter into the intellectual idea of nature, and be henceforth conceived as ruled by unvarying laws. It is a conquest of that kind which is realized by scientific sociology. The resistance with which it meets is a normal fact, and can be foreseen. The rigid distinction between the world of "physical nature" and the ethical world is only one aspect of that resistance.

But how can we speak of laws when it is a question of facts, the greater number of which are only furnished us by history, that is, are known by testimonies, with an element of uncertainty, with the portion of interpretation which every testimony comprises, and which are only given once, the facts of history never repeating themselves in an identical fashion? An answer is provided to the first point by the existence of sciences already secular, philological sciences, for instance, which without any other material than testimonies, establish incontestable laws. The second objection proves too much. Leibniz said that there do not exist in nature two identical beings. What is irreducibly individual in each tree, each animal, each human being, is especially interesting to the artist: the scientist seeks to evolve from individual differences the unvarying elements which form laws. So far the process has been successful in biology in spite of the extreme difficulty of scientific research. To affirm that it will never be successful in the study of social facts is at least rash.

Since we have two perfectly distinct ideas, one sensible and subjective, the other conceptual and objective, of nearly all the given reality in space; since the world of sounds and colours is also the object of physical science;

since we are accustomed to represent objectively to ourselves what we experience subjectively—heat and light as waves of ether, without one of those ideas excluding or even opposing the other : we may surely possess two ideas of ethical reality, one subjective, the other objective. On the one hand, we can endure the action of the social reality in which we are plunged, can feel it realize itself in our own conscience, and on the other seize, in this objectively conceived reality, the unvarying relations which are its laws. The co-existence within us of the two ideas will become familiar. It will not raise more difficulties than when it is a question of the external world. Has the progress of acoustics subtracted anything from the emotional power of sounds ? Has Helmholtz's discovery of the physical theory of tone caused the fine orchestration of a Beethoven or a Wagner to cease to delight our ears ? We are not less sensible to the delicacy and brilliance of colours since optics has taught us how to analyse them. In the same way, when the science of ethical facts shall have given us an objective idea, when it will have incorporated them in "nature," the inward life of the conscience will lose nothing of its intensity nor of its irreducible originality.

One difference, however, there is. Physical nature, so to speak, imposes itself on man from outside, always like itself and indifferent to his presence. Phenomena are produced according to laws in the interior of the earth, which is inaccessible to us, as on its surface. But customs, languages, religions, arts, in short, institutions, are the work of man, the product and testimony of his activity, transmitted from generation to generation, the material itself of his history. They are different where the history is different. How is that diversity to be reconciled according to times and places with the essential character of nature which consists of a constant and perfect uniformity ?

That difficulty only expresses in a new form an objection which we examined above. It amounts to doubting *a priori* that given phenomena in a primitive apprehension as infinitely diverse from, and almost incommensurable with,

each other, can ever form the object of an intellectual idea, of a science properly so called. It is true that they cannot *in that condition*. But in order that they may be able to do so it suffices that they shall have undergone an elaboration permitting them *to be conceived* as objective, and to discover their unvarying laws. That is no hypothesis: not only are mechanics, physics, and the other sciences of physical nature so constituted, but as much can be said of the science of language, of religion, and other sciences of the same kind. It remains then that for the greater part of the categories of ethical facts, the actual means of objectivation are still insufficient or altogether wanting. But, if we state that sociology is still in the formative period, no one disputes it, except those who tend to prove by their works that it is not a science. The main point is that ethical reality shall henceforth be incorporated in nature, that is, that ethical facts shall be placed with social facts, and that social facts in general shall be conceived as an object of scientific research, by the same right and the same method as the other phenomena of nature.

In that way the relations between theory and practice in ethics become normal and intelligible. In that case, as in others, rational practice, which must sooner or later modify spontaneous practice, the outcome of the immediate needs of action, will henceforth depend on progress in the scientific knowledge of nature. We shall come out of the inextricable confusion in which the idea of a "science of ethics," of a "pure ethics," of a "theoretical ethics," has led us, which ought to be at once normative and speculative, without being able to satisfy both exigencies at the same time. The one is naturally separated from the other. Henceforward speculative effort will no longer consist in determining "what ought to be," that is, in prescribing. It will, as in every science, bear on a given objective reality, that is, on ethical facts, and on other social facts inseparable from them. As also in every science, it will have no other direct and immediate end than the acquisition of knowledge. Arrived at a certain degree of development, that knowledge will render it possible to act in a methodical and rational

fashion on the phenomena the laws of which it has discovered.

Thus the pretended "theoretical ethics" disappears. "Practical ethics" does actually exist. It becomes the object of scientific investigation, which under the name of sociology undertakes the theoretical study of ethical reality. And theoretical study will later give rise to applications, that is, to modifications of the existing practice. It is a transformation of "ethical sciences" big with consequences, in the domain of thought as in that of action, and of which as yet we only perceive the preliminary period.

CHAPTER II

WHAT ARE THE THEORETICAL ETHICS ACTUALLY EXISTING ?

I

Ethical doctrines diverge on their theoretical side and agree by the practical precepts which they teach.—Explanation of that fact: practical ethics cannot be separated from the common conscience of the time.—Practice, here, is not deduced from theory; on the contrary, theory rationalizes existing practice.

PAUL JANET used to say that in teaching ethics it was wrong to begin with theoretical ethics and to descend from them to applied ethics. According to him, we must start from applied ethics and afterwards return to the theory. In addition to reasons of the pedagogic order, reasons that may easily be inferred, Janet, in support of his opinion, enounced this philosophical reflection: theoretical ethics diverge, while practical ethics coincide. Different systems are irreconcilable, and are refuted on questions of principle; they coincide in respect of duties to be fulfilled.

The fact noted by Janet is true. It cannot be denied that at the same epoch and in the same civilization, different ethical doctrines generally lead to precepts as similar as the theories are dissimilar. There are doubtless exceptions. Such are ethics which may be called paradoxical or eccentric (the ethics of the cynic philosophers among the ancients, or Nietzsche's ethics to-day). But they are rare, and only act on that restricted portion of the public who are persons of a refined spirit and capable of listening to practical

advice that rouses its curiosity, without causing it to conform its conduct to it immediately. They are often less ethical theories properly so-called—that is, attempts at systematic construction—than protestations against ethical routine or hypocrisy. Sometimes it is an effort to arouse consciences that are reposing on the ready-made formulae of a belated and complacent philosophy. If the revolutionary doctrines which often play a useful part are put aside, the others, different as they may be elsewhere, coincide in the region of the practical. The agreement was already to be observed in the most famous ethical schools of the ancients. Implacable enemies in the region of principle, stoics and epicureans based their teaching on rigorously opposite conceptions of nature; but they ended by prescribing similar conduct in the greater number of cases. It is well known that Seneca borrowed his formulae indifferently, sometimes from Epicurus, sometimes from Zeno.

The same thing occurs among the moderns. Directly it is a question of the practical, the extreme diversity of doctrine gives place to a quasi-uniformity. Let us consider the series of doctrines examined by Fouillée in his *Critique des systèmes de morale contemporains*. Is it not significant that the criticism deals almost without exception with the theoretical side of the systems? Apparently Fouillée considers that they only differ on that side. Every ethical doctrine jealously defends the originality of its theoretical principle against the objections of others, but it formulates the guiding rules of conduct, the concrete precepts of justice and charity, in the same terms as its rivals, whether its adherent is a disciple of Kant, a critical philosopher, a utilitarian, a pessimist, a positivist, an evolutionist, a spiritualist, or a theologian. Schopenhauer drew attention to that inevitable harmony: "It is difficult," he said, "to found a system of ethics; it is easy to preach one." For there are not two ways of doing it. Its general rules: "*Suum cuique tribue, Neminem laede, Imo omnes, quantum potes, juva*," have nothing in them that is mysterious. They are assured by an unanimous sentiment. Schopen-

hauer does not stop for one moment at the idea that different practical ethics can be opposed to each other. It seems evident to him that the same maxims are to be found everywhere. John Stuart Mill, on his side, observes that the chief rule of his utilitarianism is similar to the precept of the Evangelist: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." And Leibniz, two centuries before, shows the agreement, from the practical point of view, between his rational ethics and religious ethics, in saying: "*Qui Deum amat, amat omnes.*" It would be easy to multiply examples.

Doubtless the common basis takes varied colours according to the system into which it enters. Even here, the individuality and temperament of each philosopher impress their mark, and divergences appear on special points of practical ethics. For instance, in Kant's eyes falsehood is the greatest of all moral faults. Nothing can excuse it. On the other hand, according to Schopenhauer, who on that point agrees with several English moralists, falsehood is immaterial, and consequently lawful in a certain number of cases. Herbert Spencer maintains that charity as it is taught by Christian ethics is anti-social and impracticable. But these divergences do not weaken the agreement of different teachings on essential points. It is never the general rules "*Neminem laede, Imo omnes . . .*" which are questioned, but merely their application in a given conjuncture. Henry Sidgwick held the same opinion. In his *Methods of Ethics* he has shown in detail how intuitionist ethics and empirical ethics, in spite of the opposition of their principles, end by almost coinciding when the practical is taken into consideration.

The convergence is assuredly not fortuitous. It must have its reason in certain conditions which practical ethics must satisfy, and which the quasi-uniformity imposes on them. It is exactly what takes place. Philosophers do not much care perhaps about agreeing in respect to the theoretical point of view: but if they teach practical ethics, they are most anxious not to be disowned by the common conscience. In pure speculation they take care for the most part not to place themselves openly in contradic-

tion with "common sense." The more a system appears to be paradoxical, the more the philosopher attempts to show that at bottom common-sense speaks in the same tongue as he does: if he knows how to explain, that is, how to develop what it implicitly contains, common-sense converges to this system. The desire to have common-sense on his side does not only arise from a wish not to annoy any one, and to conciliate partisans. It responds to the need of the individual to persuade himself that his thought expresses truths valuable for all, *a fortiori*, if it is a question of practical ethics. Whatever his claims to originality, the author is only contented if the general principles formulated by him are, so to speak, accepted in advance by the common conscience. And while there exist systems of speculative philosophy that can do without the agreement, even apparent, of common-sense, and that appeal to more competent judges, there is scarcely any ethical doctrine which ventures to declare itself in open disagreement on questions of practice with the conscience of its time. When Fourier or the Saint Simonians wish to modify the rules of sexual ethics, their derogation to current practice claims to justify itself by the same principles on which that practice rests. It appeals from the common conscience to the more enlightened conscience. It invokes the right of the two sexes to equality in morals before the law. The "rehabilitation of the flesh" was, at least in one part, a manner of protesting against the moral and legal subordination of one sex to the other. In that sense it could, like every socialistic effort of that period, refer to the conscience itself which is never weary of demanding greater justice in human relations.

To conclude, practical ethics of a given time, having to agree with the common conscience of that time, agree also among themselves. Theoretical ethics, more abstract in character, do not directly interest that conscience, and can diverge without disquieting it.

If this is so, the relation of theoretical to practical ethics becomes very curious. Everywhere else, theoretical knowledge must be obtained first; application only comes after-

wards by a series of more or less complicated deductions. In the case of ethics, on the contrary, practice seems independent of theory: there is no proof that the latter preceded the former, and we have every reason to think the contrary. Neither can there be any question of a deduction going from theoretical principles to practical consequences. For how could the deduction result in identical applications, if it really set out from opposing principles? If it was true in one of the systems shared by philosophers, that system would doubtless be strong enough to eliminate the others. But such a result has never been produced. It must, then, be confessed that in ethics applications are not derived from theory. On the contrary, they exist beforehand: the theory is formed on them.

Suppose we compare theoretical ethics to curves constrained to pass through a certain number of points. The points represent the great rules of practice, the methods of action obligatory for the common conscience of the same period. The methods are likewise determined, in some degree, by one another. For instance, a given structure of the family necessarily involves certain consequences in legislation and customs. On the other hand, the ordinary characteristics of human nature, physical and moral, and the unvarying conditions of social life, resemble the common plane in which the curves would be traced. It is evident that several curves would satisfy the proposed conditions, that is, would be on the plane, and would pass through the given points. Similarly several systems of ethics may play the part of theory to pre-existing practice. Provided that an apparent deduction is established, they will all be acceptable, if not equally satisfying, interpretations of rules which do not owe their authority to them.

In this way alone can we explain the paradox of a practice of which there is no doubt, deduced from a theory still uncertain. If we did not lose the faculty of being surprised at what is familiar to us, we could not sufficiently wonder at this prodigy. What! we do not know the foundation of moral obligation, or if we prefer to state the problem in the manner of the ancients, we ignore what good

we ought to pursue by preference ; if some say happiness, others, with not less probability and authority, recommend obedience to God, search for perfection, individual or general interest, etc. And that grave uncertainty neither entails nor permits any hesitation in practice ! Whether I am a disciple of Kant, a spiritualist, an utilitarian, there is no difference, neither for the others nor for me, in the judgment passed on my acts. If my conduct is generally blamed as immoral, I should attempt in vain to show that it agrees with my theory, which I consider demonstrated : the only result would be that I should be regarded as a hypocrite who coloured his misdeeds with honest reasons, and I should entail on my doctrine the same reprobation which was meted out my deeds.

It suffices for a theory to be in disagreement with what is exacted by the conscience for it to be condemned as bad ; and we do not hesitate to conclude immediately that it is false. The condemnation may be legitimate ; but it may happen that it is not. At least, the jurisdiction exercised on theories in the name of practice, is tantamount at bottom to the recognition of a superior right in them. If we do not yet know what theoretical ethics really is, we know what it is not. It does not establish the directing principles of practice, whether it claims to do so or not.

II

Thence it follows that : (1) the ethical speculations of philosophers have rarely disturbed the conscience ; (2) there has scarcely ever been conflict between them and religious dogma ; (3) they suffice to themselves, and have a solution for every problem, a thing which is not true of any other science—In fact, it is the evolution of the practical which gradually causes the appearance of new elements in the theoretical.

Our interpretation of the real nature of the existing relation between theoretical and practical ethics is confirmed by a certain number of facts that it would be difficult to explain otherwise.

In the first place, an ethical doctrine is very rarely disputed in the name of conscience. Since, however, ethical systems are opposed to each other, since their principles mutually exclude each other, it would seem to follow that if some have acceptable results from the point of view of practice, others would be rejected because they lead to contrary results. Doubtless philosophers do not always neglect that argument against their adversaries. Partisans of the "ethics of duty," in order to refute the "ethics of pleasure," or the "ethics of interest," rarely fail to show that they lead to results unacceptable to the conscience. But the supporters of those ethics disavow the deductions that have been drawn from them. They claim, on the contrary, that their doctrines converge precisely to the precepts that conscience demands. And, yielding the same to their adversaries, they flatter themselves in their turn that they demonstrate that the "ethics of duty" do not in any way satisfy the exigencies of conscience. There, then, is an objection to the view that systems return one to the other, with equal probability, for they are all unable to prove that existing practice is effectively derived from their principles,—and with equal injustice, for all obey a similar pre-occupation: all take care not to shock the common conscience of their time by their precepts.

Also, in spite of the great apparent variety of ethical theories, especially among the moderns, scarcely any system has been produced that causes scandal, or provokes indignation, or even public disapproval. However eccentric, however little comprehensive the principle whence it starts, the author finds a way of reintegrating in his doctrine as he goes along, the elements he at first seemed to ignore. With very rare exceptions, he ends by maintaining, like the others, that his system does not refuse the conscience any satisfaction demanded by it. It is as if, among the curves we imagined above, some affected extraordinary or strange forms, but without ceasing to fulfil the conditions of the problem, or to pass through the given points.

That is why the apparent strangeness of an ethical doctrine does not disturb any one so long as it is only a question

of theory. Its sole immediate effect is to furnish food for philosophical controversy. But practice is directly interested in it, for if the doctrine tends to introduce something new into customs or legislation, things are at once changed : a lively reaction is the immediate result. Witness the case of Socrates : his conception of ethics which subordinated practice to science was revolutionary in the highest degree, in the eyes of Athenian tradition. (It would be just the same to-day.) Witness the case of Spinoza, who made a frontal attack on the practice of his time when, for instance, he recommended meditation on life and not on death, when he condemned humility as much as pride. Witness the case of Rousseau, who questioned privileges, acquired rights, and even the right of property. It would be easy to give other examples, and we should see that it is always some question directly affecting practice which evoked the protestations and anger of his contemporaries against the philosopher.

In the second place it is remarkable that disputes between ethical theories and religious dogmas have always been rare. On the other hand, they are frequent between religious dogmas and philosophical or scientific speculation. The ancients knew them and so did Christian Europe. But they have especially increased since the Renaissance. The cause which produces them is always a discovery, or a new method in regard to natural philosophy that seems to contradict the sacred religious truths. Need we recall the most celebrated cases : Anaxagoras declaring the sun to be an incandescent stone, Protagoras doubting that man can " know the gods," Galileo proving the movement of the earth, Descartes formulating the conception of modern physics, Diderot writing the " *Lettre sur les Aveugles*," Darwin putting forth the transformist hypothesis ? Wherever religious tradition teaches a certain metaphysical and positive interpretation of the universe, and as a consequence implies certain solutions of the great problems of philosophy and of natural science, it is certain that it will be opposed to the new conceptions and solutions gradually created by the progress of philosophy and positive knowledge. Hence, when it has to

do with power—whether as in Athens, because the ruling democracy is conservative; whether as in our European communities because religious faith is regarded as an indispensable guarantee of public order—a suspicious watch is kept on philosophers and scientists. Persecution may even result if circumstances permit. We need only recall the humiliating precautions that the eighteenth-century philosophers were forced to take in order to dissimulate their ideas when publishing them, and the eclectics of the nineteenth trembling at the idea of being accused of "pantheism," "scepticism," above all of "materialism." Is it so long since geology, natural history, and history, have had no need to take precautions to appear in agreement with the sacred texts?

Why is it, then, that the defenders of religious tradition and of dogmas, so distrustful, so combative, when it is a question of natural philosophy, are so indifferent to ethical speculation? It is true that doctrines have occasionally been combated in the name of religion as both immoral and impious. Yet if we look closely the hostility arose from other causes. For instance, when the atomic, or "corpuscular" philosophy regained favour in the first half of the seventeenth century, it was attacked on its ethical side in the name of religion. But what was aimed at through the partisans of the resuscitated epicurism was the "libertines," that is, the unbelievers, the atheists, or as they were called later, the free-thinkers. The theory really condemned as dangerous was not an ethical theory, but the hypothesis of atoms, which it was believed necessarily led to atheism. In the same way the enemies of the eighteenth-century French philosophers reproach them for the immorality of their ethics. But their exegesis, and their rebellion against the principle of authority, was the true reason of the attack. In short, attacks directed against the ethical theory, *considered as such*, for religious motives, have always been rare, even if there have ever been any.

Would it be so if scientific research had been developed in ethics in the same way as in the study of physical reality? Is it not evident that it would have met equally numerous

occasions of conflict? Even more numerous: for ethical beliefs are still more closely allied with religious dogmas (at least, in modern communities) than conceptions relating to nature. The catechism contains more ethics than metaphysics. Still, philosophical speculation on ethics has scarcely caused anxiety to the supporters of religion. They evidently knew that they had nothing to fear from it. If the sociological study of the family, of property, of the economic and juridical relations between the different social classes, is now beginning to awake defiance, it is because that portion of social reality is removed from "theoretical ethics" in order that it may henceforth be treated by a positive and scientific method.

As yet the storm has not burst. It would have had no object. So long as "theoretical ethics" holds the place of a scientific study, religious tradition has no reason to object to it or to defend itself against it. What does matter is that the ethical system generally admitted, and binding in its dogmas, shall preserve its authority over men's souls. So long as systems of theoretical ethics tend—by a more or less clever artifice of deduction—to agree, from the practical point of view with that morality, that is to say with the common conscience of the time, religious tradition will not be alarmed by their philosophical pretensions. That is the way in which things have gone until now. Nothing in the history of theoretical ethics even distantly recalls the great revolutions of ideas, of incalculable results brought about in the conception of the physical world by the discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo. Ethical speculation, considered inoffensive, has never caused any alarm. Thanks to their logical apparatus, ethical systems lend an air of reasonableness to generally admitted precepts to which religious tradition accommodates itself in a wonderful way. For it is to its interest that there should be an appearance of theoretical speculation over ethical reality, and that it should be nothing more than an appearance.

In the third place, all really speculative sciences, whatever be their method and object, whether twenty centuries or but a day old, agree in making a similar confession. They

recognize themselves to be imperfect and incomplete. They do not disguise that what they know cannot be compared with what they do not know. It is true of the most vigorous and advanced of human sciences, mathematics, by the avowal of those who have done most to advance them. And there is all the more reason that it should be true of those which relate to a more complex reality. Entire branches of chemistry are in the course of being constituted. Physical chemistry is only just born. In biology, our ignorance is still formidable, and the little we know is a feeble aid to medical art. Scientific psychology and sociology are scarcely beyond their preparatory period. By an unique and singular privilege, theoretical ethics, alone among the sciences, does not put forward problems, general or special, which it cannot solve to its own satisfaction. It presents itself from the first as master of its purpose. It recognizes no unexplored region, no region impenetrable to its actual means of research. It is true that it is represented by different systems, intuitive and inductive, utilitarian, Kantian, and others ; but none of them hesitates to regard itself as complete and definitive.

Does the object of ethical science offer us what we do not find in the object of natural science, a character of perfect simplicity and transparence ? Or do we possess a specially powerful method for rendering ourselves master of that object ? Neither one nor the other of these hypotheses will hold : they break down on the one fact of the persistent multiplicity of systems of ethics. And surely a glance at ethical reality makes it sufficiently clear that it is neither less complex nor less obscure for us than the rest of nature was before science undertook its analysis.

Lacking other proofs, even the definition and the claims of theoretical ethics suffice to show that it has never had anything to do with science, or undertaken the objective study of morality. A last argument confirms this conclusion. In all the divisions of natural philosophy wherever veritable theoretical research is carried on, wherever science is developed for itself, by a disinterested effort to make itself master of its object, it happens that

sooner or later its discoveries lead to applications. It is even a rule that when the science is sufficiently advanced, and if the nature of its object admits, that its progress brings considerable changes into its practice. If examples are needed, mechanical industry, medicine, surgery, will acknowledge what they owe to science. There is nothing resembling it in the history of ethics. How could theory determine there the progress of the practical, since theoretical research is not independent of it, since it is subject to the condition—more or less clearly perceived, but real—of never leading to conclusions the consequences of which would run counter to traditional rules, or would be in disagreement with the principles of the common conscience? As there is no progress properly so called of theory (a fact not incompatible with the originality of the great philosophers, which besides has its limits), there cannot be any modification of the practical under the action of that progress.

On the contrary, the influence rather makes itself felt in an inverse sense: it is the modification of practice that determines changes in the theory. They are themselves due to numerous and complex causes which act upon manners, upon the conditions of persons and things, and in a general way, on institutions: economic, demographic, political, religious, intellectual and other causes. Not but what absolutely new theories do appear. It is probable that the number of possible "theoretical ethical systems" like that of conceivable metaphysical hypotheses, is limited, and that all which could be constructed are already known. Nevertheless, they can present themselves under different aspects, and the problems they discuss will be put in relatively new terms. It is thus that the ethics of the Stoics at Rome under the Empire are not exactly the ethics of Zeno, Chrysippus, and Cleanthes. Always the same at bottom, it adapted itself to the place, very different from that of its origin, to which it was transplanted. In the same way the neo-Kantians of the end of the nineteenth century are attached to the guiding principle of Kant's ethics: but under the growing influence of the great economic problems which

have become so prominent in our time, their doctrine (that of Renouvier, for instance) attributes to social ethics a much more considerable place than Kant did. In short, as Espinas, one of the men who has made a profound study of the philosophy of action, shows, in his *Origines de la Technologie*, " theoretical ethics," far from being the science of ethical reality, is itself a part of the object of that science. It behoves us to study it in its relations with the whole of social evolution, for a given period and civilization.

III

Practice should have its principles properly independent of theory—Carneades—The ethical philosophy of Christianity—Kant and the *Critique of Practical Reason*—Effort to establish conformity between reason and ethical faith—Causes of the failure of the effort.

The strange characteristics of theoretical ethics have not entirely escaped the attention of philosophers. Some among them clearly perceived that speculation in ethics differed essentially from speculation in any other subject. To explain the difference, they say that the case of ethics is without analogy, and that " practice has principles of its own which do not depend on theory."

The ancients had a doctrine that announced and prepared that thesis. According to Carneades and his disciples of the New Academy, the philosopher must distinguish between the domain of knowledge and that of action. From the point of view of knowledge we have no criterion of the true. We ought not to affirm this rather than that : the only reasonable attitude is to suspend our judgment. But we are not only minds that know ; we are living beings embarked in action. We must, whether we like it or not, reply to the questions that life puts to us every instant. That necessity authorizes us to admit degrees of probability, for our perceptions, for instance, the conformity of which to their purpose we can never establish,

but which, when they satisfy certain conditions, from the practical point of view, we are obliged to take as the point of departure for our acts. It is clear that for Carneades there was no question of a special kind of certainty which would be proper to ethics, and independent of intellectual knowledge. Nothing warrants us in believing that a conception of that kind presented itself to his mind. According to him, on the contrary, there is no certainty of any sort. His logical scepticism lacks the counterbalance of an ethical dogmatism. It is at least probable that the Greek philosopher would have rejected as confused or unintelligible the idea of a certainty which would not be the certainty of knowledge. But he was the first to establish a philosophical distinction between the domains of speculation and of practice, admitting for the latter the possibility of judging what is rejected as possible for the former.

Once launched, the idea of that distinction did not disappear. But, like the whole of moral philosophy, it was greatly modified by the influence of Christian conceptions and beliefs. Practice was separated from theory, not only because, as Descartes says, " the actions of life often admitting of no delay, it is a certain truth that when it is not in our power to discern the truest opinions, we must follow the most probable " ; but for new and deeper reasons. It becomes, by its essence, independent of knowledge. It has its dignity, its worth, its own principles. For the Christian the question of salvation heads all the others. To gain salvation is the supreme rule of his life. Salvation does not only depend on a man's merit. In the condition of impotence to which sin has reduced the creature, merit may be a necessary condition : but it is not a sufficing condition. There must always be grace.

But if salvation does not depend solely on a man's merit, there is all the stronger reason that it will not depend on his knowledge : for knowledge, of itself, is in no way a merit. From the point of view of salvation, science offers perhaps more dangers than advantages. The *libido sciendi*, the Jansenists will say, is not less likely to lose the soul than the *libido sentiendi*. Less gross, so that it is less challenged, it

predisposes more to pride, and does not the less turn man aside from his real object, which is God. The kingdom of heaven is rather to be conquered by the ignorant than by the learned. Consequently since practice can be excellent in the absence of all science, it must be admitted that it suffices for itself. It has its own principles, which owe nothing to the intelligence. Moral perfection does not depend on science, but on virtues with which science has nothing to do, such as humility, obedience, charity. That is an entirely new conception, of which there is no trace in the ethical systems of the ancients, which, with the philosophers at least, were never subordinated to the thought of a future life, nor to the desire of "gaining heaven."

Hence there are two distinct currents in modern philosophy which are often closely mingled without ever being entirely blended. One carries intellectualist and rationalist doctrines in which the spirit of Greek speculation is seen, and which seeks to base rules of action on theory; the other, the mystical, sentimental, voluntarist doctrines in which the spirit of Christian theology takes a philosophical form, and which proclaims the independence of practice with respect to knowledge. That the two tendencies do not exclude each other is proved by the Christian tradition itself, in which Hellenic ideas play a part it would be difficult to exaggerate. They oppose and conciliate each other. They both enter, sometimes more, sometimes less, into modern philosophies. It is always possible, however, to discern which of the two predominates in a system, and the most characteristic sign is precisely the determination in that system of the relations between ethical theory and practice.

Kant, better perhaps than any other philosopher, has clearly and frankly stated that problem. He expressly made it one of the essential points of his system, one of those which unite the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the *Critique of Practical Reason.* The central question of his philosophy, round which the others are grouped, seems to be to know how to found rationally, and at the same time, both science and ethics.

Kant's solution is frankly rationalist. He scarcely troubles to reject the easy theory which accounts for morality by the existence in us of a "moral sense." He insists emphatically on the inconsistency and poverty of ethical doctrines of sentiment, on that of Jacobi, for example. In his eyes moral order is rational order. Even the symmetry which he took so much trouble to establish between the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Pure Reason* leaves no possibility of doubt. Moral law is imposed on us as universal and necessary, and in Kant's language that means that it is rational. By that declaration he remains one of the representative men of the eighteenth century, a period which perhaps even more than the seventeenth century put its trust in reason. But at the same time his doctrine presents another aspect, entirely different from the first. The reason to which he relates moral order is not the reason that knows, the reason the function of which is to found science : it is the reason that commands and that does so in the name of principles that are not instituted by the reason that knows. While forcing himself to maintain the unity of reason under the duality of its functions, Kant assigns to the reason that commands a veritable right of precedence. By it we obtain a practical certainty, sufficient though not demonstrated, in questions with which theoretical reason would never be capable of dealing. It teaches us our destiny, our veritable essence, what we have to expect after death. By the sole fact that it formulates the authority of morality and acknowledges it to be absolute, practical reason furnishes man with a light on those great problems, a light which is not doubtless that of science, but which supplies its place : and dispenses with the necessity of legitimizing moral authority itself. It is sufficient for practical reason to declare it, in order at the same time to submit to it.

That is a strange rationalism. It is strange that reason, in its practical use, should decide questions that theoretical reason is obliged to leave open. To speak the truth practical reason might also be called revealing reason. It proves our noumenal essence, and justifies our belief in

liberty. It gives us access to an intelligible world of which theoretical reason would never conceive more than the empty possibility. At the same time it reveals to all, to the ignorant as to the learned, what they must needs know in order to act well. So that, whatever Kant may have thought, it is placed above criticism. Moral law, so far as it is imperative, admits of no discussion. It imposes itself by an authority all its own, to which there is no analogy, and that it would be immoral to question. The characteristics of the categorical imperative which Kant noted with so much energy ("we are the soldiers of morality," "moral law exacts passive obedience," "we do not discuss with duty," etc.) sufficiently show that the essence of morality consists for him in goodwill understood as will subject to moral law. Doubtless the autonomy of the will allows it to be said that if reason submits to it, it is at the same time law-making : but our own causality, as free and intelligent beings, remains obscure to us, while nothing is so clear, immediate, and imperious, as the duty which each individual feels himself compelled to fulfil.

Thus, in spite of Kant's rationalism, his ethical doctrine is the natural outcome of philosophical efforts that under the influence of Christian belief tend to place the moral and social world under rules of which theoretical reason is not the judge. Those rules escape criticism because they owe their origin to a superior region. The intelligible universe, the kingdom of ends, says Kant : the kingdom of grace, city of God, was said before him. But if others had taken an analogous position, not one of them would have defended it with so much energy. Kant demands nothing from the non-intellectual powers of the soul. He places the principles that others separate from reason in reason itself. He even wishes to make the law to which it submits come from reason itself, law-making and obedient at the same time, as sovereignty, free as a legislator, as reverently obedient as a subject. Never has a more powerful or sincere effort been made to derive a natural revelation from reason, and to persuade it that in submitting to an absolute, incontrovertible law, it neither abandons nor compromises anything

of its legitimate rights. But it is a supreme and despairing effort. If it does not succeed, it is necessary to renounce the notion of establishing, at least *rationally*, that practical ethics has its own principles, independent of theory.

At bottom Kant's undertaking does not differ as much as it seems to do at first, from the frequent attempts of his modern predecessors to establish harmony between reason and faith. The problem put by Kant is of a similar nature to theirs. Former metaphysicians sought to make the results of philosophical speculation coincide with the truths taught in the name of religion. The last attempt of the kind was made (perhaps without strong conviction) by Leibniz. Kant judges them all as equally unhappy and sterile. According to him the claims of dogmatic metaphysics are untenable, and as it is incapable of defending itself against the attacks of scepticism, it only compromises the truths that it claims to confirm by its destructive demonstrations. But in his turn, Kant himself seeks to establish harmony between reason and faith—with this difference, that it is not with him question of a faith bearing on dogmas or revealed truths. That faith has for sole object moral law, duty, a sort of natural revelation in which all reasonable and free beings, capable of morality, participate. But, as with Kant that revelation is within reason, what is in reality only a reconciliation between reason and faith, becomes in his eyes a natural harmony between reason in its practical use and reason in its theoretical use. And how, since reason is one, can that harmony be doubted ?

Thus Kant's ethical doctrine possesses the characteristics shown in the preceding chapter to be common to theoretical ethics. Like the other, it is a theory of a strange kind. Its object is not at first to organize a system of knowledge by which a well considered and rational practice can be regulated later : it is, on the contrary, an effort to *rationalize* practice, which exists before all theory, and does not depend on it. That is clearly expressed by the *Primat* that Kant recognizes in practical reason. In the endeavour to incorporate it in his system, Kant states a fact that cannot escape the attention of any unprejudiced observer :

namely, that the obligatory rules of ethical practice are not deduced from theoretical knowledge—they have their own value and dignity, and theory, even when apparently rational, must agree with those rules, which are absolute. In short, the most "extraordinary" (in every sense of the word) of theoretical ethics furnishes a proof by its very structure that moral interest subordinates theoretical interest in the strictest fashion, and that the speculative interest which is manifested has nothing in common with scientific research.

To conclude, the idea that practice has its own principles independent of theory contains the establishment of a fact which is exact, and the germ of a theory which is not, but does not distinguish between them. The fact was noted by the New Academicians: for want of a theoretical certainty on which to base itself, practice desires rules. It cannot do without them, and procures provisional ones with which it has to be content while waiting for better ones. That is true of all forms of action. During long centuries, man, ignorant of the laws of nearly all physical phenomena, systematized, for good or ill, a practice which has been slowly modified in proportion as the knowledge of nature has progressed. The strongest argument, however, is that ethical practice, which is imposed on each individual conscience by a strong social pressure, has existed and still exists independently of all speculation.

Theory which is not exact, consists in establishing the fact in law, as Kant endeavoured to do in affirming the *Primat* of practical reason. It consists in maintaining that if the rules of practical ethics are not established on a scientific and objective knowledge of reality, it is because there is no necessity that they should be; that they are based on something else or simply on themselves, that reason and morality desire them to be so. That is why Kant called the obligation that he discerned in conscience "fact of reason," and he built up his ethical theory on that fact. But a "fact of reason" is a veritable monster in a philosophy like his, in which everything that is "fact" belongs to the world of phenomena, and everything that is

" reason " to the intelligible world. The hybrid character of the categorical imperative betrays the artifice of the conception. That fact, if it is really a fact, is presented to us in the same way as the others, and whatever Kant may conclude from the sublimity of duty, by the same title as the others. If Kant sees in it a " fact of reason," it is because, in his eyes, that incomparable fact is a revelation of the Absolute in us. Hence theoretical ethics, as Kant constructed it, is apparently nothing more than an attempt to reconcile, or rather to identify, moral faith with reason.

IV

Why the rational relations of theory and practice are not yet established in ethics—The other sciences of nature have passed through an analogous period—Comparison of the " theoretical ethics " of the moderns with the physics of the ancients—So long as the dialectical method is employed metaphysics of ethics must exist.

A last question remains to be answered. Why have not the normal relations between theory and practice been established in ethics as in other sciences ? The other portions of given reality in experience have gradually become objects of scientific research ; if there is an objective ethical reality, why has it only provided material for " theoretical ethics " ? Would it not be, as the authors of that ethics maintain, that a different object needs a different form of speculation ?

The answer to the question may be found in the reflections in the first chapter on the general evolution of the relations between theory and practice, and on their especial evolution in the case of ethics. Powerful social interests, strong feelings, are, so to speak, opposed *a priori* to ethical matters becoming the object of an objective and disinterested study. It is not with ethics as with crystallography or mechanics. The scientific position is a definitely critical position. How can that position be taken in respect to rules, the compulsory

character of which impress respect on every conscience? Just as in the science of religion, the critical attitude appears irreligious, although this is not necessarily the case, so in a science of ethical reality it almost assumes an air of immorality. It seems, wrongly, inseparable from a sort of scepticism which the common conscience condemns, either as a want of moral sense (corresponding to indifference in matters of religion), or as a principle of anarchy which calls in question all social institutions, that is, the existence of society itself. Every effort to consider ethical reality, setting aside the respect that conscience exacts for its imperatives, immediately provokes a powerful reaction. In a word, if the first condition of a scientific study is to desubjectify the facts, to neglect the aspect under which they touch our sensibility, and to translate them into a form which can be elaborated by the intelligence, ethical facts cannot easily become objects of science, and it is not surprising that all the preliminary difficulties have not as yet been surmounted.

Besides, the actual condition of ethical speculation is not as exceptional as it seems at first. At a more or less distant period natural sciences went through a similar phase. I do not speak only of the successive stages which led those sciences to consider their object from a disinterested point of view: I speak of the structure of the science, of its method, of its manner of putting problems. We have not as yet "physics of ethics" which are occupied in observing and classifying ethical facts, in their real and concrete diversity, according to times and places, and in analysing them in order to evolve laws from them by means of the comparative method; we are still at the "theoretical ethics" which speculates in an abstract way on ideas of good, of evil, of reward, of punishment, of responsibility, of justice, of property, of solidarity, of duty, of law. Is it, then, so long since the sciences now so certain of their methods, physics for instance, speculated in an equally abstract manner on the elements and on space? In classical antiquity, to which we have remained much closer in many respects than we think, "physical science" offered characteristics remarkably like those which the "science of ethics" presents now.

The analogy becomes striking if we go back far enough, as far as the φυσιχοί who preceded Socrates. Their tendency to explain the mass of phenomena by one or several fundamental elements, their manner of accounting for facts in uniting or separating dry and wet, cold and heat, or atoms, recurs in the effort of our philosophers to explain ethical reality by one or several fundamental elements (pleasure, interest, duty), and in their manner of separating or uniting the useful and the good, the pleasant and the obligatory. There is the same apparent facility on both sides for the rapid construction of a scientifically complete edifice ; the same frequent reappearance of opposing systems, none of which have power enough to triumph over their enemies, the same impotence in all to account, even imperfectly, for the real complexity of facts. And as the ancients were only able by that method to build up more or less probable physics—which, besides, were not true ; equally, the ethical speculation of philosophers only produced " theoretical ethics," more or less acceptable to the conscience of their time, but destitute of scientific value.

The dispute between utilitarians, hedonists, eudaemonists, Kantians, and other theorists of ethics, to consider it from the formal point of view, corresponds with sufficient exactitude to the dispute between the partisans of Heraclitus, of Anaxagoras, of Empedocles, of Democritus, of Parmenides, on the principles of physics. In the doctrines of those philosophers positive knowledge of a few facts is mingled with metaphysical conceptions, and the separation of the two categories of elements was only gradually accomplished. Similarly, observation of facts and metaphysical conceptions, which might more exactly be termed *metamoral*, if the word is not too barbarous, is found mingled in our systems of theoretical ethics : I mean by that all that is supposed to be transcendent in relation to the given ethical reality, and necessary to the intelligibility of that reality. We no longer permit such confusions in physics ; but in " theoretical ethics " they do not offend us. It must be admitted that the form preserved by ethical speculation until now is of a kind to encourage them.

The speculation still bears a very recognizable impress of the Greek genius, whence, like nearly all our sciences, it derives its origin. That genius conceived the intelligibility of the universe under the form of the harmony of ideas, and it represented the order of beings in nature by means of the hierarchy of *genera* and species. Accordingly, in order to construct the science, in which it saw an expression of the reality itself of the being, it proceeded by the determination of concepts. Thus it demanded the intelligibility of ethical things by that method. Boutroux calls Socrates the founder of moral science. Zeller sees in Socrates the founder of the philosophy of the concept. The two names are equally proper, and express at base the same idea. On one side, "the moral science" that Socrates desired to found consists in a determination of moral concepts; and on the other, the "philosophy of the concept," the discovery of which Zeller attributes to him, was only applied by him to questions concerning ethics.

The philosophy of the concept became, in Plato's hands, dialectics, and in Aristotle's, the metaphysical and scientific construction known to us, the method of which remained essentially dialectical. In spite of the taste of Aristotle and of many ancient scholars for experimental researches, that method always prevented their physics from taking the decisive step which would have made it positive. To reach that, it was necessary that the content and usage of the ancient concepts of "nature," of "motion," of "element," should be greatly modified. Modern physicists, leaving aside general concepts metaphysical rather than physical, had to learn to consider facts alone, and the relations of facts shown by experiment, a revolution which was not accomplished until the sixteenth century, and not without a hard struggle.

How was it possible for the dialectical method not to be retained longer in ethics? In the sciences which have physical reality for their object, as soon as the inductive and experimental method began to establish laws properly so-called (which was not possible, it is true, until after certain discoveries in mathematics and mechanics), the end

of dialectical speculation was only a question of time. The value of the results obtained triumphed in the end over the most obstinate prejudices. In the long run, the choice between the two methods, the one fertile only in disputes, the other fruitful in discoveries the applications of which reached the infinite, could not be doubtful. But the sciences that have ethical reality for their object are not yet arrived at that point. The prestige of traditional speculation on the concept is not yet counterbalanced by the importance of positive results due to an objective method of investigation. The results will doubtless be slow to appear. The ancient method has the secret assent of conscience, the support of religious beliefs, and the strength of social conservatism. It will lose its authority with difficulty. The critique of ethical concepts may show in vain that their apparent simplicity is illusory, and that in fact they are extraordinarily complex, vague, and ill defined ; clear ideas, if we will, but not distinct ideas. That critique as Simmel has made it, for instance, is not decisive, in spite of the skill and talent of its author, because it is itself dialectical. So long as the sentiment of positive truth, in that order of researches, does not become as familiar to men's minds as it has long been in the order of physical researches, it is to be feared that ethical speculation will continue to work dialectically on concepts.

At least, without prejudging the future, let us recognize that this form of ethical speculation is no anomaly. The human mind did not begin by taking a different attitude in regard to ethical reality from that it assumed at first towards physical reality. On the contrary, it preserved a method for the study of ethical matters that it had otherwise long repudiated ; a persistence that is sufficiently explained by the characteristics peculiar to that part of reality and by the feelings that it awakes in us. "Theoretical ethics," similar in that point to the physical system of the ancients, has been and still is an attempt to grasp its object as intelligible. But that attempt does not imply the immediate possession of the method it would be suitable to use, and the philosopher obstinately flatters himself that

he can establish the science of ethics by a dialectical analysis of concepts. Better employed, the method will seek to establish what Comte in the last century called "social physics." It is the work undertaken by scientific sociology.

But through the effect of a law well-known in the history of sciences, sociologists seem—and they ought to seem—to put themselves outside the science of which they are in reality active continuators, while those who remain attached to a sterile and old-fashioned method are regarded as its sole representatives. Were not the inventors of experiments who so efficiently contributed in the sixteenth century to give physics the impulse it has ever since preserved, common empirics, or even less, in the eyes of the professors who taught Aristotle's physics with his metaphysics and logic in their lectures on philosophy?

But they were the first true successors of the learned Greeks and of Aristotle himself. Similarly, the production of "theoretical ethics" goes on very slowly at the present time, if it is not altogether stopped. With one or two exceptions, the systems which appeared in the course of the nineteenth century have only been variants, more or less ingenious, of doctrines originated in the preceding centuries. But the tradition is perpetuated by the teaching. Many among the writers who indulge in it would doubtless be surprised to learn that the true ethical speculation of our times is not to be found in their books, but in the works of the sociologists whose existence they deplore. They do not recognize "theoretical ethics" in their works. And it is true that there are none! But the schoolmen did not recognize their "physics" in the experimental researches that were to supplant them.

CHAPTER III

THE POSTULATES OF THEORETICAL ETHICS

THEORETICAL ethics, which claims to be both speculative and normative, is, by that very claim, opposed to the objective study of ethical reality. Anxious to establish rationally *what ought to be*, it does not proceed in respect to that reality as natural sciences do in respect to given phenomena ; it does not take up the patient and minute study of what is. However, in respect to its normative work, the purpose of theoretical ethics is to direct men's conduct in a way determined by it, that is, to exercise positive action on ethical reality. In order that its action may be efficacious, must not that reality be known in a scientific manner ? How does theoretical ethics as ordinarily presented by philosophers deal with that difficulty ?

In fact, want of preliminary scientific knowledge has never prevented it from formulating its own rules and precepts. It takes for granted that it knows all that it needs to know of man and society. In short it assumes a certain number of postulates. It regards them as valuable without examining them, because they are implied by practice. Here, again, the character in some sort sacred, with which ethics (so far as it is normative) is clothed in the eyes of conscience, *a priori* excluded criticism.

I

First postulate : human nature is always identical with itself at all times and in all places—The postulate allows of abstract speculation of the concept of " man."—Examination of the content of the concept in Greek philosophy, and in modern and Christian philosophy—Expansion of the concrete idea of humanity in the nineteenth century due to the progress of historical, anthropo-

logical, geographical and other sciences—Inadequacy of the psychological method of analysis, necessity of the sociological method for the study of ethical reality.

The first postulate consists in admitting the abstract idea of a " human nature," individual and social, always identical with itself at all epochs and in all lands, and in regarding that nature as sufficiently well known to be able to prescribe for it the rules of conduct most suitable in each circumstance. Every system of theoretical ethics supposes that postulate. Kantian ethics goes still farther. It legislates for all reasoning and free beings, of whom the human species is perhaps only a small fraction. The ethics of feeling, the ethics of interest, less ambitious, hold closer to experience ; they, too, are applied to man taken in an abstract and general way, independently of all particular determination of time and place. They also implicitly admit that there is an unchanging " human nature," always similar to itself, and that to know it, we have no need of scientific study analogous to that of which physical nature is the object : every effort of ethics can without difficulty be turned to the research of principles and to the formulation of duties.

That double postulate is as ancient as theoretical ethics itself. It is born, so to speak, spontaneously, of the conceptual and dialectical method employed by its founders. According to them the object of science ought to be not what is fleeting, individual, perishable, but what is immutable, general, eternal : ideas, forms, definitions. Ethical science in particular ought to seek the adequate expression of its immutable and eternal essence in the general definition of man, and afterwards to speculate on that definition in all security, as well as on the properly ethical concepts of good, evil, justice, injustice, utility, and pleasure. In that point modern theoretical ethics remains faithful to tradition. It has, it is true, modified the position and put forth many problems. But it has not found it necessary to renounce the double postulate.

Now, " man " who served as an object of Greek ethical speculation is far from representing in an exact manner the

whole of humanity. He is, on the contrary, the man of a certain race and a certain time: he is the Greek. It is known what distance the Hellenes put between themselves and the barbarians. When their moral philosophy was founded by Socrates, when their civilization, their art, their industry reached its fullest development, they may have forgotten, or have lightly regarded what they owed to the more ancient civilizations of Egypt and the East. Doubtless the barbarians were comprised in the definition of humanity, but primarily as the predestinate slaves of their betters. They were men of the "second category." It is almost the same as when the moderns distinguish civilized peoples from the others (*Naturvölker und Kulturvölker*); with the difference, however, that ethnography, since the nineteenth century, has taken up a scientific study of uncivilized races, while the Greeks never thought of doing anything of the kind in respect to the barbarians with whom they were continually in contact. It was not from lack of curiosity; but the manners and institutions of the barbarians formed an object of amusement rather than of science. They found in them food for their taste for the marvellous, and for wonderful tales. "The Greeks," said Hegel—who admired them enthusiastically—"the Greeks knew Greece; they did not know humanity." The limited number of Hellenic cities corresponds to the finite world of Plato and to Aristotle's cosmology. The rest of mankind represents τὸ ἄπειρον: definite matter, perhaps indispensable, but not in harmony with the beauty and order that were everything in the eyes of the Greeks.

The mixture of peoples and ideas during the Hellenic period, followed by the Roman organization of the ancient world, did much to weaken the prejudices which seemed to succumb entirely to Christianity. The distinction between the Greek or the Roman on the one side, and the barbarians on the other, could not persist when the boundary between the chosen people and the Gentiles was abolished. Did not Adam include all men in his fall? Did not Christ redeem them all? Hence followed the attempt to win all men for the only Church, a spirit of proselytism unknown

to the ancients, and a conception of humanity quite different from theirs.

The catholic tradition, although "universal" by definition, tended to identify the portion of humanity it governed with humanity as a whole. In fact from the end of the fifth century to the diffusion of Islamism, Christianity occupied almost the whole of the world known to the ancients. It even converted the greater part of the barbarous nations with which the Roman Empire had had to do. The illusion was then instituted that Christian humanity or humanity without an epithet was almost the same thing. With the help afforded by the dark ages that belief became so strongly rooted that nothing has ever been able to extirpate it: neither the Mussulman conquest—for Providence desired that there should be "infidels" without, as that it should preserve "witnesses," the Jews, within Christianity; nor the successive discoveries of the great empires of the Far East, and of North and South America, nor the large masses of the Dark Continent. As each individual directly he ceases to observe himself, naïvely takes himself for the centre of the world, each nation or colony, each civilization regards itself as summing up the whole of humanity. Ours is no exception to the rule. It is known that Asia alone contains more Buddhists than there are Christians in all the other parts of the world taken together. But the truth of those hundreds of millions of men belonging to a far-off civilization is only *conceived;* an act of reflection that occurs only at intervals. It is not *felt* at every instant like the civilization in which and by which we live.

Thus the ethical speculation developed in Europe by the moderns had for its chief object man taken universally; in fact man of Western and Christian society. It corresponds to the traditional introspective psychology which studies man "white and civilized." It is still the postulate of Greek ethical speculation, modified, extended, but recognizable.

It will perhaps be said that that postulate was indispensable, if we were not resigned to wait to establish ethics until we had a complete and scientific knowledge of foreign

civilizations and inferior societies. And there is no disadvantage in admitting it. It rests on a legitimate induction, and nothing prevents the drawing of conclusions from the psychological and ethical nature of men we know as of men we have never seen. The Greeks, despite their limited ethnographical horizon, knew and so admirably described the inclinations and passions of men, that no one has surpassed them. From that point of view their literature sustains comparison with that of the moderns. In their turn, the great Christian moralists who did not possess a much more extended field of observation, formulated equally valuable truths for men of all times and all lands. Everywhere love, ambition, self-love, avarice, envy and the other passions originate from the same causes, go through the same crises, and produce the same effects. "It is exactly the same here," according to the formula borrowed by Leibniz from the Harlequin of the stage.

The eighteenth century "philosophers" who looked with scant favour on Christianity, but who believed in a natural and universal ethics, upheld without hesitation the idea of a humanity always and everywhere exactly like itself. Hume repeats after Fontenelle and with the Encyclopaedists that the men of to-day are as like those of former times as the oaks and poplars of our countryside are like those of 5,000 years ago. Do we wish to know the mechanism and play of passions among our contemporaries? We have only to study Demosthenes and Tacitus. Voltaire speaks the same language. One of the great superiorities of deism over revealed religions lies, according to him, in the fact that dogmas always have a historical origin, and consequently are only of value to a portion of humanity, while deism born spontaneously from man's heart and reason is as ancient and universal as the human species. In every epoch, in every place, man, confronted with the same objects, experiences the same feelings, and conceives the same ideas. Voltaire was so firmly convinced of this that in spite of formal testimony respecting the existence of sacred prostitution in Babylon, he refused to believe it, so impossible did it seem to him to admit that customs "contrary

to human nature" could ever have been practised. And nearly all his contemporaries thought with him.

But the postulate in which they had such entire confidence cannot now be considered exact unless it is reduced to an almost purely verbal formula. If it merely expresses the necessity for all human individuals to present certain common psychological and moral characteristics, it merely repeats the scholastic axiom quoted by Descartes at the beginning of the *Discours de la Méthode*, according to which there is only more or less between accidents, and not between the essences or natures of individuals of the same species. The axiom teaches us nothing about the characters which are, or are not, present in the whole species. It does not in any way make up for the lack of comparative anthropology.

But if we allow the postulate the sense in which the philosophers who used it more or less expressly took it in their theoretical ethics, that is, if it means that they have the right to extend to the whole of humanity what they have learnt of human nature, from the psychological, moral, and social point of view by the observation of themselves and their surroundings, nothing is more disputable. The union of two conditions, one of which still exists, helped to uphold the postulate for a long period: first, the general ignorance of ethical theorists with regard to civilizations other than those in which they lived (classical antiquity excepted); and then the subordination of theory to practice. The supreme interest of the latter exacted that ethical precepts should be presented as universal, and consequently as compulsory, with equal force on all reasoning, free, human beings without distinction of time or place. That exigency, as we have seen, still upholds the traditional conception of theoretical ethics, but it does not do so well. It becomes weakened as the ignorance for which it is responsible is gradually removed. For that ignorance has at length become conscious of its existence, and the work which is to end it has already been begun.

In the first place the great civilizations independent of ours, and of the classical antiquity in which it originated,

have been an object of scientific research for a century. The knowledge of the languages, the arts, the religions, the institutions of India, China, Japan, facilitated by a concourse of circumstances ever growing more favourable, begins to substitute a positive and precise view for the simple and conventional picture formerly made in Europe. The picture most often aimed at was one that should be amusing or edifying or both together : to be amused by curious and inexplicable customs and beliefs or to reprove our fatuity and our vices in the manner of Tacitus's *Germania*. French writers of the eighteenth century, for the most part, had no need to make a profound study of Oriental or savage civilizations to picture them as they have. Montesquieu's Persians, Voltaire's Hindoos, and the Chinese of other philosophers are scarcely travestied Europeans. It was a convenient artifice for making reflexions on things in France which it would have been dangerous to make in a more direct way. No one had either the idea or the means of making a disinterested study of communities so different from ours. It is one of the glories of the nineteenth century to have undertaken that great work, that vast anthropological inquiry. But as an inevitable consequence, the concept of " human nature " is immediately modified. It cannot remain an artificial and scholastic scheme ; the comparative history of religions, institutions, languages, provides it with an even richer and more varied content. We can understand Renan's impatience, passionately interested as he was in reading Burnouf, when he found Auguste Comte still identifying humanity with the nations belonging to Mediterranean civilization. Comte would not do so now : propinquity does not permit it. Bombay and even Pekin are not now farther from Paris than Madrid and Stockholm were a hundred years ago. Thus the traditional notion of " man " must perforce be extended.

On the other hand inferior communities no longer lend themselves to a facile antithesis between the corrupt European and the " good savage." They, too, became the object of scientific study—a little late unfortunately, and in many cases just at the moment of their disappearance. With

regard to long extinct colonies, criticism of the narrations that have come to us (especially those of the first travellers who described them), thanks to the comparative method, enable us to restore the essentials of what they saw, often without understanding it. Such observation, whether contemporary or retrospective, reveals methods of feeling, thinking, imagining, modes of social and religious organization of which without it we should never have had the least idea. Several recent works on Australian communities, and especially Spencer and Gillen's *Native Tribes of Central Australia*, have brought to light traits very little known in "human nature."

Remote periods of history are examined with equal care. Egypt and Assyria, especially, have given rise to works of a scientific character, the results of which may be regarded as gained. Instead of the deformed legends and suspicious tales with which we were formerly obliged to be contented, we have now knowledge obtained at the very sources of those highly developed civilizations; of their languages, their literatures sacred and profane, their law, even of their ethics which is sometimes singularly near to, sometimes singularly distant from ours. There follows a new extension, a new enriching of our idea of humanity, for we are compelled to give a place to the mental and moral life of that far-off but certain past—without mentioning the long evolution, unknown to us, of which it was the end. The same work is being carried on everywhere: for example in the ancient American civilizations. Anthropology and history so far as regards the reconstruction of vanished societies in both hemispheres have not yet attained all the results we may hope for. Is not this social palaeontology in its first infancy?

We cannot any longer represent the whole of humanity, from the psychological and moral point of view, as sufficiently like the portion we know from direct experience, in order to give us dispensation from studying the rest. One day, perhaps, sociology will determine with precision what is common to the individuals of all human peoples. At present a more modest task is imposed on us. We must

analyse with all possible exactness the rich variety that is offered to our observation, and that we have no means at present of bringing into unity. Are we not unable merely to imagine—I do not say to realize—an universal history? Since we reject philosophies of history which under the form of a theological, or at least of a teleological idea have a principle of unity, the conception of humanity as one whole is destroyed. In the actual state of our knowledge it is only collective unity. A plurality of civilizations, each one of which has its peculiar characteristics, seems to be developed in an independent manner.

History and anthropology bring us into the presence of an infinitely varied and complex reality, and we are compelled to recognize that we shall only obtain knowledge of it at the price of long, methodical and collective efforts; just as when it is a question of the nature we perceive by our senses. As soon as we consider societies differing from that in which everything seems clear to us, because everything is familiar to us, we meet at every step problems that common sense, aided only by the current reflexion on and knowledge of "human nature," is unable to solve. The facts which disconcert us doubtless obey laws, but what are they? We cannot guess. In one sense, social reality presents more difficulties as regards scientific research than the physical world, for even supposing the statical laws to be known, the condition of a society at a given moment is only intelligible by a knowledge of the evolution of which it is the outcome; and how rare are the cases in which the historical knowledge of the past is sufficiently complete and sufficiently certain for nothing that is indispensable to be lacking!

Here then is another reason for holding fast to a scrupulously objective method, and for expecting here, as in the science of natural physics, that the probable will not often be the true. D'Alembert amused himself by formulating a certain number of physical laws which *a priori* would seem not only acceptable but very probably true—if experience did not prove their falsity! "The barometer rises to foretell rain." In fact, when it is going to rain the

air is more charged with vapour and consequently heavier, therefore it ought to make the barometer rise. "Winter is the season in which hail should chiefly fall." In fact the atmosphere being colder in winter, it is evident that it is in that especial season that drops of rain should freeze and become hard while passing through the atmosphere.[1]

As far as our interpretation of ethical phenomena is founded on our presumed knowledge of human nature and on the supposed identity of that nature, at all times and in all places, it doubtless resembles the physical "probability" of D'Alembert. It is true that we have not always choice of the process. To explain the beliefs, customs, institutions differing most from ours, we are often obliged to reconstruct as well as we can the ideas and feelings which are objectively realized in those institutions, customs, and beliefs. But it is necessary to control and complete the process by the use of the comparative method, that is, the sociological method. Employed alone it easily leads to error; we introduce our own state of mind instead of that very different one we have to restore. That is the initial vice of so many plausible but false, explanations, and of so much wasted ingenuity. To seek the interpretation of myths in the impression made on us by the phenomena of nature is as idle as to explain polygamy by man's natural bent towards easy morals. The extreme cases in which the method of psychological analogy is impotent, ought to make us look askance at those in which it seems more satisfying. What can it tell us of totemism?

In its present condition traditional psychology which is attached to the concept of "man" in general, is for the most part fertile in the objections that the concept upholds. Like it, it is abstract and out of date. Like it, it takes for universal what it finds in the subjects under its eyes, *hic et nunc*. It takes no heed of the diversity of civilizations nor of history: it scarcely admits of the vague idea of a progressive evolution and differentiation of the human faculties. Yet the subject it studies, is, in some degree, a product of history. We do not know in what proportion, but it is

[1] *D'Alembert*, by Joseph Bertrand, p. 17. Paris, 1889.

surely not a small proportion. It is one of the most profound and original ideas of Auguste Comte, of which we have not yet by a long way derived all the consequences, that the superior faculties of man ought to be studied in the historical development of the species. For the phenomena which ought especially to be examined in their relations with their antecedents and physiological concomitants (sensations, perceptions, organic pleasures and pains, etc.), the consideration of the individual is sufficient. But the theory of superior functions (imagination, language, intelligence under its different aspects) requires the employment of the sociological method.

It would thus be of advantage whenever it was possible, to reverse the process hitherto employed in the study of the development of those functions. Instead of explaining the social phenomena of the past by the help of current psychology, it would be scientific—that is sociological—knowledge which would gradually procure for us a psychology more in keeping with the actual diversity of present and past humanity. To give only one example, the exhaustive study of rites and beliefs in primitive religions, of customs concerning marriage, of taboos, etc., introduces us to forms of imagination, combination, even of judgment and reasoning of which our psychology is entirely ignorant. Such forms, it is true, are no longer to be found with us. But they, or others similar to them, undoubtedly existed among our ancestors, and a sufficiently penetrative analysis would probably find traces of them ingrained in ourselves.

From our earliest infancy we are accustomed to use an abstract and differentiated language ; and its use is soon complicated by that of the visual signs of reading and by the graphic signs. We are thus inured, uniformly, to mental habits, to forms of imagination, to association and dissociation of ideas, to categories of reasoning which are inseparable from that language. No matter what effort we make we become almost incapable of reconstructing the ordinary mental states of men who have not the same linguistic and logical habits. According to all appearance, however, they are recent. What ages our predecessors

lived without them, and what indelible traces that long prehistoric time has left on man of an historical time !

According to Auguste Comte, philosophers are guilty of a common error in concerning themselves almost exclusively with the logic of signs. As we prescribe the signs, that logic is the one of which we best discern the play and mechanism : we see it at work in the formation of sciences. But underneath the logic of signs is a logic of images, situated deeper, less conscious, but more powerful ; and underneath the logic of images, a logic of feelings, doubtless as old as the species itself, which is expressed neither by definite concepts nor by conscious signs, but which is a spontaneous and uncoercible source of action. We can scarcely study the two last kinds of logic in ourselves or in our contemporaries. The almost exclusive predominance of conceptional logic with us—we speak our thought inwardly even when we do not express it—presents an insurmountable obstacle. But the religions, customs, and in a word the institutions of societies inferior to ours often permit us to go back to their ideas and their collective feelings. We can find there something of that logic of images, and of that logic of feelings which led the members of those societies to conclusions, that is to practices, disconcerting or inexplicable to our logic, but as necessary in their eyes as the conclusions of our syllogism are for us.

In that sense sociology in its different parts, religious, ethical, juridical, etc., is inseparable from psychology. But it is not general and abstract psychology, having for its object the mutual life of actual " man " which throws a light upon those parts of sociology : it would only furnish us with probable, and most likely, false " explanations." It is, on the contrary, the progress of scientific sociology which throws light that we should not otherwise have obtained on the primitive mental functions. And since what it teaches us with reference to imagination, to collective ideas, to the organization of thoughts and beliefs, is related to the most ancient usage of those functions to which we can penetrate, it may some day be of the greatest use for the positive explanation of our superior mental functions, so complex and obscure in their present state.

To conclude, our presumed knowledge of "human nature" in general, from the moral and mental point of view, is destined to give place to an entirely different psychology. It will be based on the patient, minute, methodical analysis of the customs and institutions in which the feelings and thoughts are objectified in the various human societies now existing, or in societies the existence of which has left traces that we can interpret. Sociology has only just begun to undertake that analysis, and has already obtained some positive results. It shows, by contrast, how artificial and poor is the idea of "man" with which psychology and theoretical ethics have hitherto been contented. It even explains why they were contented with it, and what prevented them from perceiving its insufficiency. The conception is bound up in a more or less conscious manner with certain religious beliefs which sociology finds almost everywhere: idea of a spiritual principle which inhabits the body and survives it; belief in the divine origin of that principle, etc. Where animist principles predominate, the need of scientific investigation of psychical facts is not felt; dialectical speculation seems to suffice, and is regarded as definitive. In the same way as our theoretical ethics will preserve a documentary value, and will later help the sociologist to establish what idea our society had of the relations of its members to each other: so abstract and metaphysical psychology which has for its object the functions of the human soul in general, will always testify to the pseudo-rational form which, in our civilization, is clothed by fixed beliefs.

In proportion as scientific psychology develops, concurrently with the progress of sociology (the two sciences lending each other mutual help), the unity of the mental structure in the human species will probably appear. It will manifest itself by the striking analogy of complicated mental processes produced in different portions of humanity without apparent communication between them: the same formation of myths, the same beliefs in spirits, the same magical practices, the same organizations of the family and the tribe. But if that unity is confirmed it will nevertheless

remain different from that which is admitted *a priori* by the postulate we have criticized. That schematic and abstract postulate gratuitously affirmed the profound identity of all men, and could only serve for a dialectical and formal speculation. The other, on the contrary, would be the point of arrival for a positive and exact inquiry bearing on the whole living diversity—that our means of investigation can reach in actual humanity and in history. It could not be confused with the first any more than the modern theory of energy; admitting the unity of the force under its diverse manifestations, it could not be confused with the physics of the ancients who explained all the phenomena of nature by means of one principle, such as fire, water, or air.

II

Second postulate: the content of the conscience forms an harmonious and organic whole—Criticism of the postulate—The conflict of duty—The historical evolution of the content of the conscience—Irregular stratifications; obligations and interdictions of different origin and date.

Theoretical ethics, especially normative theoretical ethics, ought to be in harmony with the conscience of their time; and in fact, as we have seen, they always submit to the essential conditions of that agreement. As, on the other hand, they claim to be systematic, and to deduce their whole doctrine from a single principle, or at least from a minimum number of principles, they suppose, without expressly stating it, and above all without proving it, that the conscience itself presents a perfect systematization. That is the second postulate of theoretical ethics. The conscience of man should possess an organic unity, a sort of internal finality comparable to that of living beings; its dictates would maintain logically irreproachable relations among themselves, and the harmonious unity of

the conscience would correspond to the systematic unity of theoretical ethics. For example, when Kant asks if the philosophical effort to construct an ethical doctrine is of much use, and if it would not be sufficient to trust to the voice of conscience, he invokes for all reply the fear of sophisms, the difficulty of hearing that voice in all circumstances and of hearing only that voice. He admits then, without insisting on it, that the dictates of conscience form spontaneously as harmonious a whole as its ethical system. Empirical ethics imply the same postulate since they are presented as systems, while claiming to expose what experience discovers in us.

If we consult the conscience only, nothing challenges that postulate. It finds in it nothing to shock it. It regards itself as homogeneous and harmonious. Everything that seems morally obligatory is clothed *ipso facto*, with the same sacred character, and seems, consequently, to have the same origin, to form a part of the same whole. That feature is so marked that philosophers have affirmed the existence of an order of distinct truth, independent of all the rest, which would be the order of ethical matters (kingdom of ends of Kant). To wound the conscience on one point is to place the whole in revolt. By a sort of immediate propagation, almost reflex, whatever the part touched, the whole conscience shares in the reaction produced.

We shall examine elsewhere the social causes of that important fact; let us only state here that it is manifested intellectually by the belief in the organic unity of the conscience. But if instead of interrogating the postulate, which cannot of course criticize itself, we examine it from the objective point of view, it becomes difficult to preserve it. In fact the content of the conscience is far from remaining immutable. It varies, very slowly sometimes, but it varies. Old elements are gradually eliminated, and new ones find a place. The change does not occur without resistance; opposing tendencies fight for the maintenance of some and the exclusion of others: here then is the first reason for expecting that the harmony of the conscience is more apparent than real. In the second

place " conflicts of duty " occur in all epochs and they are constantly difficult, painful, sometimes even tragic and insoluble questions of conscience. The implicitly admitted postulate according to which the conscience forms a one and harmonious whole, has diverted the most acceptable explanation of those facts. Ethical theorists who concern themselves with conflicts of duty seek to account for them by external causes. They derive them very often from a conjunction of circumstances in which the subject interested is powerless, or from an opposition between ordinary duties and obligations resulting from a previous fault, which they feel bound to repair. But as soon as the postulate is abandoned, most conflicts of duty may be explained in a natural way. They arise (and that is what often gives them their acute character) from inherent contradictions in the conscience itself, urged, torn by conflicting obligations which co-exist and combat each other.

Here again, we must substitute for the abstract consideration of " man " in general, the positive and exact analysis of man taken in the sense of the living reality of an actual or vanished society. His " moral obligations," like his beliefs, his feelings, his ideas, at once show an extraordinary complexity ; and *a priori* there is nothing to certify that the complexity covers a logical order, nor that it can be brought back to a few guiding principles.

From that point of view the whole of what seems obligatory on and forbidden to a man of a particular civilization at a given epoch, does not constitute a harmonious whole. Far from finding an analogy between that whole and the inner finality of living beings, we are rather tempted to find a term of comparison in the inorganic world. In spite of the uniform sentiment which is attached to the whole of the content of conscience, sociological analysis sees in it a sort of conglomerate, or at least an irregular stratification of practices, prescriptions, observances, the age and origin of which greatly differ. Some, which connect us with forms of human societies that have disappeared without leaving other traces, go very far back in history, perhaps even into pre-historic times. They are

more numerous than people are inclined to think. Folklorists give a surprising number of such practices still lingering in Europe, in the country districts, although the beliefs which explain them are entirely erased from men's minds. Others, less ancient—we know at what epoch they were introduced,—already possess, if we may so put it, the venerable incrustations of tradition. Some, again, are in entire harmony with the ideas and beliefs of our times. Others, created by new theories, or more often by institutions in process of growth, act as an element of dissolution, of renovation, and sometimes of progress. The whole or rather the mass has no other unity than that of the living conscience which contains and defends it. The composition is as heterogeneous as possible. Why does one obligation survive, while another closely akin to it disappears? In spite of their apparent harmony, the elements so diverse in origin are constantly at war. If customs are binding in other series[1] of social phenomena, and if those series progress, ought not customs to progress at the same time, and consequently conscience also? But that evolution does not occur all at once: resistance and conflict are inevitable.

What should we find, if we summarily analysed the content of a conscience at an epoch of great relative stability? For instance, the conscience of a man of rank in France in the thirteenth century? It would contain elements of Germanic origin, allied with the beliefs and practices of the barbarous peoples who occupied Gaul some centuries before. It would also include elements of Christian, that is, of oriental origin, closely bound up with the dogmas and rites of the Catholic Church into which the Gauls and the barbarians successively entered. We likewise recognize the Græco-Latin elements which were imposed on the conquerors while a portion of the ancient population was kept in the country. That mixture produced customs which we call feudal or chivalrous, the characteristic savour of which resides in the fact that we

[1] "Series" is a term in the sociological language of Auguste Comte, of which we make use in order to designate the different species of social facts, economic, religious, moral, juridical, etc.

distinguish in it scattered elements which are united without being perfectly fused.

But it is quite certain that our actual ethics will furnish the same semi-æsthetic, semi-historical pleasure to our descendants, who will possess an entirely different ethical system from ours. We could, even now, procure that pleasure for ourselves, if provisorily abstracting the feelings of respect and attachment which consecrate for us the content of our conscience, we sought the sociological genesis of all the obligations that it imposes on us. J. J. M. De Groot has shown that genesis in regard to the conscience of the Chinese in his admirable work entitled *The Religious System of China*. He shows, with the most perfect evidence, by what social and mental processes the greater part of the obligations in which a Chinaman to-day would not fail for anything in the world, incapable though he is of justifying them, were introduced and implanted. Can it be doubted that a similar analysis of the Western conscience is possible? Do we regard the acts that we feel bound to do or not to do, obligatory or forbidden for reasons known to us and logically founded? No one would dare to affirm it in every case. We often explain them by motives that have nothing in common with their real origin. That observation has been made more than once with regard to those particular obligations which are the customs and conventions of society. It is with our ethical practice as with orthography. Ordinary mortals piously believe that it is entirely based on principles, and they respect it even in its strangest eccentricities. But the historian of the language knows how much confusion and error, how many false ideas and different tendencies have assisted in the formation of this deeply respected orthography.

To understand our actual conscience in the living detail of what it enjoins and what it forbids, we must go back to the conscience of the generations which immediately preceded us. To explain that, we must go back still farther, taking into account intercurring influences, much more numerous and intermingled as wider periods

are considered (demographical, religious, political, economic causes, etc.). And the circles of social antecedents to be considered are extended until they reach pre-historic times. Leibniz said that the analysis of any portion of reality leads to the infinite. The same may be said, not less rightly, of the analysis of any individual conscience.

It is true that the dialectical method works at less expense. By the employment alone of critical reflection, by a simple dissociation of concepts, it thinks to give a sufficient analysis of the conscience. But the entirely abstract analysis remains exclusively placed at the static point of view. It is far from exhausting an object of an extreme complexity, and which cannot be understood if history is abstracted. It does not even perceive the composite character of the content of the conscience, which gives itself out to be homogeneous, and is so accepted. But that character shows itself, if we may venture to say so, with irresistible evidence as soon as we place ourselves at the genetic point of view, and employ the fitting sociological method.

The second postulate has no sounder basis than the first, and the conception of "theoretical ethics" which places them together falls with them. They are, besides, responsible one for the other, and both are suggested by the same need. If ethics is to prescribe and rationally to legitimize its prescriptions, if it is to be at once normative and theoretical, its imperatives must at the same time be laws. Hence the bastard and ambiguous concept of *ethical law* which in its theoretical aspect comes close to the law of nature, and in its normative aspect to law understood in its social and juridical sense. The formation of that concept needs the two postulates, the inexactness of which we have pointed out. In order that the imperatives may be raised to the dignity of "ethical law," they must be presented as having an universal value for all times and all places. On the one hand their relation with human nature taken generally must be evident, in such a way that the obligation set forth is imposed on all men who exist or shall exist (first postulate). On the other hand, ethical law with all its consequences

—or, if it is preferred, the whole of ethical laws—must be presented as an organic system no part of which depends on local accidental circumstances, that is, the historical genesis and the successive accretions of obligations, often incompatible with each other, cannot be shown (second postulate). Hence the origin, at least on one side, of the effort constantly renewed in the history of philosophy to make a deductive science of ethics, resembling mathematics which possesses the desired universality and unity. The misfortune is that there is nothing in mathematics which in the least resembles the postulates implied by theoretical ethics.

III

Utility of theoretical ethics in the past, notwithstanding the inaccuracy of its postulates—Functions it has fulfilled—The ethics of the ancients freer, and less limited by religious reservations than the philosophical ethics of the moderns until the nineteenth century—There the Renaissance did not have its full effect—Reaction at the end of the eighteenth century—Apparent success and final impotence of the reaction.

It seems to us that when theoretical ethics as usually understood is examined in its definition, its methods and postulates, it is impossible to support it. The idea of a science at once speculative and normative is impracticable, not to say contradictory. The method employed by theoretical ethics has much more in common with the dialectics of the ancients than with modern processes of scientific research, and scarcely anything more than verbal deductions can result from the method. Indeed, the postulates on which the conception of theoretical ethics rests, do not bear criticism. The idea of ethical law, a confused idea, comprises elements which tend to dissociation. For that reason we shall gradually see substituted for the science which is claimed to be theoretical

and normative at one and at the same time, on the one side, a science or rather a collection of sciences studying the given ethical reality by means of an objective method, and on the other, a rational practice, or an art which will show the discoveries of those sciences in an advantageous manner.

Shall we conclude that the attempt of philosophers to establish a theoretical ethics was superfluous, and that their trouble was mere waste of time? By no means. No attempt, as has been said, to understand the world and ourselves is wholly vain. Before attaining their definite form, sciences pass through stages, in conditions more or less imperfect, that it is doubtless necessary to go through: alchemy before chemistry, astrology before astronomy. That is true: yet this very general view must be carefully examined in each given case. It would perhaps be excessive optimism to trust to it as a fixed law. We may admit that the works of astrologers have not been without utility for the astronomers who came after them. But Greek antiquity produced astronomers who were not astrologers, and it is easy to imagine a development of the science which would not have known astrology, between Hipparchus and Ptolemy on the one side, and Copernicus and Kepler on the other. Nothing proves, *a priori*, that the human mind can avoid getting into inextricable difficulties, whence it cannot always get out or whence it emerges after losing much time, and without other advantage than knowing henceforth how to avoid them.

Theoretical ethics is not one of these inextricable difficulties. On the contrary, so long as a science properly so-called (that is to say objective and disinterested) of ethical phenomena was not possible, it was well that the place should be occupied by a speculation that was compelled to be rational and philosophical. Comte emphatically said that we owe the greatest gratitude to the first men (doubtless priests) who attempted to seek an interpretation of natural phenomena. It is of no consequence that for long ages the interpretation was imaginative, mythical, even puerile and absurd. Whatever it was, it was of great utility in strengthening in men's minds the intellectual need of

theoretical explanations. Gradually metaphysics was born of religious cosmogonies, and later when favourable circumstances permitted it, physics grew up in the shadow of metaphysics, only to be separated from it for ever. It is a remarkable fact that nations which have not known rational metaphysics do not know scientific physics. The whole of our young science of nature reveres the ancestors to whom it owes its existence in the Greek metaphysicians. Similarly, without the philosophers (metaphysicians for the most part) who constructed theoretical ethics, the "metaphysics of ethics," a science properly so-called of ethical phenomena, would perhaps never have been born. Their merit is then not less, nor the service rendered less important.

It was even more indispensable. Doubtless much time was needed for the mystical, sentimental, and religious elements to disappear entirely from the scientific conception of physical "nature." There are advanced civilizations like those of China and India where that work was never accomplished. Although nature remained divine with the Greeks they founded purely rational systems of metaphysics and physics. But when it is a question of ethical "nature," the same process is much less certain, and much slower. At first ethical phenomena which visibly depend on the will of man, seem to carry an element of indefiniteness with them, and if we may so put it, of incalculability. Then the guiding rules of conduct are closely and unchangingly bound up with the received traditions of ancestors, and with religious beliefs. They are not only associated with mystical religions and sentimental elements ; they are closely mingled with them, and they seem to owe to them the largest and most durable part of their power over the souls of men.

It is not wonderful then that the philosophical attempt to give a rational explanation of ethical facts and rules should have remained for so long, and should still remain, associated with irrational elements. The scientific position could in this case be assumed only very late : a whole series of successive transitions, of which we are doubtless seeing the last, were needed. In the same way as physics for long years

preserved traces of the metaphysics which gave it birth, so the rational study of ethical reality only became slowly differentiated from the "metaphysics of ethics." We must add that the curve of that evolution was not simple, and does not represent an uninterrupted progress. In the opinion of most historians, the ethics of the ancients, in the period properly Greek, was more separated from religious and supernatural elements than was the moral philosophy of the moderns, at least until our time.[1] What was lacking to the ancients to enable them to establish a science properly so called of ethical things, was a rigorous inductive method, the place of which was filled by their dialectics ; but whence could they have derived the idea of such a method, since it was also lacking in their physics ? On the other hand, their conception of ethical things was admirably free. Aristotle's ethics, for instance, is developed from beginning to end with a perfect serenity : there is never felt nor seen to enter into it, however discreetly, preoccupation about a future life, nor about a God who administered post-terrestrial rewards.

Those ideas, on the contrary, stand in the foreground of Christian ethics. They hold a lesser but still a very considerable place in modern systems of ethics. For those systems agree with the general conscience of their time, and that conscience is still largely impregnated with Christian beliefs. Let us except, if it is preferred, Descartes, who put forward no definitive system of ethics, Spinoza, Hume, Hegel and a few others : have not even the most rationalistic ethical doctrines (Liebniz, Locke, Kant, Fichte) preserved the preoccupations about man's salvation in another world in a more or less apparent and conscious fashion ? Even to-day and in countries where the teaching of ethics is not entrusted to ecclesiastics, the ethics taught in the name of philosophy and reason is not exempt from ulterior thoughts of the same kind. Does one exist where there is no fear of a complete secularization, that is to say, of a return to the rationalistic position of the Greek philosophers ?

[1] Cf. V. Brochard, "*La morale ancienne et la morale moderne*," *Revue Philosophique*, January, 1901.

Thus as regards the science of ethical reality, the Renaissance did not, as in the science of physical reality, have its full effect. Under its influence (favoured, it is true, by a large number of circumstances), the conception of physical nature soon became rational, more rational even than it had been with the ancients. The progress of mathematics, the multiplication of experiments, the abandonment of the dialectical method, caused the obstacles which had arrested the progress of physics with the ancients to disappear. The Christian tradition was not offended. On the contrary, as it held in horror the divinity of nature as recognized by the ancients, it looked with some favour on the development of modern physics, at least so far as it did not contradict dogma. But for reasons pointed out above, ethical nature could not as quickly become the object of scientific research properly so called. The "metaphysics of ethics" which took its place was protected with jealous care by the defenders of the religious tradition. The earliest attempts, some very abstract, others very hasty, to establish a social science, those of Hobbes, of Spinoza and of the boldest of the eighteenth century philosophers, for instance, were violently combated, and their authors branded with the name of materialist or atheist, not to mention the frequent persecutions of their persons and works.

Influenced by these causes and by many others that we cannot now go into, the scientific study of ethical reality only began to be undertaken when, towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a general reaction in Europe against the Cartesian and classical spirit, against rationalism, and above all, against the tendencies that had prevailed for two hundred years. The sciences of physical nature, masters of their methods, sure of their objects, proud of their conquests, had nothing to fear from that reaction. But it seemed for a time to have entirely stopped the progress of ethical speculation towards a scientific form. The want of "social reorganization," that was thought to be urgent, caused the appearance of a great many works relating to political and social questions, in which practical interest far exceeded speculative interest. Men hastened towards immediately

applicable solutions. And as to actual ethical speculation under Kant's influence as under that of traditionalist and Christian philosophy, it was at least for more than half of the nineteenth century in France scarcely anything but "metaphysics of ethics." The spiritualist philosophers who taught it, defied the eighteenth century, disliked to mention Hume, and smiled pityingly at the name of Condorçet. Similar influences explain the silence about Comte's work, and the scant attention paid to the sociology that he founded. He was the heir of the eighteenth century who was feared and avoided.

The victory of that reaction was however only apparent. We shall see later how, partly by the effect of the reaction itself, the need of a scientific study of ethical reality became more and more pressing, more and more clear. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sociology, hitherto so neglected, attracted a growing number of inquirers. While philosophers delayed to rejuvenate "theoretical ethics" which differed from one another less than they imagined, the materials for a science of "ethical nature" were being prepared elsewhere, by the continual deposit of anthropological, historical, religious, juridical, economic sciences, indeed by all sciences the sole existence of which renders the inadequacy of the postulates on which the usual conception of theoretical ethics is founded more clear every day.

CHAPTER IV

ON WHAT THEORETICAL SCIENCES DOES ETHICAL PRACTICE DEPEND ?

I

The object of the science is not to construct or to deduce an ethical system but to study the given ethical reality—We are not reduced to a simple statement of the order of facts ; we can only effectually intervene if we know their laws.

IF the traditional conception of and distinction between theoretical ethics and practical ethics is admitted, it is quite easy to form an idea of their relations. Theoretical ethics establishes (*a priori* or a *posteriori*, it matters little for the moment) the principles whence practical ethics derives its applications. Nothing looks easier. Ethical systems, in fact, almost without exception, do not allow that they offer any problem for examination. Without reflection and naturally they glide over the road that leads from theoretical to practical ethics. But Renouvier makes one reservation. He does not believe that the applications derived from theoretical ethics can be directly realized in practice. He distinguishes what this practice would be in a " state of peace " (perfect state of society), and what it becomes in " a state of war " (present state of humanity). The distinction is important. It implies that Renouvier acknowledges the existence of a problem which presents itself at the moment of passing from theory to practice, and that it is concerned with taking into account the given social reality. But, that reservation once made, Renouvier preserves the traditional conception of the relations between theory and practice in ethics. The latter is always deduced

from the former. The deduction is complicated by facts which must not be neglected; but the relation between theory and precept remains a relation of principles to consequences.

But if, as we believe we have shown, "theoretical ethics" is not what it claims to be, that easy and simple relation can be only apparent. Far from practice being deduced from theory, it is theory which so far has been a kind of abstract projection of the ethics practised in a given society, at a given epoch. Practice is put forward first, and theory is subordinated to it in order that it may not do harm to practice. For, whatever the genius of the philosopher, he cannot get his system of ethics accepted unless he is careful not to step too far aside from the common conscience of his time, and that conscience, in order to impose itself with absolute authority, has no need to be founded on an abstract theory. According to us, speculative research in ethics consists in studying that conscience as it is seen in different human societies, and in the same spirit with which the science of physical nature studies its object. What do the relations of theory, so understood, to practice become? That is, supposing that speculative research has reached a certain degree of progress, what would be the consequences for practice?

At first the conception of the ancients led to an illusion which is now disappearing of itself. The relation of principle to consequence is easily confused with that of cause to effect. When practical ethics was represented as deduced from theoretical ethics, there was at the same time a tendency to believe that philosophy founds practice; that with its principle it gives its reason for existence, and consequently its reality. There can be no question of this henceforth. "Ethics," that is to say, collections of rules, prescriptions, imperatives, and interdictions, exist by the same title as religions, languages, and laws. All those social institutions are represented to us as equally natural, and as bound up together. To construct or deduce "ethics" logically is an undertaking as much out of place as if we tried to construct or deduce logically religion, language, or law.

In short, ethics are "ideas." It is a fact, for instance, that for all average consciences of our civilization, certain ways of acting seem obligatory, others forbidden, others again indifferent. There is no question of "decreeing" in the name of a theory the rules of ethical practice. Those rules have the same sort of existence as other social facts, an existence that cannot be disregarded with impunity.

Are we then reduced, so to speak, to note what were the successive or simultaneous ethical systems of different civilizations, to state what our own system is, and to consider any attempt at improvement rash and impracticable? Such a conclusion is by no means necessary.[1] Science provides us for our advantage with the means of modifying physical reality; there is no reason *a priori*, when it shall have made sufficient progress, why it should not give us the same power over social reality. In fact, research shows us practical ethics in the course of evolution, slow, it is true, but almost uninterrupted. Among the large number of causes which help to hasten or retard that evolution, philosophical reflection has not in certain cases been the least important. Practical ethics always contains latent contradictions which are gradually secretly felt, and which are at length manifested, not only by combats in the domain of interests, but by conflicts in the region of ideas. The conscious effort to solve those contradictions has contributed in no small degree to moral progress.

So far from being compelled to resign ourselves to the rôle of passive spectators, we are constantly solicited to decide for or against the preservation or acceptation of this or that ethical practice. To abstain is to take a side. But how are we to decide, and in the name of what principle, if our decision is to be rational? Evidently, according to the teaching of the positive science of social reality, which tends to take the place of "theoretical ethics." The problem offered is to establish that science, and to learn how to apply it.

[1] Cf. E. Durkheim, *De la Division du travail Social*, 1st ed., Preface, p. v. Paris, Alcan.

II

Three distinct acceptations of the word "ethical"—How the applications of moral science to ethical practice will be established—Difficulty of forecasting the possible progress and applications of that science—Its progressive differentiation and ramification.

Even if we leave aside the old conception of "theoretical ethics," the word "ethics" has still three acceptations between which we must carefully distinguish.

1. The term "ethics" is applied to conceptions, judgments, sentiments, usages as a whole, which relate to the respective laws and duties of men among themselves, recognized and generally respected at a given period and in a given civilization. It is in that sense that Chinese ethics, or European ethics are spoken of. The word designates a series of social facts analogous to other series of facts of the same kind, religious, juridical, linguistic, etc.

2. The science dealing with those facts is called "ethics," just as the science dealing with phenomena of nature is called "physics." In that way ethical science is opposed to natural science. But while "physical" is used exclusively to designate the science of which the object is called "nature," the word "ethical" is employed to designate both the science and the object of the science.

3. The applications of the science may be called "ethical." By "progress of ethics" progress of the arts of social practice is understood: for instance, a fuller justice realized by men in their relations with each other, more humanity in the relations between the different classes of society, or in those between nations. This third meaning is plainly separated from the two preceding, which differ equally between themselves. Hence there are inextricable confusions, and particularly, the result that moral philosophy to-day, similar in that point to the natural philosophy of the ancients, discusses purely verbal problems, and overlooks real problems. We shall then, as far as possible, avoid designating the object of the science, the science itself, and its applications by the same term. In the first case

we shall say ethical facts or "ethics"; in the second, the science of those facts, or social reality; in the third, the rational ethical art.

That distinction allows us to answer an objection that has perhaps occurred to the mind of the reader. Sometimes, it would seem that ethics is thus placed in close approximation to religion, language, social institutions in general; it is consequently conceived as an unity of facts like a given reality, object of a science or of a body of sciences analogous to physics. Sometimes it is compared (as by Descartes) with mechanics and medicine which are arts, or unities of methodical processes employed by man for the application of his knowledge of the laws of nature. How can ethics be represented by two such different conceptions? Both comparisons are, however, correct. To get rid of the objection, it is sufficient to observe that in the first, "ethics" represents the object of the science of ethical facts, an object analogous to the other parts of sociology; while in the second comparison, it is a question of ethics understood as "rational practical art," and comparable under that title with mechanics or medicine.

In principle, the progress of the art depends on the progress of the science. The wider and more exact our knowledge of the laws of social nature becomes, the more advantageous will, it is hoped, be the applications derived from it. But at present it is difficult to make any more exact statement. We have no right to imagine that the progress of both will go on *pari passu*. "The chain of realities which are intimately connected, the discovery of which becomes successively possible by that of new methods," says Condorcet, "bears no relation to the series of realities which ought to become, each in its turn, of practical utility.[1] Hence the need of pursuing the theoretical work in a disinterested manner, even in the absence of immediately useful results, merely with the hope of future applications of which we have as yet no idea. "A discovery is not made because it is needed," says Condorcet again, "but because it is bound up with realities already known, and because we

[1] Eulogy of M. de Fouchy, *Œuvres*, iii. p. 313–14.

are strong enough to cover the space which separates us from it."[1] It may be that the science of sociology, which is only at its beginning, will pass through a period of which we do not know the duration, in which the results obtained will yield very few applications in practice. It has taken mechanics three centuries to become a rational art; it will perhaps take medicine more than three centuries to reach the same point; but the attempt to obtain a scientific knowledge of the natural laws on which those two arts depend goes back to Greek antiquity. There is no authority for thinking that in the case of sociology the period of rational applications will coincide with the beginning of scientific research. It would be rash at the present time to formulate a precise idea of those applications. We can at most in some measure foresee the mode of appearance according to the way in which more advanced rational arts formed themselves.

There is no longer question in the inorganic world of the subordination of practical to theoretical science of laws, because the proof of the power that science furnishes is too continuous and too striking. No empiric can compete with an engineer for the utilization of a waterfall or the construction of a tunnel. That subordination is only beginning to be established in the organic world. There are numerous reasons for the slowness, and the strongest is, doubtless, that in a great number of circumstances, rational art is still incapable of superseding the experience of the surgeon. Besides, in that case the relation of practical to theoretical knowledge becomes extraordinarily complex. Rational art is no longer based only on laws established by a single science, or by a small number of sciences, such as now produce so large a number of applications in electricity and in industrial chemistry. It implies knowledge derived from a very large number of sciences which include not only the biological sciences properly so-called, and already very numerous, but also physical and chemical sciences. The expression "applied chemistry" is perfectly clear: that of "applied biology" is obscure, and in fact not

[1] Eulogy of M. Duhamel, *Ibid.* p. 642.

used. No one would call therapeutics by that name in any of its forms. On one side, indeed, biology comprises much knowledge which permits of no application; and on the other side, the art of healing, in many cases, is not yet based on knowledge of a properly scientific character.

Consequently the relation of practical to theoretical science is not established in a general and systematic manner, but rather with respect to special problems, and as if at the hazard of discoveries and needs. Sometimes applications are derived from certain newly discovered laws, and are henceforth rendered possible; sometimes the solution depends on long existing theoretical knowledge. For instance, from the recently acquired knowledge of the agents by which contagious diseases are propagated, there is derived as applications a whole series of prophylactic measures which make the disease very rare, or even cause it to disappear (erisypelas, puerperal fever, etc.). Inversely, Pasteur made researches into the diseases of silk-worms, and found, so to speak, a theoretical solution. It permits of useful interference in the rearing of the worms, and in suppressing the disease.

The number of cases in which the relation is established with perfect clearness is restricted. During what will doubtless be a very long period, the progress of the rational art of healing will be most often produced by the indirect result of discoveries made in a domain that has no apparent relation to therapeutics or surgery. The history of Pasteur's scientific career is rich in instruction in that respect. When he first began his work on the rotatory power of certain crystals, it was impossible for him to foresee by what transitions he would be led from experiment to experiment to discoveries of the greatest interest for human pathology. To-morrow, perhaps, an analogous proceeding may lead a physician of genius to results neither less important nor less unexpected. Thus, we have on the one side the complex problems set by practice; and on the other, biology, itself greatly extended, increasingly concerned with the immense domain of physical and chemieal

sciences, undergoing the results of their progress ; thus the development of rational art would seem to depend almost entirely on fortunate conjunctions of circumstance. We can say nothing in advance, except that they will become more and more frequent in proportion as the sciences progress.

There is even stronger reason why it should be the same in the domain of rational social art. Any precise conjecture as to the law of a process which has hardly begun would necessarily be arbitrary. It is most probable that that art, too, will be exercised for a very long period on special points, before becoming organized in a systematic fashion. It will take advantage of the scientific knowledge of the laws of " social nature," wherever it is favoured by a fortunate conjunction of circumstances. Pedagogy, for instance, has already given up certain ancient practices not easily defended, and has replaced them by applications based on the scientific psychology of the child. Similarly, in questions of philanthropy, an attempt is made to organize its practice according to the scientific knowledge of the causes of poverty and of the lack of employment, either in the towns or in the country.

But lacking a sufficiently advanced science of " social nature," we do not see how rational social art can modify the established practice in the great fundamental questions. Attempts have certainly been made by Utopians in all ages, and especially during the last hundred years, by reformers, communists, socialists, Fourierists, and others, to institute a new organization of the family, of property, of economic relations, and of our society in general. Those attempts claim to be based on " positive science." But in fact the effort of their authors is mainly concerned with the reorganization of society, and not with the objective and patient study of social reality. For that reason they could unhesitatingly suggest projects of complete reorganization of the prevailing practice ; but for that reason, also, they belong to the pre-scientific period. That period will only come to an end when those ambitious hopes have disappeared. Such pretensions will become more modest when

once the conviction is firmly established that man can no more easily dispose of "social nature" than he can of physical nature, and that the only means of conquering the one as the other is first to discover its laws. Scientific research will appear as the preliminary condition of a rational intervention in social phenomena. The reformer will subordinate himself to the sociologist.

Besides, in proportion as sociology develops, it will be divided into an increasing number of sciences, connected with but distinct from each other. In the study of extremely complex phenomena, the division of scientific work soon becomes a necessity. The ramification of big scientific trunks into secondary branches, which in their turn are subdivided, goes on now in physics, chemistry, biology; with how much greater reason will that state of things be produced in the vast whole, called by the general term: sociology. Each of its large divisions (religious, economic, juridical, sociological, etc.), will be subdivided in its turn. See, for example, the double process of differentiation and organization which is carried on in *L'Année Sociologique.*

On which, among those sciences, will the progress of rational social art principally depend? It is impossible, given the actual condition of sociology, to foresee it, especially if we consider the wholly unexpected results that the discovery of a process of method, or of an instrument of research in one science, can have on the progress of another science, and consequently on practice itself. Who would have thought fifty years ago that surgery would be entirely transformed, and medicine profoundly modified, by a series of discoveries due to biological chemistry. At that date who even had a clear idea of that chemistry? It is only prudent to expect such surprises in the domain of the science of "social nature." That vast region is only beginning to be explored scientifically. Its topography is uncertain. The division of sciences ought there to be considered provisional; and the organization of scientific work is certainly destined to undergo profound changes.

III

Its progress may be represented according to the evolution of the more advanced science of physics—Causes which arrested the development of that science among the ancients—Aristotle's physics proposes "to understand" rather than "to know," and descends from the more general problems to particular questions—"Ethical sciences" have more than one characteristic in common with the physics of the ancients—How nearly they approach modern physics.

Since the science of physics is considerably in advance of that of sociology; and since physics only reached its present condition by a long series of secular and tentative efforts in which its progress has not been continuous, the science of sociology may perhaps profit by the experience of its elder sister. Even the study of the periods in which it remained stationary will be as useful as the examination of the epochs of rapid and brilliant conquests. It must be extremely interestingt o know why the science of physics did not take the form among the ancients that has allowed it to progress for the last three centuries beyond all expectation, and made a large number of valuable and equally unforeseen applications possible.

Let us consider, taking it in its widest sense, physics as understood by Aristotle. It is doing the science no injury; for if the sum of known physical facts continued to increase after his time, antiquity produced in him an exponent of the logical conception of the science, an adherent to truth, with the greatest respect for the laws of fact and experience. If we compare Aristotle's physics with the modern sciences of nature, the essential reason of their numerous differences may be summed up in the following distinction: modern physics limits its ambition to "knowing"; the object of Aristotelian physics was to "understand." The chief obstacle to the development of physics among the ancients was the need of representing nature as intelligible. The decisive step was taken for modern physics the day that it resolutely limited its researches to determine how the func-

tions of phenomena vary one from the other, and to measure those variations.

In Aristotle's conception, every being, every definite and special phenomena undoubtedly had its definite and special cause. But, in another sense, by an analogy extending to the whole of nature, the same causes and the same principles are found everywhere and render everything intelligible.[1] The scientist (who is not distinguished from the philosopher) everywhere discovers relations between potentiality and actuality, between matter and form, between the means and the end. But this universality of principles and causes is exactly opposed to the practice and even to the conception of a physical and experimental method, because it gave the mind a complete and definite explanation beyond which there was nothing to seek. How was it to be conceived that we do not know what we understand ? How was it to be doubted that a natural phenomenon was known when it has been deduced from general principles that explain it and a great number of others ?

At that period, one through which all natural sciences have passed (mathematics perhaps excepted), the student does not perceive that the intelligibility with which he is satisfied is more apparent than real. It is generally obtained by means of simple, but arbitrary, postulates of which he is only dimly conscious. It may be said, slightly modifying a formula that comes from Aristotle himself: *Quidquid intelligitur, intelligitur secundum formam intelligentis.* He conceives nature under several relations as an internal activity, working after the manner of an artist. It does nothing in vain. But where is the principle which distinguishes between what is and what is not vain to be found ? Evidently in the opinion of man who decides what is good or bad, useful or harmful, beautiful or ugly. The idea of nature remains for the physicist, anthropomorphic, aesthetic, and in a certain sense, moral and religious. But the complexity of real problems remains unperceived on account of the simplicity of a few principles which suffice to account for all the known facts. Intelligibility thus

[1] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, xii. 4. 1070ª, 31.

obtained dispenses the student in all good faith from a verification that seems superfluous. "If Democritus was right," said Aristotle, referring to gravity, "all bodies would fall through space with equal velocity. Now that is absurd." It is absurd in the Aristotelian conception. But it is not the less true. Such are the arguments by which Aristotle proves that the sky must be circular in form, and generally that the disposition of celestial bodies could not be other than it is. Zeller observes that Aristotle had those questions much at heart and only touched them with a sort of "religious respect."

Besides, the physics of the ancients, in that point very different from those of the moderns, first attacks general problems in order to derive from them a solution of the more particular questions arising out of experience. It is the natural consequence of its effort towards intelligibility of the whole reality. If the motion, generation, evolution of beings in general became intelligible, such or such motion, the generation and evolution of such or such a being, would no longer present difficulties. So to speak, we should have the explanation in advance. It would only have to be verified; and if the principles are sufficiently general and abstract, the verification must infallibly succeed. The great initial problems once resolved, positive progress, in a science of nature thus conceived, can only be accidental or insignificant. In fact, so long as that conception prevailed, the chief effort of physicists was to elucidate and comment on the principles transmitted by Aristotle and his successors. Not unreasonably, indeed, since therein lay the essential part of physics. It is scarcely just to attribute that fact exclusively to the taste of those physicists for the method of authority; it conformed in every point to the spirit of their science.

Natural science with the moderns proceeds in an inverse direction. It only sets problems, the terms of which are provided by experience because it desires to *know* actual laws. It knows that it can only study and measure the functions of a very small number of variables at one time. It does not in principle forbid the use of analogy. Some-

times it even risks the boldest generalizations. But it does not imagine that it is making nature more intelligible by that means, nor does it ever consider its hypotheses as definitive: it suffices that the hypotheses shall bear fruit during a certain time, that is, shall set it on the way to new facts and new laws. By that method "physics" becomes gradually better known; but as, at the same time, the complexity of the phenomena comes out more clearly, in becoming less ignorant we become more modest. We perceive how naïve and childish were the claims of the ancients to a "science of nature" which sought to give it something better than knowledge, that is intelligibility, or to be more accurate, which represented the first, as implied in the second. "Our power," said Berthelot, "extends beyond our knowledge." A scholar of antiquity, without considering that he lacked modesty, would have certainly affirmed the contrary. His power was of the slightest: his knowledge represented the whole of nature to him as intelligible. He felt that it was divine: he religiously admired its plan and design. The majesty of nature appeals not less to the modern scientist. But he abstains from interpreting it by means of anthropomorphical concepts, and in his scientific efforts carefully puts aside everything that does not tend to the knowledge of facts and laws.

Now, without setting up an exact parallel between the development of physics and that of ethics, does it not seem that the latter possesses at the present time a number of features found in the former in its ancient period? Has it not sought until now rather to "understand" than to "know?" Does it not consider as sufficiently known what it thinks to have understood? Does it not proceed from the more general problems to the more particular questions? Does nothing remain of the mystical or religious in the manner in which its object appears to it?

Psychology, for instance, has only recently become a positive and independent science; as yet there is no unanimous agreement on the definition that should be given of it. According to many contemporary philosophers, it is inseparable from metaphysics whether because it is the only

road that directly introduces us to it, or because all true psychology is already in itself metaphysics, our deepest consciousness is a revelation of being. All those who, under the name of spiritualists and idealists explain the universe and humanity by means of a principle of intelligibility itself intelligent, are drawn to that conception. The spirit seems to them to possess a dignity, and a value incommensurable with anything else the universe may contain : it is the principle whence everything departs, and to which everything leads. " We who believe in the spirit," recently said one of those young philosophers. It is in fact a sort of faith. Metaphysics of the "spirit" is the actual envelope of the beliefs formerly manifested under the more concrete form of religion. It affirms and endeavours to prove the presence (otherwise inexplicable) in the body of living man of a being of higher essence, incorruptible, immortal, only apparently touched by the diseases and decadence of the organism, and which continues to exist when the body is destroyed. *Est Deus in nobis.* It is the simplest and most natural way of rendering the psychic functions " intelligible." Under different forms it is found almost everywhere in humanity, and although more subtle in the theories of spiritualist psychologists, it is still recognizable.

" To know " is another thing. It is the more modest and difficult task undertaken by men of science who, renouncing the possibility of " understanding " at the first onset, proceed in the same way in regard to psychic phenomena as the physician does in those he studies : I mean he objectifies them whenever it is possible by expedients of method ; by studying the relations and the concomitant variations with other series of natural phenomena easier to measure, and especially those physiological phenomena which seem to contain their immediate conditions. Similarly, a fresh distribution of the facts becomes necessary in proportion as they are better known. The old conceptions of memory, imagination, attention, emotion, etc., seem destined to disappear. The terms, sufficiently defined for current use and practice, are not sufficiently so for scientific use. They confusedly designate a complex multiplicity of phenomena

that a more accurate analysis is beginning to distinguish and classify—but with much difficulty—to place them according to their particular conditions. If the psychology of the ancients was satisfied with speculations which in that respect now seem almost purely verbal, it is because it more or less openly supposed behind the psychic functions the presence of a principle which revealed its activity through them: imagination, the soul which imagines; memory, the soul which remembers; pain, the soul which suffers, etc. It is thus that biology, in its beginnings, thought to make physiological functions intelligible by connecting them with the action of a "vital principle."

Traditional psychology, while claiming to use the method of observation, had a constant tendency to solve the more general problems first, so as to derive from them afterwards, by the abstract means of reasoning, the solution of more particular questions. The trait is found both in the empirics and in their opponents. Some students, impressed by the results obtained in physics by the combined method of experiment and calculation, and impressed above all by Newton's great discoveries in astronomy and physics, sought a pendant to the law of universal gravitation in the law of association of ideas, and constructed the somewhat artificial edifice of associationist psychology. Others thought the essential thing would be reached, if they could determine the "faculties" to which the different phenomena should be referred, and the smallest number of irreducible faculties that must be included.

There is a striking contrast between such indefinite problems about which mere reflection is satisfied by its own means, and the minute analysis of actual facts in their specialty, as is now the practice of scientific psychology.

From that point of view, the *Philosophische Studien*, the *Zeitschrift für die Psychologie der Sinnen und der Sinnesorganen*, the larger number of English and American psychological reviews, the *Année psychologique* (to mention only a few of such publications) do not differ from those devoted to chemistry, physics and biology. The student's chief

preoccupation is to *know* certain facts accurately in order to discover through them if he can their constant relations with other facts. The thought of treating them altogether, so to speak, by a skilful manipulation of concepts, no longer enters his mind.

On the other hand, works like Frazer's *Golden Bough*, while bringing together certain fruits of the collective imagination gathered in every quarter of the globe, and by showing the manner in which those fruits have gradually been modified (sympathetic magic, prayers, myths), allow us a glimpse of the mechanism of collective ideas, a study which is almost scientific, the progress of which depends on anthropological sciences.

Thus the unity of traditional psychology was factitious. Under the action of the scientific spirit applied to "knowing" and no longer to "intelligibility," the unity gave way and was broken. Speculation on "the soul" disappeared. What related to the theory of knowledge returned to logic. As regards the higher mental functions, demarcation is not yet definitely established between what exclusively refers to psychology, and what also interests sociology (language, intelligence, altruistic feelings, collective action). A new method of treating the object of psychology corresponds to that new distribution : the sciences which study it leave the characteristics of the physics of the ancients in order to approach those presented by modern natural science.

A similar evolution is to be noted in what are called the "ethical sciences"; but we scarcely begin to admit its necessity. The proof lies in the fact that the greater number of cultivated minds still find much difficulty in regarding the whole of social reality as a province of nature. There are scarcely any, even among those who are most careful to preserve a scrupulously scientific attitude, who entirely refrain from mingling the consideration of what ought to be with the objective study of what is. Few have remained wholly faithful, in every case, to the distinction between theory and practice, a preliminary condition of scientific research. All who have insisted on the difficulties peculiar

to sociology, from Comte to Spencer and Durkheim, state, as one of the chief of them, the inevitable claim of actually urgent moral and social problems.

Besides, excepting Durkheim and his school, contemporary sociologists, who in that point may be compared to physiologists prior to Socrates, bring their efforts to bear less on the exact knowledge of certain facts and certain laws, than on the intelligibility of the vast whole offered for study. Tarde, for example, proceeds in that manner. And it seems to them that the intelligibility can be conceived without much trouble. Doubtless they have not always recourse to an unique principle to which they flatter themselves to attach all the facts, just as the Greek physiologists thought to find a similar primitive essence under all the phenomena of nature. But everything of ethical or social nature seems to them to be sufficiently "explained," and "comprehensible" by means of a psychological interpretation presenting no insurmountable difficulty: do we not know human nature? There are no custom, beliefs, religious rites, no system pertaining to the family, no judicial system, for which those sociologists are unable to account easily; and their demonstrations, if we may employ the word, possess the same sort of relation to truth as those of the physics of the ancients.

The temptation to proceed in their fashion is strong. For social phenomena of every kind—religious, juridical, economic and others—are only furnished us by oral or written testimonies, texts, monuments of various kinds, signs even, that must be interpreted. This we do by mentally reconstructing the state of consciousness that originally produced them. When we read a psalm, when we restore an inscription, when we decipher an Egyptian or Assyrian judicial act, we add the meaning it had for its author to the objective matter of the document that has been perserved for us. If it is a question of an economic fact, of a sale for instance, we imagine, although in an epitomized and purely schematic manner, the motives for action of the persons interested. Thus while other natural phenomena are better adapted to become the object of positive science the

better they are objectified, it seems that many social facts are at first presented to us objectively, and that in order to know them we ought to subjectify them in some way by connecting them with certain states of consciousness. As much as to say that to know them is to understand them : for what do we understand better than the facts which pass within us since consciousness seizes them at the moment in which they are produced, and since, according to philosophers, their essence consists in being perceived.

That conception of sociology is much nearer the " moral sciences " of the ancients than the positive sciences of nature. It is a characteristic trait : competence is not now acquired in any physical or natural science without prolonged special study conducted on a method that cannot be disregarded. No one becomes a physician, chemist or physiologist by improvisation ; the most gifted genius has need of an apprenticeship. No one claims to decide all at once questions on which scientists are divided. But men still become sociologists by improvisation, and they can make the public, even the educated public, listen to more or less ingenious solutions of the chief problems under discussion. Special preliminary studies do not appear to be indispensable. Simple good sense, psychological penetration, moral finesse, dialectical skill, with imagination and some reading, are sufficient. Why ? Because since social facts are always translated in terms of consciousness, we implicitly hold that we have immediate intelligence of them.

There, in Kant's expression, is a nest of sophisms. First, the phenomena of our own consciousness are far from " transparent " for us. They are presented directly, undoubtedly, but by masses, and are seen from the angle most favourable to practice. But they are not on that account understood, nor even known, at least if we mean knowledge of an objective value, that is, which unites the phenomena with themselves, and with other phenomena of nature. Afterwards, when we restore the state of consciousness which is an indispensable element of the social phenomenon, we nearly always introduce an error ; for we do not restore the state of consciousness which was actually that of the actors or

contemporaries, but another state peculiar to us, with the associations and sentiments, which belong to us and our epoch. Instead then of imagining that we easily have complete intelligence of social facts, we ought to be very circumspect in the interpretation of those facts, especially when it is a question of beliefs, feelings, practices, and rites far removed from our experience. Scientific method prescribes an *objective* study of their circumstances and conditions in order to discover their meaning. It will be a progress similar to that which has been realized in philology, for example, where instead of guessing etymologies by the apparent resemblance of words, they are studied methodically according to the laws of derivation, a fact that has caused us to acknowledge that in that science, as in many others, the probable is not often the true.[1]

But even when relying on the analogy of our own conscience we obtained a faithful restitution of moral phenomena considered *subjectively*, we should still have to acquire knowledge of the laws which the phenomena, considered from the objective or sociological point of view, obey. Those laws would only be revealed through an equally objective analysis, and in certain cases rigorous and well-established statistics are indispensable. Not only does consciousness not give us the formula of those laws, but it does not even warn us of their existence. The object of sociology is to seek them.

Here again progress will consist in substituting the methodical effort which seeks "to know" for the philosophical reflection which seeks "to understand." The new science will take into account the vast extent of its unexplored domain. It will discover, in its turn, that a reality can be familiar and entirely unknown at one and the same time. All men speak, but how many suspect the problems that their language sets to the philologist, the logician, the sociologist? We all make movements every instant, but we cannot explain how we produce them: it is only a short

[1] Cf. on that point and on the whole chapter generally, Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, 2nd edition, especially the introduction and chapters i, ii, iii, and iv; Paris, Alcan, 1901.

time since mechanics and anatomy have known how to explain them. Similarly, we live amid social reality, we are penetrated by it, enveloped by it on every side, and we even help to produce it: scientifically, however, we are as ignorant of it as a market porter is of myology and the theory of levers. Our laws, our duties, our beliefs, our customs, our family and class relations, the institutions of our society, seem easy to understand because we are accustomed to react immediately in a certain way on a given social stimulus. But if it is a question of accounting for it, scientific sociology, which alone could do so, is scarcely sufficiently advanced, and indeed few minds would think of having recourse to it. The habit, for the most part, subsists, in appealing to principles "above experience," that is to say, to a *metaphysics of ethics* which comprises, under the name of the ideal, respect for the practice universally accepted in our time.

Even positive sociologists do not always escape the illusion of believing that what is familiar to them does not need scientific analysis. Comte, for instance, considered the family as the primitive social unit, not admitting of decomposition, as the element beyond which sociology could not go. He took it as self-evident that no human society was possible without the family. But we know now that very complex social organizations exist in which the family is not the first element. The genesis and evolution of the family in human societies is a problem of positive sociology which is only just beginning to be studied. Its solution would doubtless do much to throw light on the actual notion of the European family; abstract reflection alone will never teach us its actual genesis.

The extreme complexity of the relations between social facts once understood—a complexity comparable to that of the phenomena of organic nature—sociology, recognizing what is necessary in the way of effort, patience, and methodical skill to explain even one problem, will no longer care for abstract and general speculation. It will abandon the vast questions, so dear to the ancients, questions which end themselves to ingenious argument and brilliant varia-

tions, but which add nothing to knowledge. Comte thought that sociology subordinated discovery of the more particular laws to that of general laws, and was consequently forced first to determine the universal law which governs the whole of social dynamics in order to descend thence to the other laws. But that conception only proves that Comte's sociology was still a philosophy of history. Sociology now aims at being exactly positive. Veritably physical, it tends to divide itself like its elder sister, physics, into a multiplicity of sciences, distinct and connected, each with special tools for its work, and special processes and methods. Like physics, it distrusts the large hypotheses which explain everything, and account for nothing: such, for example, as the hypothesis of society-organism (Lilienfeld, Schäffle) or of the struggle of races (Gumplovicz), etc. It is surely progress not to waste time in developing conceptions of that kind, but to spend it in more modest researches, limited to more restricted objects, the results of which will teach us something, and will add to instead of subtracting from the sum of our knowledge.

IV

The large part played by mathematics in the development of physics—In what degree historical sciences can play an analogous part in the development of the sciences of social reality.

There exists, in the development of the science of "physical nature," a trait of capital importance of which we have not yet spoken, and which may perhaps throw some light on the future progress of the science of "social nature." In the dismemberment of the physics of the ancients which by means of progressive differentiation has produced the various sciences of inorganic and living nature, the period of decisive progress only began when a science, more general

and more advanced than the others became both a model and an *organon* for them. A model in as far as it offered the type of rigorously scientific knowledge, purged of every foreign element either metaphysical or practical; an *organon* in the sense which mathematics according to the philosopher's opinion, constituted the richest and most complete arsenal of all the artifices of argument with which a man could be armed for the conquest of natural laws. Mathematics enjoy the singular privilege of being cultivated for themselves as much as for science, and also of serving at the same time as a powerful instrument in the progress of the more complex sciences (astronomy, physics, and chemistry); the weakness of our intellect and the complexity of the problems not permitting us, actually, to carry the application of mathematical analysis farther. Surely then the science of "ethical nature" will also only enter its period of decisive and rapid progress when it has found an instrument in a science more advanced than itself?

Evidently that science cannot be mathematics. They may doubtless serve to represent certain laws. A trial has been made for the most part without success in psychology, and more happily, it seems, in political economy. But in a general way, if mathematics cannot render service to biology because vital phenomena are too complex and too unstable, *a fortiori* they cannot be employed in the social sciences, the phenomena of which, equally complex and unstable, cannot be related to exactly proportionate physical and chemical forces.

However, if the truth which is the object of this "ethical physics" does not objectify itself in space as the other does, it objectifies itself in a manner peculiar to itself. It becomes object for the consciousness of man of the present time, by imposing itself on him in the shape of facts which that consciousness did not produce and cannot change. The mass of those facts whether contemporary or past, constitute properly a "nature," but a nature of a kind in which the scientific knowledge of contemporary facts would be impossible without that of anterior facts. The actual condition of any social group depends in the closest way on its

immediately preceding condition, and so on. In short, what is possible in the study of "physical nature," is not possible in the study of "social nature"; the laws of statics (except perhaps in a few rare cases, for instance in abstract political economy) cannot be studied apart by abstracting even provisionally the principles of the laws dynamics.

There are then sciences which ought to play an indispensable part in "ethical physics," analogous (I do not say entirely similar) to that of mathematics in physics properly so called. They are the historical sciences. For, among the sciences which have "ethical nature" for their object, they are both the most advanced, and an indispensable auxiliary for the others. If we understand, as we should, by historical sciences, not only the political, diplomatic and military history of nations, but also the history of languages, arts, technology, religions, law, customs, civilization, and institutions, those are the oldest and the most fruitful in results of the sciences studied by "social nature"; indeed failing them, the effort to establish sociological laws would be vain. The comparative method, indispensable to reach such laws, is only applicable thanks to the results of the historical sciences.

Yet we must not assimilate too closely the part played by the historical sciences in ethical physics to that played by mathematics in physics properly so called. Mathematics furnish demonstrations, and permit the problems of physics to be put in the form of equations; while history, whatever be its special object, only causes facts and series of facts to be known, and leaves the care of pronouncing and demonstrating their laws to another science. Thus history cannot be an *organon* for that science, in the sense in which mathematics form an *organon* for physics. The particular nature of the services rendered has its reason in the particular nature of the phenomena studied which lends itself to exact measurement when it is a question of physical nature, and refuses it when it is a question of ethical nature. But that difference and the important consequences which result from it do not efface the analogy we have pointed out.

Without the science of mathematics there would be no science of "physical nature"; without historical science, there would be no science of "ethical nature."

The essential, and if we may say so, the preliminary function of historical sciences in the study of the "ethical world" has only been clearly perceived for about a century. Formerly that part was attributed either to ethics or to psychology. The name of "ethical sciences" which was applied to all the sciences having either the individual or the social order for their object, is sufficiently characteristic. The name well corresponded with the mixed character of those sciences as they were then understood, occupied at one and the same time with the knowledge of what is, and the determination of what ought to be. The second part of their task was not the most difficult; it only demanded an effort of deductive dialectics, for the general principles of "what ought to be," were provided with their demonstration by the higher and central science of theoretical ethics. Thus were deduced systems of natural law which gravely set up what society, the state, the family, property ought to be, and the relations which those lofty abstractions ought to maintain between themselves. That was the pre-scientific period, or according to the expression suggested above, the metaphysics of ethics of that speculation.

Psychology might perhaps have fulfilled the inaugural rôle sometimes attributed to it in the science of ethical nature if it had been more advanced than that science, if it had long been master of its method, and rich in acquired results. But it is almost at the same point of its development as the other parts of "ethical physics." Besides there is a graver difficulty: it depends for its ulterior progress not less on the progress of those parts, than they do on it for their progress. For the scientific knowledge of higher mental functions, we have seen, cannot be obtained by a dialectical method or by simple reflection, and without the aid of sociological sciences. How is psychology to be made the basis of sciences of which psychology itself has need, or to put it better, which are one of the sources of psychology itself?

It remains then that the preliminary and necessary condition of the progress of " ethical physics " is the methodical exploration by history of the social facts of the past, and at the same time the observation of existing societies which perhaps represent older stages of our own evolution, and are thus, so far as we are concerned like a living past. If we had a profound knowledge of the history of religious life in the various human societies, of the comparative history of law, customs, arts and literatures, technology, and institutions, we should be infinitely nearer than we are to the science properly so-called of social reality. In the presence of that reality we should easily assume the mental attitude which always costs an effort, and without which that science is not possible ; we can only consider the objective relations of facts between themselves and refrain from interpreting them subjectively. From that point of view the historical sciences are merely introductory, offering in a certain sense a model. They teach us to regard social reality with a disinterested eye, and without other aim than knowing what is or what has been. They are now as exempt from the metaphysics of ethics as mathematics have long been from metaphysics. The philosophy of history, the Hegelian conception of progress, the action more or less apparent of a Providence guiding events, all those transcendent elements have gradually disappeared ; the methodical and critical effort towards the knowledge of facts and, if it is possible, of their connexion, has alone remained. Just as mathematics are indispensable to the training of the physicist who, however, employs the method of observation, a method useless to the geometrician, so the historical sciences are not less indispensable to the sociologist while his comparative method and his systematic effort to establish laws are foreign to the historian.

CHAPTER V

ANSWER TO SOME OBJECTIONS

I

How can we remain without rules for conduct while awaiting the formation of the science ?—Answer : the conception itself of the science of ethics implies pre-existing rules.

IF we understand the relations between theory and practice in ethics as they are established in the preceding chapters, a serious difficulty seems to present itself. Rational practice depends on the state of advancement of the social sciences. The most indulgent judges admit that those sciences are still rudimentary. Centuries, the number of which we cannot foresee, will probably elapse before "social nature" is as well known to us as "physical nature," before we can base our conduct on the positive science of its laws. While waiting, we must act. Social life sets us, every instant, practical problems that must be solved. To refuse to reply is, in most cases, a manner of replying! Abstention brings the same responsibility as action. How are we to reconcile the reserve that our actual ignorance would impose on us with the immediate necessity for action ? Can we be, even provisionally, without guiding rules of conduct ?

The hypothesis, which we hesitate to discuss, offers nothing absurd in itself. We reject it instinctively, for conscience seems to testify that all, learned and unlearned alike, find a sufficient guidance in the commands of duty. And besides, by a sort of spontaneous optimism, we cannot conceive that anything can be both indispensable to us and

denied to us. But it happens, and we are compelled to recognize that it is so, that we are sometimes unable, for a long while, to give a rational solution to problems of the greatest importance Witness the many diseases in which the physician, recognizing his impotence, refrains from interfering except to relieve the sufferings of the patient he cannot cure. The medicine-man of the savages, and even the physician of a few centuries ago, never doubted the efficacy of their remedies. The progress of knowledge has made our physicians more reserved and more circumspect. May it not be the same in ethical and social matters ? Prior to the scientific search for laws every practical question relating to ethics seemed to have an immediate, definitive, and most often, an obligatory solution. With the progress of the science a period begins in which the most enlightened will make no difficulty about confessing that the rational solution of a great number of problems escapes them. Such is the state of mind of more than one scientist in the presence of social problems properly so called.

But how is he to suspend his judgement when it is a question, not of general problems the solution of which, it is admitted, depends on knowledge, but of the resolutions that life compels us to make at once, rendering it necessary for us to answer an urgent question by yes or no ? The silence of science we can understand : we cannot understand, even provisionally, the silence of ethics.

The difficulty is not so intricate as it seems at first sight, and as it would actually be if it was necessary to accept the terms in which it is stated. It comes in a great measure from a confusion of ideas. We have seen that the word ethics has different meanings in current usage. Sometimes it designates existing ethical *reality*, that is to say, the mass of duties, laws, feelings, beliefs that constitute at a given moment the content of the common conscience ; sometimes it means ethical *practice*, so far as it is a rational art founded on science, and interfering in ethical or social phenomena in order to modify them. Now in a large number of cases the confession of our ignorance may suspend that intervention ; but, whether we ignore it or not,

social reality has its own objective existence, and remains what it is. Our knowledge and our ignorance are only "extrinsic denominations" for it, exactly as with "physical nature," the laws of which when they are unknown to us are not less felt than when they are known.

In short, ethics, if we mean by it the mass of duties imposed by conscience, does not depend for existence on the speculative principles which would found it, nor on the knowledge that we may have of that whole. It exists *vi propria*, under the title of social reality, and it imposes itself on the individual subject with the same objectivity as the rest of reality. Philosophers sometimes imagined that it was they who founded ethics: a pure illusion, but a harmless one which they have had to give up. Hegel, at the beginning of his *Philosophy of Right* rallies the theorists of the State who assume the task of constructing the State as it ought to be. He explains to them that the State exists, that it is a *given* reality, and that they will find enough to do to understand it such as it is. He instances the example of the physician to whom the idea never occurred of discovering what the laws of nature ought to be, but who simply asks what they are. That reflection is not less applicable to ethics. The ethics of a people or of a civilization is not "made" for the reason that it is already made. In order to exist it has not waited for philosophers to construct or deduce it. But, just as laws, once discovered procure us the means of interfering rationally, and certainly, in the series of physical phenomena, in view of certain ends that we desire to attain, so the knowledge of sociological laws would lead us to a rational ethical art, which would permit us to improve the social reality in which we live up to a certain point.

The celebrated Cartesian formula which assimilates ethics to mechanics and medicine implies that all three are conceived as rational arts, proposing to modify a given reality under the direction of science. So far as mechanics and medicine are concerned, no confusion is to be feared, either of words, or of ideas. It is, too, clear that the reality in which they interfere has its own existence, and that it forms

the object of a vast whole of sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology). But if ethics as rational art exactly corresponds to mechanics, and medicine, it must be confessed that it, too, operates on a given reality which does not depend on it for existence.

If then rational ethical art must recognize that in a very large number of cases it is unable to solve the problems presented to it, that is to say, to know how and by what means to modify the given reality even when we have an urgent interest in so doing, there is nothing particularly alarming in the confession. It does not mean that we are without morals in the current sense of the word, that is, without rules of conduct, without guidance, incapable of acting, as if paralysed. On the contrary in the absence of that rational art, the rules of traditional conduct weigh heavily on consciences, and if they are not obeyed it is for reasons with which our ignorance has nothing to do.

The art is only just at its birth, and is still far from sustaining comparison with the triumphant arts which place a portion of the forces of physical nature at our service. We need not, however, be alarmed by the revelation of such impotence ; it is the natural consequence of the fact that the science of ethics is still in its formative period. Indeed I should rather see in it the annunciation and promise of a new power for man. There is nothing new in the fact that we are incapable of rationally modifying ethical reality ; but it is new that we should conceive a positive means of attaining it later by applications of scientific sociology. Until now the reality was simply imposed on individual consciences. Utopian reformers docilely introduced it into their abstract political systems ; constructors of " theoretical ethics " rationalized the practice universally accepted in their time and country. It is for the sociologists to undertake the scientific, and purely objective, study of that given reality.

Why does our conscience approve one action and blame another ? Nearly always for reasons that we are unable to state, or for reasons other than those which we do state ; the comparative study of religions, beliefs, and customs in

different epochs and different countries is alone able to account for it. It is true that a skilful philosopher can always deduce duties from a fundamental principle with an apparent necessity. But necessity and deduction are only of value if our conscience resembles that of the philosopher, and if it has similar exigencies. Otherwise the necessity vanishes, and the deduction seems artificial.

Simmel, who is not the dupe of many prejudices, furnishes a striking instance of that fact.[1] In the course of his very interesting reflections on "honour," he undertakes to prove that between persons of equal rank the duel is an inevitable necessity for the avenging of certain offences. The proof is stated with fine dialectical rigour. Simmel does not realize that if instead of being a German sociologist, he was an English sociologist, his proof would be sophistical or superfluous, or that he would never have thought of constructing it, nor have experienced the need of writing it down, because it would correspond to nothing in an actual English conscience. Simmel's demonstration only proves one thing: that a custom, comparable to the *vendetta* but regulated by the influence of the military spirit, persists in Germany among a certain portion of the people. The persistence of the custom in a nation otherwise highly civilized is explained by the conception of honour of an exclusive caste which jealously preserves its traditions; the survival of the caste is due to certain historical economic and political causes. Suppose that those causes were equally felt throughout Europe: the custom in question would assume the aspect of a universal exigency of conscience. Probably the philosophic moralist would formulate it into an obligatory rule of conduct. His ethics would appear immoral if he condemned or ignored the custom; and he would become "subversive" if he did not find Simmel's demonstration convincing.

[1] Simmel. *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, I. pp. 193–5.

II

Do we not destroy conscience in presenting it as a relative reality ? —Answer : No, because we know positively that duty is imperative ; and it is because it is imperative that we regard it as positive—If philosophers do not make ethics neither do they unmake them—Force of dislike of ethical novelty—The authority of an ethical rule is always assured so long as the rule actually exists.

Whether ignored, unrecognized, or admitted by the philosophers, one fact is sure : they do not establish the rules of conduct. They codify them and rationalize them. The rules form part of a " social nature " which may be regarded as an objective reality. Until now it has developed in every human society according to its own laws. " Theoretical ethics " may yield the place to sociological research, the only solid basis for a rational ethical art : the fear that ethics (understood in the sense of the content of the conscience, duties, feelings of merit or demerit) would disappear is wholly chimerical. The content would remain precisely the same, and we should live by the same ethical system.

Perhaps ; but here is a fresh objection. Would ethics preserve its authority ? Man is little inclined by nature to do himself a violence. His tendency is always to follow wherever possible the line of least resistance, that is, the direction of his desires and passions. It may happen that his emotional impulses conspire with the dictates of conscience, but the contrary is much more frequent. In fact the temptation to act against ethical rule is almost continuous. If man does not more often succumb to it, it is because he is prevented by a whole system of restraints, moral and social, one of the most efficacious of which is the inviolable sublimity and sanctity of duty. Convinced that what he is going to do is bad, bad in essence, bad " in itself " independently of consequences, bad in a mystic and religious sense, man is more capable of refraining than if he lacked that belief. If he learns that it has no rational foundation, that the repulsion or condemnation called forth by certain

acts is explained by historical and psychological reasons, in short that his ethics is relative, do you not take from them both their prestige and their power ? Relative, it is no longer infallible, it is like a judge whose decisions can be carried to the court of appeal and reversed He who, nevertheless, continues to submit to it will have the feeling, to use Renan's expression, that he is something of a dupe. When speculation on " ethics " treats it as a province of " nature " which develops according to laws, it tends first to weaken it, then to destroy it. To state that ethics is relative is in a certain sense equivalent to saying that there is no ethics. Either the imperative of the conscience is absolute or it is not imperative at all. Thus that speculation is condemned : for can we imagine a human society without ethics ?

The argument does not fail to make an impression. The interest of social preservation to which it appeals is so strong that most minds consider the argument decisive. But it is not ; to speak accurately, it is not an argument. Hostile to a particular method of research in ethical subjects, we plead the fatal consequences that the employment of that method would entail from the point of view of practice. But that manner of criticizing a speculative method is not of lasting efficacy. It is not equivalent to a direct refutation. It cannot avoid showing that the method thus combated is unsuited to the order of researches under discussion, that consequently it cannot lead to the discovery of the truth, and that the results it has so far obtained are false. How many of our sciences would still be at their first beginning if they had been obliged to take into account considerations of that kind ! There is scarcely any scientific method which was not for a certain period considered dangerous to public order, or what was even more serious, as irreligious and impious. The first who ventured to state that the moon was a big stone, and proposed to examine it as a mineral body, nearly paid for his rashness with his life. It was rash to put nature to question by experiment ; it was more rash to dissect human corpses ; it was an unpardonable audacity to apply verbal and his-

torical criticism to the sacred texts of the Bible and the Gospels. Is it surprising then that a still stronger protest should be made when it is proposed to apply the scientific method to ethical matters and to treat them with the same impassive objectivity as the rest of nature ?

In the second place, the objection consists in claiming an intangible and sacred character for duty. A kind of natural revelation (Kant says, rational), it exacts absolute respect, and is placed by its very nature above all anthropological and historical investigation. Undoubtedly that is how duty presents itself to the individual conscience, and Kant described it with perfect accuracy. But we may accept his description without agreeing with his interpretation. It is not impossible to give an account of the characteristics with which duty presents itself to the individual conscience without admitting all the apparatus of the " metaphysics of ethics " and the " critique of practical reason," the categorical imperative, the law which imposes itself by its form alone and not by its matter, the autonomy of the will, causality by liberty, the intelligible character, the kingdom of ends, the postulates of practical reason, etc. Empirical and utilitarian ethics think they can do so, and so do, in general, all non-intuitive ethical systems which tend more and more towards a scientific form, while intuitive ethics like those of Kant would by preference return to a religious form.

The argument, indeed, implies a postulate which is not evident, not proven. It takes for granted that if the dictates of conscience appear imperative to man, it is because he imagines them to be positive ! The sublime mystery of their origin obtains an obedience from him he would not otherwise give. Duty makes him understand or at least feel his participation in an ethical reality, distinct from the nature in which he pursues his interest and happiness as far as he is sensible of it ; hence he finds it impossible to dissociate himself from duty which has no common measure with his other motives of action whatever they may be. It imposes itself because it is of another order. But on the other hand we may conceive duty to be positive because it

presents itself as imperative. It is the most natural way of explaining its characteristics to ourselves. Similarly in the speculative philosophy of the ancients, general concepts, species, and genera hypostasized by the language, became "ideas," and those ideas forming an intelligible universe, seemed to "explain" objects and given organisms in experience; similarly, too, in the ethical speculation of the moderns, the presence of imperatives in individual consciences which are presented as positive and universal, almost necessarily produced belief in the supra-sensible not to say divine origin of duty: and that origin in its turn, served to "explain" the presence of those imperatives in the conscience. As often happens in metaphysics, an abstract statement of the problem appeared to be its solution.

If, instead of speculating dialectically on the concepts of duty, on ethical law, on natural good and ethical good, on the autonomy of the will, we consider the actions that men actually think it their duty to perform or avoid, and if we employ the processes of the comparative method, indispensable when social facts are in question, the following conclusion tends to impose itself: what is now enjoined or forbidden by ethics in the name of duty, was equally enjoined or forbidden at a former period, and for another reason, sometimes in virtue of beliefs which are effaced while the practices which are the outcome of the beliefs have been preserved, sometimes in view of the interest of the group. The last explanation was believed to be true in every case in the eighteenth century but was only really true in some. Everything that was forbidden as entailing a stain (taboo) may remain morally bad after having received religious interdiction. If we had the same horror of slaughtering animals as we have of slaughtering a man, we should, like the Hindoo, feel after eating, or merely touching animal food, as we should feel if we were concerned in an assassination. In all nations, in all degrees of civilization, we find obligations and interdictions that the individual does not violate without the most poignant, sometimes mortal, remorse.

But then the objection falls. If ethical prescription does

not hold its authority from a theoretical conviction or from a system of ideas, it could exist by its own strength, at least for a very long time, whatever the methods employed by science for the study of ethics might be :—just as the science of religions does not seem so far to have brought about any marked change in the condition of religious beliefs. The imperative character of the ethics now practised not being derived from reflection, is scarcely enfeebled by it. In short, if philosophers do not *make* ethics, neither do scientists *unmake* them, and for the same reasons. They are face to face with an actual objective reality, although it is not projected in space like the physical reality is. The whole function of scientists, very important although modest, is to study it in order to know it, and to know it, so that later they may rationally modify it in what degree it is possible.

The danger which seemed so disquieting is then entirely imaginary.

The things that we *must* or *must not* do, our relations to our parents, our countrymen, to foreigners ; our duties and rights with regard to property, sexual morality, etc. do not depend on the ethical theory to which reflection may lead us. Our obligations are determined beforehand and imposed on each of us by social pressure. We may in a given case, resist it and act otherwise than it prescribes ; but we can neither ignore it, nor get rid of it. Without mentioning the positive penalties by which the penal law punishes crimes and definite misdemeanours it is manifesteed by what Durkheim rightly calls diffuse penalties, by the reproaches of our own conscience ; and the only means we have of avoiding that reproach is a moral obduracy which seems to us a worse fall than the rest. There is nothing more exacting than the conformity of the average conscience. Everything that it does not clothe with an authorization, either formal or tacit (for it often tolerates in fact what it seems to contradict in principle), it condemns with a severity that generally imposes obedience, and that at least assures outward respect for the rule. It descends from one generation to the next, jealously

guarded by the spirit of tradition and by the instinct of social preservation.

Indeed, one of the chief conditions of the existence of a society seems to be a sufficient ethical similitude between its members. It is necessary that all should experience the same repulsion for certain acts, the same reverence for certain other acts and ideas, and that they should feel the same obligation to act in a particular manner in determined circumstances. That is one of the essential significations of the maxim : *idem velle et idem nolle.* The common conscience is the hearth at which individual consciences are lighted. It keeps them alive, and is at the same time kept alive by them. They all react together against what threatens to weaken the common conscience and so compromise the existence of society. The force of the reaction was very great at the time when rules of conduct were not separated from religious beliefs, and when every transgression, every modification of obligatory methods of acting, would draw the anger and vengeance of invisible powers down on the group. The fault, even involuntary, of an individual would entail the punishment of all. Social solidarity is now no longer felt or understood in that fashion in our civilization. As a general rule the acts of the individual only concern himself. The misdemeanour or crime committed by him does not *ipso facto* contaminate others : our idea of responsibility is quite different. But, the moment that the common conscience feels itself injured in its essential prescriptions, a violent social reaction bursts forth. Any one who seeks to " re-adjust " the idea of patriotism, and to bring it into harmony with the philosophical and sociological thought of to-day, risks being regarded as a traitor and a bad citizen. He who thinks of a modification (however inevitable) of the right of property, is looked upon as a despoiler, and incurs the contempt of " honest men ! " It is the same with questions of sexual ethics and many others that might be enumerated.

Thus dislike of ethical novelty is even now an universal fact. There is no need to have recourse to the example of

societies like China, where ethical principles are fixed for ever by classical texts, so that even the idea of change is rejected in advance as immoral, every reform only consisting in returning to the sources, to Confucius and Mencius, who are themselves but the faithful interpreters of their ancestors. The tendency of the common conscience in European societies is not less conservative. But the changes which occur in other social series, chiefly in economic conditions and in science, inevitably react on law, beliefs, and finally on ethical practices. But the variations in ethical ideas and beliefs in the course of a generation in those societies are necessarily inconsiderable.

As morality is bound up in each man's consciousness with the " strong inward sense " of liberty, the belief prevails that individual initiative is frequently manifested in ethical matters. Does it not depend on me, at every instant, and in a thousand ways, to obey or to disobey the rules? Yes, the choice is yours, but not the initiative. An alternative is yours : to restore what has been entrusted to you, or to keep it ; to speak the truth or to tell a lie ; to practise a religion or to abstain from so doing. But to get free of the alternative, that is to say, to act *otherwise* : to conceive and realize a positive mode of action, different from that prescribed, does not depend upon you, and indeed hardly ever happens. It matters little whether a man conforms to a fixed rule or violates it, but in experiencing the feelings, and preserving the conceptions of those who observe it, his conscience is in both cases set in the same direction. The matter of the action alone differs, and it could be maintained that it is always the same action but affected here by a positive sign, there by a negative sign. The idea of a third direction is not even conceived.

Generally speaking, when, from time to time, an ethical initiative appears (Socrates, Jesus, the socialists), it is infallibly denounced and condemned as subversive. That must be so. It constitutes a threat of trouble for the common actual conscience, and consequently for the whole social system in force. A mere transgression is in a certain way adapted to the law violated, since the

transgression is foreseen by the law, and will be punished by it. If a man follows a law of his own, he threatens the very existence of the common rule, and provokes a much more violent repression; but this very seldom happens. Most often if a veritable ethical innovation appears, it means that the decay of the prevailing system of laws or duties is very advanced. But that decay is never produced in isolation. It implies a whole mass of transformations, and sometimes of political, economic, religious, and intellectual revolutions. And in that vast net of mingled actions and reactions it is difficult to say at what precise moment any particular modification is produced, and whether it is more cause or effect.

It is not then impossible to conceive the conscience otherwise than as a mysterious participation in a supra-sensible absolute. We may regard its content at a given moment, as a mass of social facts, conditioned by the social facts at the same time as it acts on them in its turn. The past of a certain people, its religions, sciences and arts, its relations with neighbouring peoples, its general economic condition being given, its ethics is determined by the mass of facts of which it is the outcome. A more or less harmonious system—but only one system—of ethical rules wholly defined, corresponds to a wholly defined social condition. It is in that sense that Greek ethics differs from modern ethics and Chinese ethics from European ethics.

As no civilization is entirely stationary, the ethics of a given society at a given moment may be considered as destined to progress in proportion to the other social series, and as even progressing at all times, no matter how slowly. It is then always provisional. But it is not perceived to be so. On the contrary, it imposes itself with an absolute character that tolerates neither disobedience, nor indifference, nor even critical reflection. Its authority is always assured *so long as it is real.* But it may happen that the authority of such or such determined rule becomes weakened. In societies like ours where evolution is rapid, the imminence of great economic changes reacts in advance on ethics. For instance, the contemporary conscience tends more and more

to recognize that the actual régime of rights relating to property is provisional. In spite of the strong and often sincere protestations of orthodox economists, the social nature of property, the ancient character of our laws of inheritance, the outcome of Roman law, become more and more evident. What is to be said, if not that the economic transformation of our society tends to cause the appearance of a new law and new ethics ? The defenders of the old law exclaim that society is lost, and their indignation is in entire conformity with precedent. They denounce the social and ethical doctrines which diverge from spiritual philosophy and from the traditional theory of natural right as responsible for the inevitable catastrophe. But they are mistaken : those doctrines establish the relativity of *all* rights, and submit *all* ethical rules to sociological criticism. How is it that only a few of those rights and rules are weakened, and threaten ruin ? Why those, and not others ? Is it not because they are already otherwise weakened ?

III

But there are, however, questions of conscience : in the name of what principle are they to be solved ?—Answer : Our embarrassment is often the inevitable consequence of the relatively rapid evolution of our society, and of the development of the scientific and critical spirit—We must decide on the course which, in the actual state of our knowledge, seems the most reasonable—We must be contented with approximate and provisional solutions in the absence of better ones.

Let us admit, it will perhaps be said, that the conception of a " social nature " regarded objectively as " physical nature," does not *in fact* destroy the authority of ethical rules, and that where the authority wavers, it is the inevitable effect of the whole mass of social conditions. There are two objections that make the acceptance of that conception difficult. One is of a practical, the other of a speculative order.

In the first place, it is asserted that whether the science or rather the sciences of " social nature " are still in their

formative period, matters little, or whether the rational art to be founded on them is still less advanced. Rules of conduct are what we least lack. Conscience imperiously teaches us our duty, social pressure makes us feel the necessity of conforming to it. While awaiting the rational modifications of practice, which undoubtedly will only be produced in the distant future, that practice exists by its own strength and imposes itself by itself. The statement is only true in the aggregate, and it is necessary to distinguish. There are doubtless a large number of actions expressly dictated or forbidden by conscience. If those alone are considered, what has been said above appears satisfactory. But there are other actions that perplex the conscience. There are cases in which, while sensible of the social pressure exerted on us, we are inclined to see reasons which urge us to resist ; other inclinations, other reasons urge us to obey. Who does not know those problems of conscience in which the whole life is indirectly concerned, in which all our future activity depends on the solution we shall choose ? Such moral crises that no conscience can avoid are of all epochs, but are more frequent and perhaps more serious in our time than they were in any other on account of the progress of the critical spirit applied to ethical and social questions. What help will your rudimentary science, and your still more rudimentary rational art offer for their solution ? Of what use is it to me to hope that one day actual practice will be modified in conformity with the results of science ? I must know now if I shall attempt to modify them or not according to the measure of my strength.

The ethical speculation of the ancients undoubtedly had its weak points. But it furnished a general reply to questions of that kind. It set before our voluntary activity an ideal of justice or of general interest : such as the "greatest happiness of the greatest number," in accordance with which men tried to guide their conduct. It is difficult to deny, however, that the reply was not always wholly clear, that error often slipped into applications of the principle, that the ideal might be interpreted in practice in quite different senses,

and be invoked by conservatives as well as revolutionists. But is not an insufficient guidance better than none at all ? We desire to be just and to know which side justice bids us choose in respect to the great social problems of our time. If an idea of justice, even an imperfect one, is offered us, how can we help holding to it ? In any case we shall only abandon it for another idea of justice more exact, more true, more beautiful, and shall not leave the place empty until the progress of science allows us to hope for a new one.

The fact signified by that objection is accurate. We do not always find our conduct ready marked out for us, and in our society each man's conscience sooner or later encounters grave questions that he hesitates to settle. We are so far from ignoring that fact, that we have already mentioned and described it.[1] Only instead of considering it subjectively, that is, as it is manifested in the individual conscience and coloured by the feelings that it awakes in it, we studied it as it appears objectively. We showed that ethics necessarily develops by reason of its solidarity with other social institutions, and that the evolution cannot be accomplished without shocks and friction demonstrated in the domain of interests by struggles, and in the inward conscience by conflicts of duty, sometimes, at least in appearance, insoluble. A fact that it expressly recognizes and for which it accounts by means of general laws of that nature, cannot be used as an objection to the positive conception of "social nature."

The question is more complex in regard to the difficulty we find in solving cases of conscience, and the slight help given by sociological science and its applications. Our embarrassment seems to be the inevitable consequence of the progress of the critical spirit on the one hand, and on the other, of the acceleration of social evolution which is one of the most significant phenomena of our civilization. Social evolution necessarily implies that of ethics. The evolution of ethics in its turn entails the disuse of certain rules, the appearance of new obligations, new rights, new duties ; in short, it tends to shake the perfect stability which seems to

[1] Cf above, chap. iii. div. ii.

be the essential character of ethical prescriptions in slow-moving societies. In feudal society or in Chinese society, conduct is generally guided, even in its smallest details, by precepts that no one dreams of disputing. That feature is particularly marked among the Chinese where the line of demarcation between ethics and ceremonial, so clear among Europeans, can no longer be traced. We, on the contrary, who are accustomed to ideas of social progress and even of revolution, who have assisted during the last centuries in social and economic changes of capital importance, who see science question the fundamental institutions of the whole of society in seeking their genesis, and study the different types by the comparative method, how can we refuse to extend universal relativity to ethics? And must not that new attitude inevitably cause us far more embarrassment than taking for granted, as we formerly did, the conformity of every individual conscience with the common conscience?

The more we realize our ignorance of social reality, the more hesitating, and sometimes even the more powerless shall we be in the presence of certain problems. It is a pity; but does it depend on us that it shall not be so? Who guarantees to us that we shall never perceive a difficulty of practical ethics without the solution being within our reach? We tacitly think that it is so, and we scarcely admit that the supposition is denied by the fact. Nothing, however, *a priori* authorizes us to take it for certain. We resemble a community of invalids for whom each disease ought to have its corresponding remedy: let the physician make his diagnosis, prescribe the treatment, and the disease will disappear. In point of fact things do not go with such happy simplicity: how many maladies disconcert the surgeon, and defy actual therapeutics! Similarly, the more scientific research increases our knowledge of social reality, the more will practice lose its primitive certainty, the more numerous will be the insoluble problems that are presented to our conscience. Whether we like it or not, it is what we have to expect.

Does this mean that we must resign ourselves in advance, and for lack of a rational and immediate solution become indifferent to the problems, while awaiting the distant time when they may be solved? By no means. It is not a question of imitating the sceptics, and of following custom in saying: "Why not? As well this as that." Of all conceivable attitudes none is less suited to men convinced that progress in social matters is possible, and that progress depends on science. Confidence in reason cannot accommodate itself to a purely routine practice, nor counsel men to be always contented with it. What then will it prescribe in doubtful cases? To decide on the course which *in the actual state of our knowledge* seems the most reasonable. Rational ethical art is forced to follow the example of medicine. How often does the physician find himself confronted with difficulties he cannot solve whether on account of the obscurity of the symptoms, or of indications and counter-indications that mutually obstruct each other! Does he hold to pure and simple abstention? No, most often he acts, but with precaution, taking into account all that he knows and all that he assumes. Lacking the rational treatment that science will one day formulate, he tries the treatment that seems most reasonable. We must agree to similar solutions for many of the problems which are now presented to the conscience. True they are approximations more or less distant, more or less sure: but except in the exact sciences and in their applications, have we the right to despise them? The spirit of positive science is as far as possible from the rule expressed by the formula: "all or nothing" It is, on the contrary, accustomed to slow progress, to solutions obtained by successive stages, to fragmentary results that are gradually completed. It repudiates neither the relative nor the provisional; it knows that it can scarcely attain anything else.

IV

What importance can be attached to the authority of the conscience if it exists *de facto*, but disappears *de jure* ?—What becomes of the ethical ideal ?—Answer : Analysis of the concept of the ethical ideal—Imagination, tradition, and observation of reality are included in the content of that concept—The conservative part played, from the social point of view, by a certain sort of ethical idealism—Scientific research is really the heir of the philosophical idealism of former times.

There remains a last objection, more or less directly implied by the preceding ones. What does it matter whether, in the conception of a " social nature " analogous to " physical nature," the authority of ethical rules *de facto* exists if it disappears *de jure* ? We confess that our individual conscience continues to conform to the common conscience of our time, and that social pressure produces the same effect as before. But we know that whether we will or not we are forced to submit to it, almost as to the physical law of gravity. What is there in common between the fact of submitting to a natural necessity that might be avoided, and the dedication of conduct, master of itself, to an ideal of justice and goodness ? Ethics loses even its name if it has not its own reality, and is confused with " nature."

The objection constantly reappears. We meet it in the most diverse shapes. Duty is presented to the conscience with a sacred character, and no one disputes that it engenders a religious respect. But to infer, thence, that duty can only be derived from a supernatural origin, and that morality introduces us into a world above nature, is simply to transform the fact in explaining it. It may be that the characteristics of duty, and of the conscience in general, are the result of a whole mass of conditions, nearly similar, which are found in all fairly civilized human societies. That is the hypothesis which sociological science considers most in conformity with the facts. There is nothing particularly disconcerting here, since long before there was any question of sociology, and from the time of

the ancients, that view was upheld by empirical and utilitarian philosophies.

But the notion of confronting the given reality with another social state, conceived or imagined by us in which justice alone shall rule, and that shall be called "ideal," is the way by which we think we can best feel how far morality lifts us above pure nature.

But in fact, that ideal is nothing else than a projection, more or less transfigured, of the social reality of the epoch that imagined it in a distant past, or in a not less distant future. For the ancients it was the golden age; for the moderns, the city of God or the kingdom of justice. Every civilization has its own ethical ideal which characterizes it as well as its art, language, law, institutions and religious ideal. In short, the ideal actually forms part of the social reality to which it is opposed; but the imaginative elements that enter into it allow it in great measure to be distinguished from it, and to be separated from the present in order to represent it either in the past or in the future.

In the last case, it is the form that the idea of social progress takes in minds that have not yet a positive and scientific conception. Enduring with impatience the evils and iniquities of their present condition, they form a vague but consolatory image of the reality which will come later: of a world in which men will be just and good, in which egoism will yield to the general good, in which institutions would produce that good without constraint or suffering for any one. But if we go far enough back into the past of humanity, we shall find similar imaginings in regard to the physical world. Man is always glad to oppose to real nature which brings him so much suffering, pains and terrors, the idea of a beneficent, gentle nature in which he would be guarded from hunger, thirst, disease, inclement weather:

> vestem vapor, herba cubile
> Praebebat . . .

Something of this dream is to be seen in the descriptions of the golden age, as in those of paradise. They paint the human race not only more innocent, but more exempt from suffering, and freed from pain as from sin,

We have now ceased to imagine a physical nature other than that which is given : we have undertaken the bolder and at the same time the more modest task of conquering real nature by means of science and the applications which it permits. Similarly when the notion of " ethical nature " has become familiar to all minds, when the phenomena are no longer represented without conceiving at the same time the static and dynamic laws which rule them, men will cease to confront that nature with an " ideal," the most exact features of which are borrowed from her. The effort of the human mind will be directed towards the knowledge of the laws, a necessary if not always a satisfying condition of our reasoned intervention in the series of natural phenomena. The methodical conquest of the real will succeed the imaginative conception of the " ideal."

We are thus brought back to the idea of a rational art, based on the science of social reality. To admit that that reality has its laws analogous to those of physical nature is in no way equivalent to considering it as subject to a sort of *fatum*, and to despair of bringing about any amelioration. On the contrary, it is the very existence of laws, which while they render science possible, also render reasoned social progress possible. On that side, again, the comparison of " social nature " with " physical nature " is instructive. It seems that neither one nor the other was formed and framed with a view to the general well-being of man by a benign omnipotence. But the one is gradually subdued by man, and if the future progress of science corresponds to that of the last three centuries, we may indulge in great hopes. Likewise, when the social sciences have made progress comparable with that of the physical sciences, their applications will undoubtedly be equally valuable.

When that time comes—unfortunately still very distant, since the sciences in question are themselves only at their first beginnings, and we cannot form any exact idea of what those applications may be—the authority of such or such a practice, of such or such an institution, of such or such a law will be compromised if that practice, institution or law is incompat-

ible with the results of well established facts. We already see an example of progress in the abandonment of practices formerly considered to be excellent, or even indispensable, and which are opposed in fact,—political economy has proved it,—to the end to which they aspire (a veto on the exportation of corn and precious metals ; prolongation of the hours of work in factories to sixteen and eighteen ; secrecy of criminal procedure, etc.). As science advances, the opportunities of substituting more rational methods of conduct for traditional practice will become more frequent, or simply of giving up interventions directed by false ideas, which produce fatal results. How many irreparable but innocent mistakes may be laid to the charge of medicine and surgery in their pre-scientific period which is only just at an end ? Similarly, how many wasted efforts, how much wrongly directed activity, what suffering and despair are caused to-day by our social arts which are still in that period, by our politics, our political economy, our pedagogy, our ethics ! Far from alarming us, the statement of the fact that our ethics is losing its absolute and mystical character, and beginning to be conceived as relative and open to criticism, ought to rejoice us as a great and happy event. It is the first step on the scientific road : a long and difficult road, but the only one which leads to freedom.

It may be said, even supposing that those previsions will be verified one day, will they suffice to satisfy the exigencies of conscience ? Will the progress of " rational practical art " take the place of the good to which conscience aspires ? In spite of all, it seems that the conception of a " social nature " analogous to " physical nature " cruelly mutilates the human soul. It takes away from man what makes of him a being apart in the world known to us, what gives him his nobility, his greatness, his eminent dignity : the faculty of elevating himself above his terrestrial condition, of dying for an idea, of forgetting himself in the tenderness of charity or the heroism of sacrifice. Science will teach him to take the best advantage of the social conditions in which he finds himself, just as he does now with respect to physical conditions : he will live better, and happier, a

result not be to despised, especially if new occasions for suffering do not occur when the older ones disappear. But will that result satisfy the heart of man, who, says Pascal, is only produced for the infinite ? Can that earthy realism occupy the place of the idealism which under a religious or philosophical form has so far nourished the spiritual life of humanity, and inspired everything great that it has done, even the science in the name of which it is now to be banished ?

Such sentimental considerations have much force, and so far as they are sentimental, they are irrefutable. The best arguments listened to in all good faith, do not crush them for an instant. In such matters a deeply rooted and dearly loved conviction rarely yields to reasons of the logical order. But it gradually gives way before the action of facts. The question : " Is the nobility of human life compatible with a positive conception of social and moral nature ? " closely resembles another question that long agitated preceding centuries : " Can an atheist be an honest man ? " A few philosophers maintained the affirmative. But for the great majority of their contemporaries, the bond between religious faith and morality was so close, and a similar feeling based them so intimately one on the other that their reply was bound to be negative. Further, they regarded with disfavour anyone who replied otherwise, and were inclined to treat him as a dishonest man, even if he made no open profession of atheism. To-day such a problem has no existence. No one any longer disputes that the relation between faith in religious dogma and the moral worth of a man is much less close than was formerly imagined. Believers confine themselves to saying that unbelieving honest men deserve to have faith. Whence comes this great change ? Men were obliged to yield to the evidence of facts, and to cease to affirm what is daily denied by striking examples.

Similarly, the question now raised by the transformation of the " ethical sciences " has little chance of being answered by an exchange of arguments between those who affirm that the nobility of human life will not survive it, and those who

deny it. Time alone will show whether those universal beliefs and sentiments did not represent elements as indissolubly bound together which, in reality, were easily separable.

Besides, is it certain that the doctrine is incompatible with all idealism, that it breaks with all that is greatest and most beautiful in the past of humanity, and exacts a sacrifice to which it will never be resigned? The term, "idealism" is used by philosophers in several senses. Here it evidently means not only the act of human reason, when it regards ideas as more real than sensations, and laws as more real than facts, but also and especially its contempt for immediate, sensitive individual interest compared with higher, purer and wholly disinterested ends.

We must not be deceived by words, and must remember that the defenders of idealism are not always veritable idealists—no more than devout persons are always truly religious, or "patriots" those who best understand what is due to their country. It may be that the "guardians of the ideal" are, to use Ibsen's phrase, only "pillars of society." A defined ethical ideal which, so to speak, occupies an official place in the general frame of the philosophical ideas of a given epoch, is a piece of its mental and social system. The whole of that system is interested in its preservation. By the veritable irony of history, what seems the purest and most sublime idealism, is defended at base by positive and material interests which have their reasons for protecting it. Are not the true idealists at the present time those who refuse, merely for the sake of social preservation, to make conventional profession of a faith in which they no longer believe. Is not the chief and most indispensable condition of the idealist attitude, perfect sincerity and absolute respect for truth which at bottom is not distinguishable from the respect for oneself and for human reason? If we decide by a tacit compromise to affirm that we still believe what we do not really believe, how are we to refuse other concessions of a like nature, when they are demanded by interests not less pressing or considerable? Thus, for interested reasons of which we are more or less conscious, we gradually come to defend a mass of traditional truths about the actual truth of which we are

not quite sure. Nothing could be more opposed to idealism.

On the other hand nothing is more in conformity with it than actual scientific research of the truth, even in ethical or social matters, without any doubts concerning the results which may be entailed by the discovery of the truth. Leaving aside the devotion to humanity which animates an effort of which the scientist himself will not probably see the practical application, scientific research entirely given up to the pursuit of truth and indifferent to all besides, is perhaps the most perfect form of disinterestedness. The resolution to defend an idealist doctrine because it is idealist, and because it is good to defend idealist doctrines, in the superior interests of ethics and society, comes from a right feeling, but it also comes from utilitarian considerations, which are perhaps wrongly grounded—for who knows if those doctrines will be always socially advantageous ?—and which are certainly not idealist. The heir of the great idealists of former days is not he who insists on upholding metaphysical systems henceforth untenable ; he is the scientist who transports into the study of reality, whether physical or ethical, an enthusiastic rationalist faith and a thirst for truth.

CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF MORAL SCIENCE

I

Present condition of moral science—The principal influences that tend to uphold the ancient " ethical sciences " : religious traditions ; predominance of literary culture—The moralists ; general characteristics of their descriptions and analyses—Nearer the artist than the scientist, and busied in describing or criticizing, they have little taste for speculative research.

REVOLUTIONS concerned with method, according to Comte's wise observation, are, as a rule, only perceived when they are nearly accomplished. The beginnings are scarcely felt. The great majority of men prefer to follow traditional paths, and no one foresees the bearing that certain processes now beginning to be employed will have later :—not even those who have taken the initiative. When war is declared between the ancient methods that feel themselves threatened, and the new ones which claim their place, the issue is no longer doubtful. The struggle will be more or less long and fierce, but the same process which rendered the appearance and progress of the new method inevitable, a method more adequate to facts, more positive, does not render the disappearance of the old method " by disuse " less inevitable. It is one of the aspects of natural dialectics developed in the history of science.

If Comte's remark is applied to ethics (so far as it is a science), we ought to find ourselves confronted with a transformation that is almost accomplished. For long ago the need of a change of method was discerned, and even indi-

cated. Without going back to Hobbes, who had a very clear idea of a system of social science analogous to that of physical science, and who made an admirable attempt to realize it, we find in the course of the eighteenth century, and especially later with Saint Simon and his followers, politics and ethics conceived as sciences of observation. At last Auguste Comte founded sociology. The last years of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of works of positive sociology which almost allow us to think that the revolution is accomplished, that the struggle between the methods is ended, and that henceforth only researches conducted by a properly sociological method will count.

But if that result is attained it is not unanimously admitted, and things are not as advanced as they seem. When it is a question of sciences like mathematics, the evolution of their method follows a relatively simple curve, and Comte's theory is justified. But the case of ethics and politics is entirely different. The distinction between theory and practice is scarcely beginning to be established in a normal fashion. We have seen that it rouses strong opposition. Similarly, special disfavour was for a long time attached to the doctrines we mentioned just now. Hobbes, the encyclopaedists, Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and present day scientific sociology have suffered from the alarm given to traditional methods and conceptions. History itself has often shared that prejudice, during the two centuries, for instance, in which Hobbes's social philosophy was condemned without being examined. In short, extra-scientific elements intervene here on account of social consequences that the change of method seems to render imminent. In the violent and obstinate resistance that it meets, we recognize the reaction that sets in directly the collective morals, beliefs, traditions of a society consider themselves menaced. And that resistance naturally extends itself to the domain of ideas: that is, the positive conception of a science of social reality, analogous to the science of physical reality, although acknowledged in principle, may be long contested. In everything that concerns ethical practice, we continue not only to act, but to think, according to traditional convictions long

after we believe ourselves to have replaced them by new ideas.

That is what we are now witnessing. The idea of a positive sociology is sufficiently elucidated. It is no longer in a state of abstract conception; it has entered the period of realization (economic, religious, juridical sociology, social morphology, etc.). And yet the idea is still counterbalanced in a great number of minds, even minds that consider themselves very liberal, by the ancient conception of ethical science. A fair number of philosophers, or more accurately, of professors of philosophy are drawn towards sociology by a lively and sincere interest, and accept its essential positions; but they do not the less continue to teach theoretical ethics according to traditional methods. They do not seem to find such action embarrassing, nor to perceive the necessity for choice. If the confusion does not trouble minds accustomed to the analysis of ideas, minds that are professionally given to philosophical reflection, it must surely persist still more generally, and be more difficult to dissipate among the educated public who do not make a special study of ethical or social matters. For that public, even if it admits the possibility of an objective and positive science of social reality in principle, the science remains an almost purely verbal expression. Sociological labours, properly so-called, are still too recent and too little known. Men's minds are not accustomed to the new science. To ensure it the position it demands, the continuous action of numerous influences acting in the same sense is necessary. In the long run the general progress of the scientific spirit will doubtless be irresistible. But it is slow, and at first only influences a small number of persons.

On the other hand, how many influences contribute to uphold men's minds in an opposite attitude! Without enumerating them all, it is there that the force of traditional customs, so tenacious when they have their origin in a very distant past, and the whole weight of education and instruction given in the schools, acts. Let us leave aside the idea of ethical reality which, together with religious dogma, is imprinted in the minds of children by the catechism.

It usually shares the fortune of that dogma; it is retained or rejected for the same reasons. Yet with many who at a certain moment cease to believe, there exists an obscure and almost instinctive repugnance to conceive ethical "nature" as analogous to physical "nature". A mystical sentiment survives the vanished belief and protects its phantom. But it is especially the literary culture given to children, the constant reading of poets, historians, orators, preachers which makes it so difficult for them to assume easily the sociological point of view. The education of which they preserve an impression as deep as the aesthetic value of the classic writers is high, and which justly bears the name of "humanities," implies an idea of man and in general of social reality, entirely appropriate to the mind of the moralist (from which it actually comes), but without any possible use for the scientist. On the other hand, unaccustomed to understand the method and signification of the physical and natural sciences, the elements of which they have been taught, the great majority of educated men have contracted habits which prevent them from accepting the idea of an objective science of social reality, and of familiarizing themselves with its method. Hence the difficulties, the resistance, and sometimes the hostility that it encounters. It disconcerts and even shocks men long accustomed to receive their conception of human things from the moralist.

The moralists proceed, as we know, by careful observation of themselves and others. Their reflection analyses the play of motives and impulses more or less confessed or concealed, of our actions, the sophisms and ruses of self-love, the impulses of instinct, the infinitely varied disguises of individual and social hypocrisy, the influence of age, sex, and disease on character and modes of action, the formation and persistence of habits, moral solidarity, conflicts of egoisms, and the mechanism of the passions in general. Moralists take for their motto the celebrated line of Pope—

"The proper study of mankind is man."

but they have their own way of interpreting that study.

Speculative philosophy, which claims, as they do, to know man, does not believe it can attain that knowledge without also attacking the highest problems concerning the universe and God, the solution of which implies that of the questions under consideration. The moralists are not concerned, at least to that degree, to make their thought systematic. For the most part they care little for logic or metaphysics. What directly interests them is the living, acting man in his relations with his neighbours and his own conscience, divided between duty and interest, pursuing happiness and never discouraged in the pursuit, committing faults, hardening himself or repenting, capable of good and evil, according to his temperament, his habits, and chiefly according to his circumstances : a study which doubtless requires a spirit of delicacy, but not necessarily a mathematical spirit.

For man living in society, there is so great an interest in possessing at least an approximate idea of the ethical life of other members of his group, that in taking the term "moralists" in a sufficiently wide sense, it is not rash to state that the most distant epochs had their moralists. In the same way if medicine is a recent science, it goes far back into antiquity as a practice, so if scientific research concerning ethical reality dates from yesterday, there must have been spontaneous reflection on the subject from the moment that individual initiative began to have some importance in social life. The chiefs of groups, priests, elders, kings, sorcerers — especially those who were above the common—must have observed the effect produced on their neighbours by their manner of speaking and acting in given circumstances. Incapable doubtless of giving even rudimentary expression to the observations and rules on which they based their conduct, they followed a road which, where it was not prescribed by tradition, could have no other reason than those observations and rules.

Analogous phenomena are still presenting themselves in every part of the social edifice. From the statesman who understands how to handle an imperial assembly and to guide its decisions in the direction of his own designs, to the village politician who officially or secretly governs the affairs

of his parish, what gives the ascendancy is not only clearness of intelligence and energy of character, which others may possess in the same or even in a higher degree. Such individuals understand how to influence men because they know them. Not through a science that can be expressed and transmitted by fixed propositions; but they foresee almost with certainty what will be the near and distant consequences of such words, of such actions, of such a derogation of custom, and they regulate their doings by that foresight. They are moralists by instinct, improved by experience. They are, if it is preferred, men who have a more delicate sense than others of the "logic of feeling" of which Comte speaks, a logic that cannot be expressed in the analytic terms of our language, all powerful in animals and strong also in men. Perhaps moralists of genius existed in primitive societies whose merit and originality we cannot conceive, just because we possess the explicit and analytic knowledge of ethical matters that they lacked; and possessing also the art of writing and acquaintance with books, we can scarcely understand what a superior mind would be like in societies where only oral tradition existed. An idle hypothesis, possibly, for if those primitive moralists ever had an existence they have left nothing behind them. But their social activity has at least left its traces, and we cannot be certain that it does not still persist in some of the traditions, the origin of which we do not know.

If the moralists of those distant times were men of action, those of civilized times, and especially those of literary periods, are rather of the race of artists. Proof is superfluous in France, the land of Montaigne, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Bourdaloue, Vauvenargues, and so many others. The same conclusion would be arrived at in the history of ancient and modern literatures. The "knowledge of man" which we owe those moralists is always the more acute, instructive, and original, the greater their talents as writers. It is not chance that renders those who are mediocre from the literary point of view, equally so as moralists, and the greatest artists the most profound moralists. Just as painters gradually teach us to

see, and feel "values," contrasts of colour and the play of light that an uneducated eye would not notice, so moralists teach us to seize in ourselves and others the subtle shades of feelings and passions. If they did not describe them to us, we should not see them or should only vaguely feel them. But when they have shown us what they see, we can no longer help seeing with them. They are not anatomists, for however deep their analysis penetrates, they have neither scalpel nor microscope at their disposal, and cannot go beyond descriptive observation; neither are they painters, for they do not create, and their work always has a general and abstract character. But taking everything together, they are nearer the artist than the scientist.

Like introspective psychology, with which it has the closest affinity (every psychologist is not a moralist, but every moralist is a psychologist), the "knowledge of man" attained by the moralist is only of worth through the penetration, the delicacy of analysis, the special talent of observation in those who practise it. There is nothing to certify that the present time or future ages will produce moralists more highly gifted in that respect than those of the past. There is nothing to certify that conditions most favourable for that particular kind of observation did not prevail in a former period, and that the limit of what can be obtained by that means has not been reached. In short, progress, so clear in the sciences, appears here extremely doubtful. The best minds consider the ancient moralists as the equals of the modern, and that it would be difficult to surpass them. Without reopening the quarrel between the ancients and moderns, let us confess that it will be difficult in the future to surpass either. "Ethical works" have almost disappeared, at least at the present time. Problem plays and novels have taken their place.

The moralist proposed to study "man" in general; but in reality he studied almost exclusively the man of his own time and country. Doubtless he distinguished as far as he could between what is accidental and local and what is profound and universal. Was it a question of

passions like love, jealousy, fear, maternal affection ; its analysis fixes traits which are alike in all countries. He formed, as it were, a series of general schemes. As soon as the observation became precise and detailed it inevitably reproduced the man who appears in a certain civilization, who lives under a certain climate, who is imbued with certain beliefs, who respects certain traditions, bearing in short the impress of the society of which he is a member. Thucydides, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and many other discriminating and acute observers have told us scarcely anything of the barbarians by whom they were surrounded, and with whom they had constant relations. Even in the precincts of the Greek city, although they have admirably described the mentality and morality of the free man, they have left us very little about that of the woman, married or single, and about that of the slave. Plato initiates us into the casuistry of love between men ; he scarcely mentions the love that so largely occupies modern moralists. It surprises us to hear a character in a Greek tragedy explain that the loss of a husband is not irreparable, while a dead brother cannot be replaced. The moralist of to-day is puzzled by that argument. Sociology must come to his assistance, and show him that the trait apparently so strange is to be found in other civilizations.

Generally, the more vigour and talent a moralist possesses, the closer is the mingling, or rather the fusion of particular and local elements, with the more general and even the universal elements in his description of "man." Just as in a portrait by Rembrandt, we feel without being able to separate them, what is profoundly human, and irreducibly individual. When the moralist belongs to the society in which we live, and finds the subjects for his observation there, we do not think of making that distinction, because we have a natural tendency to believe that the traits which characterize us, are all essentially human traits. But we distinguish easily enough in a foreign moralist. Pascal and La Bruyère seem to us almost purely human ; we do not observe to what point they describe the Frenchman of the seventeenth century and

the Frenchman of our own time. On the other hand, if we read Confucius or Mencius, we find them only secondarily human, and above all Chinese.

The moralist concerns himself especially with practice; and that fact separates him not less from the scientist than from the artist. The scientist is doubtless not indifferent to the possible applications of his discoveries; it may even happen (especially in certain sciences, such as chemistry) that the choice of problems is indicated to him by present industrial needs. Nevertheless, the natural sciences can only be established and developed by favour of the distinction carefully observed between the theorist who pursues the knowledge of facts and laws, and the practician who makes use of that knowledge when it is gained. With the moralist, on the contrary, the speculative interest is not to be separated from the practical interest. Whatever pleasure he finds in analysing and describing, if he is not a mere *dilettante*, he always has in his mind the ulterior design of directing and correcting. Bitter or indulgent, pitiful or satirical, according to the nature of his mind and talent, he invariably opposes, more or less openly, man as he ought to be to man as he is. Preachers do not dissimulate their purpose. And the other moralists in a more veiled form are equally persons who teach us morality.

In the name of what principle do they teach it? Whence do they derive the ideal of man as he ought to be which serves them now to humiliate, now to encourage, the man to whom they address themselves. They find it ready formed in their own conscience, or rather in the common conscience of their time. As that conscience expresses itself in absolute imperatives, they accept it without examination. They never dream of criticizing it, of asking themselves if it is perfectly coherent, or if, under its apparent harmony, it is not pulled between irreconcilable tendencies. Neither do they trouble themselves to discover if it contains elements of different ages, of different origin, and if those elements are more or less well fused together. In short, they identify the ethical idea of their time and country with the ethical ideal in itself, and so they become the mouth-

piece of the conscience of their epoch. They voice its aspirations and anxieties and distribute praise and blame in harmony with it. That is a socially useful function, and even under certain circumstances, indispensable; but it is a function that has nothing in common with that of the scientist. Again, the moralist is immediately listened to by a large public. He scarcely ever encounters the resistance usually provoked by what is new. If he is violent and paradoxical in expression, he awakens curiosity, and if he possesses talent, he is read. If he is moderate and skilful he has every chance of pleasing those who are capable of the slight effort of mind necessary to follow him, and who find their guiding ideas, preconceptions, and beliefs in his writings.

So, with the moralists, the keenest insight may be joined to an almost complete indifference towards speculative criticism. They are "connoisseurs of men," and their curiosity is wholly satisfied by the psychological and close analysis whence they derive their knowledge. It is clear then that their work, independently of its aesthetic value, is of the greatest worth for the educator of men, and interesting to all who have to manage men. While the science of ethical reality properly so-called has not made sufficient progress, while a rational art is not based on that science, the moralists continue to supply the place of both. From that point of view they may be compared with the surgeons of the period prior to the existence of scientific biology. There were certainly physicians and surgeons in ancient times and in the Middle Age who united a remarkable skill and readiness with infantile or absurd theories. Their anatomy and physiology were ridiculous for the want of method and instruments, and especially on account of preconceived ideas and respected systems which interposed between them and the reality of facts. But their ignorance and even their false science did not exclude a certain sureness of empirical knowledge. They could observe and compare their observations among themselves, follow the progress of the symptoms, could sometimes even establish differential diagnostics. Incapable, doubtless, of justifying

their procedure, or of stating why they preferred one treatment or another in a given case, they often chose the best by a kind of tact impossible to analyse, the outcome of experience and attention. And perhaps in an ordinary disease it was not more dangerous to have recourse to a great physician of that time than to a mediocre one of ours.

Similarly, with the moralists, the most untenable dogmas and theories concerning social reality can quite well co-exist with an admirably clear-sighted and practical knowledge of men, and with a surprising skill in managing them. Indeed, very often the accuracy of the description, and the success from the practical point of view, have effectually concealed the poverty or the absurdity of knowledge. If one of the great physicians of the twelfth or thirteenth century had been told that he knew scarcely anything of what took place in the human body either in health or sickness ; that he had everything to learn and also everything to unlearn, he would doubtless have shrugged his shoulders. If his interlocutor had insisted, he would have referred him to the cures he had performed, a decisive argument in his eyes, and in those of his contemporaries, an irrefutable argument, and yet one that proved nothing.

Without pursuing to the end the comparison between moralists and physicians, it is certain that neither the talent of describing the morals and passions of men nor skill in making them listen and obey, necessarily implies a rational and scientific knowledge of what they are. Those qualities may even co-exist with the faith which accepts without discussion such or such a mythological or theological explanation of "human nature." The moralists make no scruple of accepting the conscience of their time, such as it is; neither do they hesitate to admit the postulates which are more or less consciously associated with it. Their business is to describe or correct, and not to make researches regarding a scientific knowledge of social reality, nor to found a rational art, the want of which is not felt. In short, the "wisdom" of the moralists has its value ; but just because speculative interest holds a very small place in it compared with aesthetic and practical

interest, it cannot help the budding science of "ethical physics." The germs of that science are to be found elsewhere.

II

Philologists and linguists the true precursors of a positive moral science—Their rigorous and scrupulous method—The rôle of the economic sciences and of experimental psychology analogous—Influence of transformist theories—Important rôle of the historical sciences—Apparent conflict and real connexion between the historical spirit and the eighteenth century method of genetical analysis.

For a long period scholars and scientists have been quietly and modestly undertaking the study of certain categories of ethical facts by a rigorous and objective method. They were first the philologists of the Renaissance and the linguists, then the founders of comparative grammar and other positive sciences having language as their object. Those scientists purposely exclude everything that recalls vague, general, and purely literary pyschology, or dialectical processes that lead only to the probable. They offer the same logical characteristics as the physician or the chemist. They feel themselves bound by the same scruples, they practise the same prudence in respect to hypotheses; in short, they observe the same scientific circumspection in respect to their subject. Even their audacities are methodical; facts always have the final word.

What can be more technical or more harmless, in appearance, than the constitution of the philological and linguistic sciences? How can we conceive any relation between studies of so special a character, and the comprehending of individual and social ethics. And yet those sciences once founded, a methodological process began, the consequences of which were to be extended and to contribute to the transformation of the "ethical sciences" in an

important way. The greatest philologists have a clear feeling that, full of erudition and detail as their work is, it carried in itself an exemplary virtue. Men like Grimm, Burnouf, and Renan, pointed out its dignity and high social importance. Renan, in the *Avenir de la Science*, gives an enthusiastic picture of the almost infinite hopes the works of his masters seem to justify.

Even if something has to be discounted, as Renan himself found necessary later, it remains true that the success of a strictly rigorous method in the linguistic and philological sciences marked an important date in the history of the human mind. The facts studied by those sciences share at once in the physical reality (objective) and the ethical reality that we are accustomed to regard especially under its subjective aspect. As far as words are sounds emitted by the vocal organs, they belong to the domain of action, and can be the object of experiments in a laboratory. By their meaning, syntax, and the evolution of their forms, they belong to psychological and social life. It soon becomes evident that their evolution follows certain laws. Such phenomena form the most natural transition between what was formerly called "physical" and "ethical." The sciences which study those phenomena were predestined, if we may venture to say so, to serve as a vehicle for the methods of physicians and physiologists when they were introduced into the so-called ethical sciences. That is exactly what took place. The brothers Grimm, for instance, were insensibly led by their philological researches to study, always by the same method, sometimes Germanic antiquities and folklore, sometimes old German law, sometimes beliefs and customs. So, by degrees, a large extent of the old domain of the "ethical sciences" was won over or at least prepared for the employment of an objective, positive, and uniform method so far as the nature of the facts allowed, like that which has led to such excellent results in the philological and linguistical sciences.

Another influence also worked in the same sense.

In proportion as political economy is developed, it tends

to define its method with increasing exactness and to separate theoretical knowledge of facts more and more sharply from practical applications of science. The animated struggle between the different economic schools of the nineteenth century, a struggle in which both interest and principles had a part, gradually dissipated all confusion between one and the other. Some economists, determined advocates of a political and financial cause, undoubtedly regard theoretical science as an arsenal of arguments against their adversaries. But those who aid in advancing the science desire to be nothing more than students devoted to the study of natural phenomena which they recognize as most complex, shifting and difficult to grasp. Their progress is slow but sure. They predict the conquest, long and laborious, assuredly, but certain and fertile too, of an important portion of social reality by the objective method. Every year, in every civilized country, economic, demographical, juridical facts are the object of more and more exact and detailed statistics. The custom of representing them by curves is spreading, we may almost say is imposing itself, and of demonstrating how the phenomena vary in relation with each other by an analysis of the curves; this is an application of the method of concomitant variations, the only one we can so far employ in the study of laws which involve numerous series of phenomena, so that it is impossible to isolate one of them for the purpose of studying it separately.

It is unnecessary to traverse here the whole domain of social reality in order to prove how the objective method is gradually gaining ground on every side; it is sufficient to call attention to one important fact. Psychology seems the science most hostile to the method. Introspective, so to speak, by definition, it is also closely allied by tradition to metaphysics. Still, experimental psychology is born. It has developed and is established as a special and positive science independent of metaphysics. It has proper processes of investigation, it has its laboratories. The example should not be lost for the "ethical sciences." Undoubtedly they cannot like psychology have recourse to precise ob-

servation, and experiment by means of instruments. But when it is a question of method, it is not only the matter of the instruments and processes that is of consequence; it is also, it is perhaps especially, the attitude of the scientist when confronted with facts and the manner in which he tries to seize and connect them. It is clear that experiments can never be made in the science of religions, law, or ethics. But according to Comte's observation, nature, that is, history, has experimented for them. In the hands of the sociologist the comparative historical method becomes a powerful instrument, the force of which has not yet been properly estimated.

The movement was accelerated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A certain number of causes conspired to favour it. We may speak of causes in which reciprocal action is the rule, so that in any given mass of facts it cannot be stated which are the causes and which the effects. We have no intention of drawing a picture however sketchy of the mass of conditions favourable to the movement which tended to overcome the adverse influences the principle of which we have pointed out. In virtue of the *consensus* which gives solidarity to all the social series, we ought to take into account economic, political, religious and other conditions belonging to our civilization. To consider only the intellectual series (where the influence of the others always makes itself felt), the appearance and the success of transformist theories in the natural sciences are echoed in kindred and even in foreign sciences. The success encouraged men to make fresh attempts at analysis by genesis. The eighteenth century philosophers knew and advised that analysis; but they practised it with such rash haste, and with so much taste for abstract simplification, that it was abandoned after their time. The example and success of Darwin restored it to honour. Henceforth the method of genetical analysis, patient but careful, scrupulous, hostile to systems and respectful of facts, will be more and more extended to social reality.

At the same time it received efficient and, to speak the truth, indispensable help from history. For social facts are

just those the genesis of which cannot be studied without recourse to history. The development of history, so favourable to the positive science of those facts is one of the most striking traits of the physiognomy of the nineteenth century. On the one hand history has organized its method and the work of its auxiliary sciences so well that it has come as near as possible to the reality of the past and elicited from it the maximum of certainty. On the other hand it has conquered a large amount of territory formerly studied in an entirely different manner, that is, from a dogmatic or ethical point of view, or by abstract criticism. It has thus gradually transformed the science of religions, law, literature, art, technology, institutions, in short almost all the objects of the ancient ethical sciences.

We now see quite clearly that genetical analysis and history both contribute to the investigation of social reality, and prepare the formation of a similar science. But that has not always been the received opinion. Those who for a century did the most for the diffusion of the historical method thought precisely the contrary. They recommended history as an antidote against the abstract and philosophical method of genetical analysis. It was one of the leading ideas of Savigny, for instance, who was the master and friend of the brothers Grimm and of Ranke. All the romanticists insist like him on the impossibility of explaining a real historical process by a conceptual analysis. All are anxious to show what is individual in the language, religion, and nationality of each people, what is irreducibly different from race to race, from civilization to civilization ; they always oppose the concrete and natural genesis of history to the abstract genetical analysis of the philosopher. And they easily triumph over the encyclopaedists, over the Abbé Raynal or over Dupuis. But they do not see that they are themselves preparing the way for a genetical analysis much more powerful than the first, against which they can do nothing because, thanks to them, it will no longer be abstract and hypothetical but historical and comparative.

Arguments from facts, sometimes decisive, borrowed from

history, may be opposed to the logical and dialectical analyses of the eighteenth century; therein consists the brilliance or success of the traditionalist school. But what can be replied to the exegesis which without passion or eloquence, with the cold impartiality of science shows how such a belief or such a practice appeared in a certain society at a given moment, and through the action of a mass of determined circumstances, especially if the comparative study of other societies brings to light other examples of similar facts? How can what is thus "fixed," incorporated with historical reality, preserve a supernatural and transcendent character, and remain the object of almost religious veneration? While seeking in history the justification of what is traditional, the fact passed unnoticed that the justification itself implied the relativity of those traditional beliefs.

Wherever history introduces its method, the idea of "becoming" is introduced with it. Except perhaps for Hegel, that "becoming" is never universal or absolute. It comes from such a point in space, at such a moment of time, under such conditions; in short, it is localized. We cannot see it with other eyes than the rest of the social phenomena of the present and past. History has thus insensibly dispossessed metaphysics. No longer does it make researches only into the conditions of birth, development and death of empires, but also of civilizations, species, societies, and in our society, of religions and institutions; for instance of the different forms of property and of the family. A century which began with the comparative history of languages and ended with the comparative history of religions, had already submitted all the objects of the "ethical sciences" to the idea of universal relativity. That means that it prepared the way for the positive science of ethical reality and that without desiring it, it continued the work of the eighteenth century, even while declaring itself opposed to it.

III

Inevitable slowness of changes in method—Example drawn from sixteenth century physics—Causes which hinder the transformation of " ethical sciences "—Forms of transition in which ancient methods are still mingled with new methods—Necessity for a new *cleavage* of facts—Reasons for hoping that the transformation will be effected.

The transformation of the ethical sciences was inevitable. The general movement of ideas that the scheme of this work does not permit us to analyse, the progress of the natural sciences, and especially the domination of the historical spirit and method do not any longer allow the ethical sciences to preserve the uncertain and ill-defined form which was pleasing to spiritualist philosophy. But we also know that the opposition to the transformation was and is extremely active. It will not be surprising if it is only gradually overcome and rather by a succession of jerks than by a smooth unbroken progress. To consider everything together, the movement may be regarded as the consequence or rather as the continuation of that which substituted the modern science of nature for the physics of the schoolmen. Here again it is a question of a profound change in the methods of the science and in the manner of conceiving its object. The foundation of modern physics is the precursor of the movement we are describing. Thence, undoubtedly, came the chief impulse, continually renewed by the extraordinary prestige exercised by modern physics on both the educated and ignorant men of our time.

Many centuries went to the making of that foundation. The idea and explanation of the phenomena of nature were traditionally based on a certain number of schemes derived from Aristotle. The force of the tradition, the acquired vitality of the schemes, was so great that neither the progress of mathematics nor the ever increasing number of known facts and experiments could destroy them without great trouble. A series of successive efforts was needed, each of which was followed by only a slight step forward. The schoolmen preserved the Aristotelian idea of motion,

closely allied to several other metaphysical ideas (ideas of a final cause of form, of matter, potentiality, power, actuality). Their physics rested on the qualitative distinction of natural and controlled motion. To pass thence to the idea of motion as it is found in Galileo, a masterpiece of scientific abstraction following from measurement and calculation, and adapted to the equations of mechanics,[1] how many intermediaries had to be traversed! What a long time and how many transitions the passage of the traditional elements into the simple bodies of chemistry required! The history of the other sciences of nature similarly proclaims how very slowly all analogous substitutions were made; for nothing is more difficult nor more disagreeable to the human mind than to renounce concepts, that is, forms in which nature was organized for it, and to have to construct them afresh. Indeed it only becomes resigned when that most ungrateful task is inevitable.

If it needed so many efforts, if it took so many generations of scientists to destroy traditional physics, must we not expect the resistance to be longer and more obstinate when it is a question of social reality, when the transformation bears on the whole body of "ethical sciences"? The opposition takes the most hostile forms. Sometimes the traditional conception of ethical sciences proves its own legitimacy dialectically, to its entire satisfaction, and finds one proof the more in its antiquity. More often the disastrous consequences which will infallibly occur if that conception is abandoned are pointed out. For it considers itself inseparable from the existing order, the principles of which it imagines to found; or rather, the conception is considered as bound up in itself. It believes in all good faith that the fate of those institutions is joined to its own. Whence it concludes that a different way of conceiving the science of ethical reality must be false and, at the same time, immoral and anti-social.

That means of defence is constantly employed against "dangerous" methods and "evil" doctrines. As at first

[1] Cf. the history of the successive phases of this transformation in K. Lasswitz, *Geschichte der Atomistik*, vol. ii. pp. 3–37.

it seems efficacious because it is interested in protecting "good" doctrines and "legitimate" methods, all the conservative forces, even those which are scarcely concerned with things of the mind, gladly have recourse to it. Men do not reflect that in the eyes of reason the only evil doctrines are the false ones and the only good doctrines the true ones. Thus they prolong the resistance but do not assure it. In proportion as science progresses, the time approaches when the solidarity invoked ceases to advantage the doctrines it desires to defend and begins to compromise the allied beliefs and institutions.

On that point again, the history of the substitution of modern physics for the physics of the schoolmen is an instructive precedent. Does not one of the arguments that has done most service in combating the movement consist in demonstrating that the new methods compromised the highest interests of society in the gravest manner? Religion and the state were equally threatened by the temerity of the innovators. The inquisition and parliaments showed by trials that are still celebrated that they did not neglect their duty of social preservation. Galileo was condemned in the seventeenth century, and Descartes was compelled to live out of France; a little later the burlesque arrest of Boileau prevented the Parliament of Paris from committing an even greater absurdity. But unless we boldly follow the thesis which subordinates research of scientific truth to the higher interest of social conservatism to its end, unless we imitate the Chinese who, it is said, teach a false astronomy, knowing it to be false, because it is the astronomy of their ancestors, we must end by acknowledging that the new physics is superior to the old, confess that nature does not abhor a vacuum, and that the sun does not turn round the earth. But the admission was only made as a last shift.

There are deep-seated reasons for the almost instinctive and reflex tenacity of that resistance. It may not appear to be of much importance that one physical conception is substituted for another. But it is of great importance that men shall abandon one method and accustom them-

selves to another. The victory of the inductive and objective method in the science of "physical nature" may seem harmless in itself, and yet become formidable by the possible, probable, imminent extension of the method to the study of "social nature." It presages another secular battle to be fought, doubtless with the same result.

We are now assisting at the second struggle, and the processes of the first reappear in it under a different form. The adversaries of the physics of the schoolmen were assailed as heretics and impious persons because at that epoch the Church was still the great defender of social interests. Now, the enemies of the traditional conception of the ethical sciences are regarded, whether they like it or not, as revolutionaries, because the actual conservative defence is supported by the State. Improved manners, and the liberty we enjoy make that defence no longer brutal as it was formerly, but it is not on that account less active. In order that it may give way, men must accustom themselves to dissociate feelings that are rightly dear to them from what seems to them, though wrongly, an exact idea of social reality. That dissociation can only come slowly. To the scholars and philosophers of the fifteenth century, and to the crowd which thought like them, it seemed that everything would be lost if Aristotle's physics were no longer followed. In spite however of sinister predictions they have been abandoned, and the world is not the worse for it. Many moralists and economists now believe that society must perish if the family, property and analogous institutions instead of resting on an *a priori* basis (that is, in the last analysis of a religious conception which is taken to be rational), are considered henceforth as forming part of a social "nature," given in experience like physical "nature." And as those lively fears are not without sincerity, they will only gradually disappear. In order that the indispensable dissociation shall be effected, the new science must be developed, and must impose itself not only by its demonstrations but by its applications. It will then be recognized that veritable social interest, that is, general interest, need take no alarm.

However the most difficult obstacles to be overcome do not arise from open opposition to new conceptions and methods. If that opposition delays the victory, the struggle is not without advantage for them. Clear-sighted and rigorous adversaries do not allow them to ignore their weak points, and compel them not to be contented with half measures. They are thus forced to be clearly conscious of what they are, to formulate themselves in an exact manner, to state precisely the principles on which they are based. More formidable is the enemy that they nearly always carry in themselves ; I mean what persists of ancient methods and conceptions in the new ones without the knowledge of those who uphold them as well as of those who reject them. The passage from one to another being accomplished very slowly, the innovators, during the period of transition, are entirely impregnated with the conceptions against which they are fighting. However bold and clear-sighted the first minds that free themselves from a secular tradition may be, they only liberate themselves imperfectly. Bacon, for instance, the declared adversary of Aristotelian physics, promoter of an inductive method opposed to the syllogistic deduction of the schoolmen, who was moreover a contemporary of Galileo and Gilbert, persists in setting up the discovery of " forms " as the object of science. What he understands by that (as far as we can interpret under the obscurantist brilliance of his style) is something hybrid, something intermediary between the laws sought by modern physics and the " substantial forms " followed by Aristotelian physics. Descartes, similarly, desires to break with the scholastic philosophy, and he seems to have accomplished his purpose. But in many passages his " Meditations " preserve more than traces of the terminology and doctrines of the schoolmen. Lastly, Comte formulated the idea of a positive sociology, and his own sociology in its essential traits still resembles a philosophy of history.

The history of philosophy and of science is full of analogous facts. They prove clearly that even under the most favourable outward conditions, changes in method are only made gradually. The chief obstacle to

the establishment of a science of social nature is derived from rooted mental habits. Among the declared partisans of the new science, persons who flatter themselves that they are of assistance to it, how many bring those old habits with them, and continue the traditional " ethical sciences " under the newer name of sociology ! Even those who are on their guard against the danger, do not always succeed in escaping it. To avoid relapses they must continually be ready to defy the natural tendency to return to ordinary habits, and the language which is impregnated with them. Wherever possible, general concepts, in which the experience of former generations is crystallized, and to which the new experience is in its turn irresistibly drawn, because in that way the mind obtains immediately the maximum of order, that is the maximum of apparent intelligibility with the minimum of trouble and effort, should only be employed under reserve.

When it is question of the science of ethical reality, the force of mental habits is still more increased by the respect inspired by that reality. We now consider—we have not always thought so—that there are no noble or vile substances in physical nature. The physiologist is concerned with urine as with blood ; from the scientific point of view, all aesthetic feeling as well as all religious and moral feeling is abstracted. No external consideration intervenes either in the statement of facts or in the research for their laws. But when it is a question of ethical reality our habits are totally different. We scarcely take facts into account—at least the greater number of them—without bringing to bear on them at the same time a " judgment of value " accompanied by feelings that we should not like not to experience. That fashion of relating facts to our ethical concepts is most prejudicial to scientific knowledge since it classifies them not according to their objective and real relations, but according to schemes the origin of which, so far as reality is concerned, may be considered as arbitrary. The classification, the generalization, even the analysis of facts would certainly become quite different if undertaken from a purely speculative point of view. Even the structure, the *cleavage* of facts

would be different; in short, social reality so far as it is an object of science would offer an entirely different aspect from that under which it appears in the common conception. Generally, what we perceive is the material of the science, but under condition of not remaining in the state in which we first perceive it. Those data must undergo a preliminary elaboration. Dissociation is necessary in order to break the relations established, most often, by the needs of practice or sometimes by certain striking traits in the perception. Before Lavoisier the chief fact in the process of combustion was the supposed presence of phlogiston—perhaps because the flame imposes itself upon the attention of the observer as the essential factor in the process. All that it does, however, is to hide from their mind the real chemical phenomenon, the combination of oxygen with another body.

It is at least probable that the real relations between social facts are still more concealed by the intensity of the feelings they arouse in us, and by our habit of disposing of them according to categories of a practical origin. That is why it would be wrong to believe that the accumulated knowledge of more and more numerous facts would entail as a necessary result the triumph of the objective conception of social reality and the progress of the new science of that reality. In cherishing such a hope, it is supposed that the primitive apprehension of facts, and the *cleavage* they first present, immediately permit scientific elaboration. But that is a gratuitous hypothesis. In truth it is not facts that sociologists most lack. In a large number of cases they already know enough to attempt to determine their laws. What they still often lack is the scientific apprehension of facts : the knowledge how to substitute for the traditional schemes other settings more favourable to their researches ; the discovery of the plans of cleavage that would cause the laws to appear. Such preparation of scientific material was, as we have seen, entirely indispensable in the case of " physical nature," and the rapid, brilliant progress of the physical sciences was only assured when the preparatory work which took centuries, was sufficiently advanced. It will doubtless

be the same with "social nature." A long period will be filled with the "redistribution" of its material. The redistribution will almost always dissociate what we brought together, and bring together what we dissociated. Here the scientist's imagination plays the chief part. He is permitted every boldness provided he succeeds, I mean, provided his hypotheses bear fruit.

Thus the summary study of historical antecedents shows how the conception of an objective science of social reality appeared, after the objective science of physical reality was developed, and why that conception will only be gradually imposed. That science has not only to contend with the difficulties its elder sister experienced, it finds others peculiar to it alone. In what proportion and in what period of time will they be overcome ? No one to-day can venture to reply to those questions. The irony of prophecy applies as well to the history of sciences as to other history. But if we venture to argue by analogy, historical precedents are encouraging. When we remember the idea which the most cultivated men in Europe had of physical nature in the fifteenth century ; if we compare it with the idea of it that a few generations of scientific men have constructed for us ; if we take into account not only the road that has been traversed, but the formidable obstacles which blocked the way from the first, we are irresistibly tempted to believe with Descartes, with the eighteenth century philosophers, with Comte, that scientific effort will in the end conquer in our society. We may allow ourselves to hope that in a few centuries the sciences will have established an objective idea of ethical nature which will be to ours what our physics is to that of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas. But the comparison helps us to understand how vain it would be to try to imagine beforehand what that idea will be.

CHAPTER VII

NATURAL ETHICS

I

Scientific research does not consist in "founding" ethics, but in analysing the given ethical reality—Its first step is to recognize that the reality, however familiar, is generally ignored.

A CONCEPTION more in conformity with scientific analogies tends to substitute for the old division of ethics into theory and practice, on the one side the science, or the group of sciences, the object of which is social reality, and on the other, the rational art founded on the science. The substitution is only beginning to take effect, and can only progress slowly. It is also to be presumed that for a long while yet, its progress, far from disarming resistance, will render it more acute. Neither must we ignore that the most important obstacles, probably for a long period, will be those that lie, so to speak, within ourselves. Rooted habits of feeling or thought, bonds which insensibly still hold us to a past we thought abolished, cause us, whether we will or not, to pour our new wine into old casks, and to place our new conceptions in the old frames. There are almost organic conditions which are imposed on the evolution of ideals and methods : no effort of thought can rid us of them. Yet we also know that when we have a clear idea of an evolution of that kind it is almost complete, or that its completion cannot be far distant. In order to aid the transition, and to render it less difficult and rough, it is permissible and also useful to represent to ourselves beforehand the immediate consequences of the new mental attitude when it is firmly

established and universally adopted. An anticipatory view of those consequences may spare us some of the imperfect reconcilements, some of the untenable compromises, and consequently the conflicts, which mark each of those stages.

In the first place, philosophers can no longer speak of "founding" ethics. That excessive claim, respectable in so far as it originates in a desire to rationalize action, has always been illusory. Ethics requires no more "founding" than "nature" in the physical sense of the word. Both have an existence in fact which is imposed on each individual subject, and which leaves no room for doubt of their objectivity.

With physical nature that is quite clear. Is it more open to doubt with social "nature"? A social reality which existed before him, and will survive him, is imposed on every normal individual living in any society, ours for instance. He knows neither its origin nor its structure; he must conform to all its prescriptions, obligations, interdictions, morals, laws, manners and conventions, under penalty of various punishments, some external, some within himself, more or less determined, more or less scattered, but which make themselves felt in the most incontestable fashion, by the effects they produce, by the intimidation they exercise. Philosophers are free to conceive a metaphysics of ethics, as they conceive a metaphysics of nature. But although no metaphysician exists to-day who would confuse his speculation with the work of the scientist, who patiently and humbly confines himself to the study of given phenomena and their laws; still the metaphysics of ethics, if it exists, should henceforth be distinguished from the science, or rather from the complex group of sciences which deal with the positive study of social reality. That reality, no more than the other, is to be "constructed," or "founded." It is, like the other, to be observed, analysed, and reduced to laws.

The assimilation of "social nature" with "physical nature" brings, in its turn, other results. They may at first cause surprise, but the principle once admitted, it is difficult to reject them. In the physical and natural sciences, for instance, a long practice of the experimental method has

accustomed scientists to confess their *a priori* ignorance. A recently discovered body being given, what are its physical, chemical, therapeutical properties ? We can make hypotheses on the subject : it is even necessary that we should make them, in order to serve as a point of departure for the experiments. But no one doubts that the verification is indispensable, and that the experiments alone can decide in the end : how often have the most probable hypotheses been disproved by the fact !

Have we then, with respect to social reality, a well assured conviction, passed, so to speak, into the condition of axiom, that before studying it scientifically, we know nothing about it ? Certainly not. How are we to explain the difference of attitude in presence of a reality, the science of which does not seem to be more infused in us in the second case than in the first ? There is no objective reason. The principal cause of the difference must be sought within us. Our science of social reality is far from being as advanced as the science of the physical world. Following a constant law in the development of knowledge, the greater the want of a positive science of a determined portion of reality, the less it is felt. Without paradox, a science must have existed for a long time, have obtained incontestable results, must be almost universally admitted, in order that its object may be conceived as a reality of which we are almost entirely ignorant, and which will furnish material for methodical, prolonged, and patient researches. Until then ignorance ignores itself. The place of the absent science is occupied by pre-scientific ideas, by constructions and systems in which the imagination and the intellect find an equal satisfaction. Everything " is explained " without insurmountable difficulty by general and abstract principles. It was long so for physical reality. We are just at the moment when it is going to cease to be so for social reality.

The confession, or the affirmation of our ignorance which is inseparable from the scientific attitude is not yet unanimously accepted. We hesitate to acknowledge that the ethical reality is unknown to us before scientific research is applied to it. The resistance is derived, we know, chiefly

from the confusion of current ideas regarding theory and practice in ethics, a confusion that until now was favoured and maintained by philosophers. They had in all good faith the double claim of constructing the science of ethics and of teaching ethical practice; and they believed they were basing their prescriptions on their science. But there they fell into the common illusion produced by the double meaning of the word, "knowledge." Doubtless, it is true that every normal and adult individual who forms part of a more or less civilised society, "knows" what he ought, or and what he ought not to do, "recognizes" what ethics orders him to do, what it forbids him to do. It is the natural, inevitable result of the education he received under various forms, and of the social pressure continually exercised on him. But the "knowledge" of the conscience which owes nothing to reflection, has nothing in common with science. If everyone in our society "knows" what he has to do from the ethical point of view, it is as every Frenchman is supposed to "know" the law; or to borrow a simile from Darwin, as the setter "knows" that he has to set.

Instinct, training, education, social convention or by whatever name we choose to call the "knowledge" of which we are speaking, it relates solely to practical, and is as far removed as possible from what we call theoretical knowledge, or science. The sociologist who establishes whence the law is derived, under what conditions the legislation made it, under the influence of what beliefs, ideas, or feelings by respect for or in imitation of what antecedents, in a word what is the historical filiation, and the place in the whole juridical system, knows the law, the average Frenchman does not. It is the same with ethics. Everyone is supposed to know what it prescribes. No one speaks of ignorance when he has committed an act which his own conscience and that of others regards as reprehensible or wicked. But if the dictates and interdictions of conscience are considered as an object of science, we can no more account for them without long preliminary study than we can account for civil laws. The ignorance is not the less real because it is not felt. It is precisely because it is not felt that it is difficult to recognize

its existence. In order that we may persuade ourselves of its existence, it must cease to be entire. Science must gradually establish that if we regard one method of acting as obligatory, and another as criminal, it is most often due to beliefs of which we have lost even the remembrance, and which exist under the form of ruling traditions and collective and strong feelings. We then perceive that the dictates of conscience so clear for us as dictates, are not so at all as social facts.

Here again, the comparison between religion and ethics is instructive. The Australians have perfect knowledge of the rites, ceremonies, and practices of their very complicated religion. It would be ridiculous to attribute the science of it to them. But the science that it is impossible for them to conceive is established by the sociologists. Similarly, the Chinese know what is expected of them by the worship of ancestors in every circumstance of life down to the most minute detail; but they do not know the science of it, and the science which they lack has been established by a European scholar. What is true of the religious conscience is equally true of the ethical conscience. It is one thing to know its dictates practically, another to possess its science. But, it will be said that philosophers legitimize what the conscience spontaneously prescribes for us by going back to the rational principle of imperatives; that is exactly what is meant by "founding" ethics. True, but they founded natural religion in the same manner by attempting to justify beliefs the origin of which is as little rational as possible by a rational deduction. The science of religions now explains whence come the "God" and "soul" of the religious philosophers. In the same way the science of ethics will soon show the origin of what the philosophers call "practical reason." In one case as in the other the pretended "legitimation" is purely dialectical. Nevertheless the interest in it is considerable, for the effort to "found" ethics rationally signifies that reflection is being applied to it, that it is ready to submit to a work of systematization, and to become, when circumstances permit, an object of disinterested and scientific study.

II

The ethics of a given society at a given epoch is determined by its conditions as a whole from the static and dynamic point of view.—Teleological postulates underlying the current conceptions of the social *consensus*—Criticism of the philosophical idea of "natural ethics."—All existing ethics are natural—Comparison of natural ethics with natural religion—Ethical anthropocentrism is the latest form of physical and mental anthropocentrism.

Among the consequences of the new conception, there is one which is especially hard chiefly for sentimental reasons ; it is the necessity in which we are placed to regard the same ethics, (that is, the same mass of obligations, prescriptions, and prohibitions) from two entirely different points of view, according to whether we consider it from within or without, according to whether we feel subject to its imperatives, or regard them as social facts, objects of science. From the first point of view the excellence of the mass of prescriptions is not questioned. It gives us an ideal of goodness, holiness, justice and love, which we know only too well that we cannot reach. Most men regard ethical laws as the commands of God Himself, or do not believe it possible to conform to them without the help of His grace. In a word, the idea of the ethical ideal calls up such feelings of veneration and adoration that all possibility of criticism is excluded. The conscience rests on its own imperative as on a thing absolute. From the scientific or external point of view the mass of ethical prescriptions does not appear to us to have the same characteristics. We no longer judge them *a priori* the best possible, nor sacred, nor divine. We regard them, in fact, as bound up with other concomitant series of social phenomena. The ethical feelings and practices of a given society are necessarily bound up for the student with religious beliefs, with economic and political conditions, with intellectual acquisitions, with climatic and geographical conditions, and also with the past of that society ; and just as they have evolved until now in relation with those series, they are destined to evolve similarly in the fu-

ture. That general view, the immediate consequence of the scientific conception, is continually verified by the employment of the comparative method. It applies to our own ethics as to all the others.

That (and the others also) will no longer appear to us as an ideal representation of perfect activity and ethical excellence. We shall confess that at a given moment, it is as good and as bad as it can be. We shall acknowledge it to be a case of the application of the *principle of the conditions* of existence that the progress of positive knowledge is everywhere being substituted for the metaphysical consideration of finality. Just as every species capable of living lives so long as it can resist the mass of conditions which threaten it, even when its organs are manifestly imperfect or degenerate, even when their fitness for the end they ought to attain seems to be very mediocre ; similarly every society capable of living is upheld, so long as it is not engulfed or destroyed by another that is more powerful ; and it is upheld by its own ethics, a function of its conditions of existence, which is precisely what those conditions exact that it shall be. What those conditions and their results are in a given case we cannot guess *a priori*, basing ourselves on principles of economy, of least action, of finality etc. ; we must seek it in the study of facts.

The propagation of a great number of animal and vegetable species is assured by means of an immense amount of millions of germs which nearly all perish, while only a few of them evolve and reach maturity. A terribly extravagant proceeding, and one which would shock our feeling regarding the reasonable adaptation of the means to the end, did we not possess an attitude of preconceived admiration with regard to all that nature offers us. Similarly, human societies maintain themselves, and it is a natural fact : but the social order which is perpetuated there (the ethics of which is one of the essential factors) is perhaps obtained by an equal disdain for what we call economy and finality. Perhaps there too, is an enormous waste, an unjustifiable expenditure (at least for our reason) of suffering, misery, physical and moral pain, a sacrifice which is renewed in each generation in respect

to the majority of individuals forming the social whole. At least as far as there is proof to the contrary, nothing authorizes us to think that it is not so. For, as soon as we conceive social reality as forming part of nature, we ought to conceive it as ruled by the general laws of that nature, and at first, by the principle of the conditions of existence. Now that principle in no way implies the " reason of the best " which served Socrates and the ancients for understanding physical nature, as it still serves the moderns for understanding ethical nature. On the contrary, it affirms that all beings and systems of beings compatible with the whole of their conditions, internal and external, are preserved, so long as that compatibility lasts, however great their imperfections may be in our eyes. Human societies form no exception, nor in particular, the beliefs, feelings, and ethical prescriptions which dominate in each of those societies.

It follows then that the idea of a " natural ethics " ought to give way to the idea that all existing ethics are natural, They are so by a similar right, whatever the rank they fill in any classification made by us. The ethics of Australian communities are as natural as those of China, Chinese ethics as natural as those of Europe and America : each is exactly what it was able to be according to the whole of the given conditions. We are accustomed to understand " natural ethics " in a different sense. The word signifies for us that every human conscience, just because it is human, receives a special light which reveals to it the distinction between good and evil. Ready to admit, as facts force us to do, that the light may be obscured in a thousand ways, and almost extinguished in savage, corrupt, or degenerate communities, we are not the less convinced that it would be sufficient to remove what dims it, for it to begin to shine again. In short, we believe that man is naturally moral, by the same title that he is naturally rational. That belief forms the basis of philosophical doctrines which study " practical reason." But it rests on a confusion of ideas. Man, doubtless, is naturally moral, if we mean that man lives everywhere in society, and that in all societies there are " customs," usages, obligations, taboos which are incumbent on him. But we

are only affirming a fact that is verified in all ages and in all countries. And that is by no means equivalent to saying that morality is natural to man, if we mean that an ethical order is more or less clearly revealed to his conscience by a sort of privilege attached to him as a rational or responsible being.

The idea of "natural ethics," near neighbour to "natural law," is perhaps what helps most to make us so obstinately hostile to the necessity of admitting that ethics, like institutions and languages, is produced, established, and maintained by virtue of purely "natural" (taking the word here in the sense of physical) sociological laws, and ought to be studied as such. To discover the origin of the deep-seated reasons of the resistance, we may compare "natural ethics" with "natural religion" with which it has very close affinities. Since the eighteenth century how many good and generous minds have been pleased to distinguish between religion and religions! They opposed natural religion, born spontaneously from the human soul, therefore rational and beneficent, as simple as the others were complex, as logical as they were absurd, as peaceful as they were sanguinary, as tolerant as they were intolerant, as united as they were divided, to the historical religions, to the diversity, the strangeness, the horror of their dogmas, their myths, their forms of worship. Voltaire really believed in natural religion. According to him it had the advantage of greater antiquity than the others. The latter were only deformities destined to disappear when humanity, having attained its majority, would listen only to the voice of reason.

The conception has enchanted many minds, and the reason is easily understood. It allowed them to withdraw without remorse from the positive religions in which they had ceased to believe, and yet to preserve a lively sense of religion for which "natural religion" furnished a sufficient sustenance. It accounted for the diversity of positive religions by special historical circumstances, for the unity of natural religion by a disposition (in order not to call it a revelation) essential to humanity.

Why is this attractive explanation no longer put forward?

Because in reality it explained nothing, because the so-called " natural religion " was not at all what its adherents thought it. Far from representing the essence of the elements common to all human religion, it was a particular product of philosophical (that is thoughtful) reflection in a small portion of humanity at an epoch in which there was very little religion. In fact, it was only the European monotheism of preceding centuries, reduced to the shadowy and abstract form of a rationalist deism. All progress made in the positive study of the religions of inferior societies has rendered the want of harmony between the facts and the hypothesis of the universality of natural religion more apparent. The study does not, undoubtedly, contradict the assertion that phenomena to which the name " religious " applies belong to all human societies, past and present. But, as the eighteenth century philosophers believed, neither belief in a " wise creator of the world," nor the idea of a " Providence," nor of a " rewarding and avenging God," is found among those constant phenomena. If it is possible to separate the permanent elements of human religions, it is not by an ideological analysis *a priori* that we shall ever succeed, but by the careful study *a posteriori*, of what religions have actually been in the most diverse societies of which we can obtain a sufficiently accurate knowledge.

These reflections may quite well be applied to " natural ethics," the near neighbour of " natural religion " ; eighteenth century deism vaguely comprised them both. Those who eagerly accepted the idea of a natural religion, born of reason and the heart of man, did not do so because they had discovered the universality of the beliefs of which in their eyes the religion was composed by scientific study, but because they could not conceive human nature stripped of such beliefs. We only see in them now the expression of their own religious needs. Similarly, those who remained faithful to the idea of " natural ethics " did not do so because they affirmed in fact that men everywhere distinguish between justice and injustice, and everywhere know the principles of those ethics, but because they could not conceive human nature despoiled of what was in their belief its most

essential attribute. But it is all the same an expression of the fervour of their ethical faith. Scientifically, it is as useless to oppose ethics to systems of ethics as to oppose religion to religions. The distinction may be interesting as the symptom of an effort of conscience to dissociate what is accidental in their morals as in their beliefs ; but it teaches us nothing, and does not absolve us from seeking the constant elements in the ethics of the different portions of humanity past and present in the study of facts and there only.

At bottom, the idea of natural religion which was opposed by the eighteenth century philosophers to the idea of revealed religion, is the same idea under a slightly different form, a laicised revelation, if we may say so ; so the idea of " natural ethics " under a philosophical form remains an essentially religious conception. The " nature " which enlightens man on the distinction between good and evil, and which makes him a moral being alone among all other beings, is still a kind of " Providence," laicised too. The optimistic postulate is found in Hume, as in the French philosophers, and it agrees as well with their empiricism as with Leibniz and rationalism. For it owes its origin to an instinct challenged by none of those philosophers. It is the instinct of what we may call the " ethical anthropocentrism," more profound and more difficult to combat than physical anthropocentrism, although analogous in origin and essence. It is the spontaneous need of disposing the facts and laws of the ethical world round the human conscience as centre, and of explaining them by it ; and we yield to it with such an immediate complacency that we do not suspect that we have yielded to it, or even that it exists.

We know what efforts were required to convince man that he was not situated at the centre of the physical world. The astronomical conception of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, had to overcome an obstinate resistance before it was received : ancient and respected theories, religious beliefs, habits of mind and deeply rooted prejudices were allied against the common enemy. It ended by conquering ; but the great intellectual revolution now three centuries old, has not so far, especially from the ethical point of view, the

far-reaching and profound results that might have been expected. It certainly made the marvellous progress of celestial mechanics possible, and contributed more or less indirectly to those of the other physical sciences. It undoubtedly influenced the appearance of transformist theories, which have in their turn given a strong impulse to anthropocentrism. But that always existed. The religions and ethics of the most advanced nations who take it for granted, do not seem to have lost their superiority.

How is it that the substitution of Newton's celestial world for that of Ptolemy, and Darwin's world of species for that of Cuvier has not had an energetically dissolvent action on the dogmas belonging to an entirely different system of ideas? Because modern scientific discoveries only destroy anthropocentrism from the physical or rather the spatial point of view. Whether a man occupies the centre of the world, or finds himself isolated on a grain of dust in illimitable space, the difference of the two conceptions at first seems absolute, but it soon grows less, principally under the influence of the two considerations. At first our imagination alone is set in motion, and is struck by the idea of space that it can never entirely embrace. Intellectually, space only offers relations which soon become familiar by the consideration of different orders of infinitudes. No quantity is either large or small by itself, but only in comparison with an arbitrarily fixed unity. But if we are lost in an isolated corner of the universe, we know it, we measure our distance from the sun, and the distance of our sun from many others; whence it follows that if the fact humiliates our pride, the knowledge of the fact elevates it. Our material place in the world matters little if it is always set round our reason. Considerations of the same kind stop the effects which might arise from transformist theories.

Anthropocentrism has thus been able to subsist, and has subsisted in fact by no longer taking the earth, but human reason, for the centre of the universe, that is by modifying itself so as to become a spiritual anthropocentrism. Hence the growing importance of the idea of an ethical order in which the mind of man who is alone endowed with

reason and free-will is at once the principle and the cause. That mind appears more and more as the centre to which the rich diversity of natural phenomena and especially of ethical facts is related and by which it is explained. At bottom it is always the same mental attitude, the same anthropocentric teleological, religious conception (the terms are such that the passage from one to the other is made insensibly), which makes reality intelligible in imagining it formed and organized with a view to man. That explanation of physical nature had to be abandoned under pressure of the positive science which demonstrated its falseness ; but all the same man has remained the ethical centre of the universe.

The struggle against anthropocentrism is far from ended, its strongest positions are not yet touched. It has only lost, so to speak, its outworks. The citadel is intact, and it will be very difficult to take it. But the siege has been begun by the sociological sciences which have undertaken to study social reality in the same way as physical reality, and which, instead of starting from the conscience as a sort of natural revelation, analyse existing ethics as natural science analyses bodies. But the task is far more complex and arduous than that of Copernicus and Galileo, and the resistance that the scientists will encounter will be far more obstinate.

To renounce ethical anthropocentrism, will be in fact to renounce definitely teleological and religious postulates, and to place the science of ethical matters on the same level as the natural sciences. The series of ethical phenomena presented by a given society will no longer have an unique character among the whole series of phenomena (juridical, political, economic, religious, intellectual and others), which are simultaneously produced in that society. It will be conceived as relative to them in the same way as they are relative to it. It will be " natural " in the same sense as the others. From the religious point of view, the conscience will always appear to itself as the " universal legislator in the kingdom of ends, " member of the celestial city," " a subject of the kingdom of God." But science,

taking an entirely different view, far from relating the whole of social reality to consciousness as its centre, will, on the contrary, examine each conscience in relation to the whole of the social reality of which that consciousness is a part, and of which it is at one and the same time an expression and a function.

III

Necessity, henceforth, of studying both past and existing ethics by means of the comparative method—Impossibility of bringing them back to our own consciousness taken as a type.

The results of the introduction of the scientific method do not only modify the character of ethical speculation ; they displace its axis and centre of gravity. The conscience that served for a principle of explanation becomes the object of scientific investigation. Instead of speculating on man as a being naturally moral, we must discover how the whole mass of prescriptions, obligations and interdictions which constitute the ethics of a given society, is formed in relation to other series of social phenomena. Hence, under the actual diversity of existing or past ethical systems, we have no longer the right to declare the existence of an ethical root or origin common to all, or at least if we make the hypothesis—and it is permissible to do so, on condition of submitting it to the proof of facts like every scientific hypothesis—we must seek the constant elements of all human ethics. We cannot determine in advance what they are, nor make that preliminary determination a basis for considering such or such a given ethical system as a deviating type, as a more or less serious deformation of the original ethical system. That would be a return to the idea of " natural ethics," to which we refused a scientific character, and in which we recognized

an expression of metaphysical and religious anthropocentrism.

The legitimate use of the hypothesis is shown us in its employment in the other social sciences. The comparative science of religions, arts, laws, institutions in general, languages, tends to demonstrate that in those societies which have evolved as it seems, independently of each other, the process of development often presents striking analogies. They are so exact, sometimes even down to the smallest detail, so regular in the uniform succession of phases, that it is not possible to regard them as fortuitous. We must then admit that in different societies institutions are evolved according to the same psychological and sociological laws. Therein consists the hypothesis in question. But it must only be taken as " heuristic," and not as explanatory.

Instead of constructing a hypothetical primitive man *a priori*, instead of determining his emotional, intellectual, and ethical functions by a retrospective and hazardous induction, we recognize a scheme, doubtless useful, but an *empty* scheme. It can only be filled by the analysis and comparison of the different processes of social development which are actually produced ; an analysis and comparison which will place us in a position to dissociate what is common to all from what is not. The comparative study of religions, for instance, particularly of the religions of nations in a low state of civilization, soon convinces the student that all imaginable psychological insight, and dialectical subtlety, reduced to themselves, cannot reproduce the mental condition of which those religions are unexceptional witnesses. The men who believed or who still believe in those myths, who organized those forms of worship, and practised those rites, had their own special ways of representing objects to themselves, of grouping their ideas, of imagining, of classifying beings, of deriving results ; they experienced collective emotions so profoundly different from ours that it is extremely difficult for us to reconstitute them even by the greatest effort of intellectual suppleness of which we are capable. It is a logic, a symbolism, a whole mental life which we cannot

read as an open book merely by bringing it into relation with ours. We shall decipher it with difficulty, ignoring as far as we can our own mental habits; or the problem considered in its totality, may be put thus: the hypothesis being admitted, that the process of development in human societies always obeys the same laws, to find the intermediate stages that the religions, institutions and arts of the highest societies have traversed in order to reach their present condition.

In the particular case of ethics we ought not to use our actual conscience to comprehend or explain what conscience may have been in primitive societies. Neither can we state *a priori* that they recognized an equivalent for our individual conscience, which is capable of affirming its initiative and independence either in setting itself in opposition to generally accepted rules, or in conforming to them by a carefully considered decision. Here again a precisely opposite method is imposed on the scientist. He must try to determine what is prescribed or forbidden for the members of a society of that kind, how the obligations or interdictions are manifested, what is the form of punishment in the way of expiation, chastisement or remorse, and particularly for what beliefs and ideas those obligations and interdictions are responsible. He must not transport the clear and more recent distinction, between what is religious, juridical, or purely ethical, into that distant past. In fact, to put the general problem in all its complexity, he ought to try to determine so far as he can, the stages of which the custom and the *taboo* of the savage gradually became law in both religious and juridical texts, like the Pentateuch, and also to touch the categorical imperative of the philosopher, an abstract expression of the conscience of the present day which is taken to be rational.

It must be confessed that we are still a long way from solving the problem, or even from possessing its positive and indispensable data. In the series of social phenomena, more perhaps than in all others, we know almost nothing, and we are only just beginning to perceive our ignorance. Our conscience considered objectively is a mystery to

us or rather a mass of actually undecipherable mysteries. It presents us with obligatory or forbidden ways of acting of which the reasons and beliefs, vanished long centuries ago, are as impalpable to us as the globules of blood of the mammoth the skeleton of which is found to-day. We know that there exist most diverse elements of origin and age, Germanic, Christian, classical, pre-classical, and pre-historic, perhaps even pre-human elements. We no longer ignore that the stratification of the successive deposits may be as regular as geological strata in an active volcanic region. And yet, since our conscience is imperative, and we feel ourselves subject to its dictates, not only do we not find it obscure (although it issues its commands quite clearly), but we take it to be in itself the universal, eternal conscience, the absolute conscience.

For a long period, the object of ethical speculation was to demonstrate that this spontaneous and naïve claim was founded on reason ; it invoked the privileged " nature " of the human soul, itself divine, daughter of God. Scientific ethical speculation is more modest, and will doubtless for a long time only concern itself with more particular and historically definite problems. What is the origin of such an obligation, of such an interdiction found in several distinct societies ? What was the meaning of individual responsibility, whether penal or civil, when it appeared ? Through what forms have landed property, household goods and slaves passed ? What were the succession of forms of marriage, of the family ? But it will perhaps be said : that is not ethical speculation, that is sociology. It is true, but what scientific ethical speculation can there henceforth be except the comparative study of ethical systems that exist or have existed ?

In fact ethical speculation in becoming a scientific work becomes at the same time a collective work. Formerly it produced systems, each of which was due to the individual genius and organizing faculties of a philosopher who discovered its principles, indicated its whole content, and sometimes even completed its details. Ethical speculation under its scientific

form suggests the idea of a company of pioneers whose common efforts are directed to dig up virgin soil. It knows that it will produce nothing that is not destined to be completed, remade, perhaps transformed, so as to become unrecognizable. But it also knows that such is the common fate of all scientific work, especially in the initial period. It is content if it breaks the road for others who will go farther.

IV

Objection : ethical truths were always known—Answer : that conception is not to be reconciled with the actual solidarity of the different series of social phenomena which evolve together—In fact the resemblance of the formulae does not prevent a great diversity in their content.—Social justice is a "becoming" if not a continuous progress—Influence of great economical changes.

Buckle maintained, supporting his argument by a large number of facts, that the progress of human societies depended chiefly on the discovery of new scientific truths, and in no way on the discovery of ethical truths, since they were transmitted from generation to generation, and even from civilization to civilization, always alike by their formulae, if not in their applications. According to him as far back as history permits us to go, we find societies already in possession of the fundamental principles of ethics although entirely ignorant of the sciences of nature. That conception is not new. The ancient philosophers, especially the stoics, had already made it a commonplace. It is in opposition to what we have tried to establish, for, at bottom it is only a slightly different expression of the belief in a natural law and in natural ethics. We may then, if we desire, consider it refuted by what precedes it. As, however, it claims to rest on observation, it will not perhaps be useless to criticize it in itself and to examine the value and bearing of the facts which it invokes.

Those facts are, in general, borrowed from civilizations

which in comparison with those that are more familiar appear far remote in time and consequently relatively primitive : Egypt, Assyria, Babylon (three or four thousand years before Christ). A certain number of texts exist which testify that there was a conscience at that period, open to the idea of justice and to respect for the rights of others, and also to the duty of assisting others and of protecting the weak. But those civilizations, however remote they seem to us, were already very complex, highly developed, remarkably differentiated from the social point of view, and of an elevated type in organization. We do not know absolutely what space of time separated them from a condition analogous to that in which the inferior societies of Africa, America and Australia are at the present time ; but we shall not be greatly in error if we conclude it to be very considerable. The alleged facts would tend to prove that wherever human societies have reached a high degree of civilization, the ethical relations of men between themselves testify to it. The contrary would indeed be surprising ; and the same statement may be made in regard to their economic relations, their art, language and religion. It is an immediate consequence of the solidarity which unites the different fundamental series of social phenomena. The solidarity, doubtless, is not always equally apparent and intercurring causes may favour or retard the development of this or that series ; but in a general way, and if we are careful to take into account the perturbations which may arise from the most diverse causes, the law is verified.

Consequently, by reason of the same law, it would be most unlikely that the conscience would be greatly differentiated and be master of itself in a society in which civilization was still low and savage. How is it that one single social series will evolve in isolation to a high degree of complexity and differentiation, while others remain at a much lower stage ? How is it to be imagined that with a dull mentality, not yet admitting of abstract thought or generalization, in the absence of an advanced division of labour, of a clearly defined feeling of the opposition possible between the individual and the group, subtle

ideas like those of reparative and distributive justice, individual responsibility, respect for law could, I will not say be expressed, but be formed ?

To suppose so would be to grant the hypothesis of a special revelation ; and it was exactly that hypothesis which we found when we reached the deepest root of the idea of " natural ethics." But we also saw that the hypothesis was not supported by the facts. Doubtless wherever human groups exist, relations also exist between their members which may be described as ethical, that is, acts permitted or forbidden beyond those (small in number) which are indifferent, are to be found as well as feelings of blame, admiration, reprobation, esteem for the perpetrators of the acts. But there is a long distance between those facts and the conscious and considered knowledge of " ethical truths," and especially of truths comparable to those which play so large a part in civilized societies. In the societies called primitive, the presence of an individual conscience possessing those truths itself, would be a sort of miracle. So far as we know that miracle nowhere occurs.

Besides, even in more elevated societies the external resemblance of the formulae should not hide from us the internal difference of the " ethical truths " they express. For instance, it is frequently stated that the essential rules of justice were as well known in the most remote civilized antiquity as in our own time : *Neminem laedere* ; *suum cuique tribuere.* Perhaps : but all that may be legitimately concluded is, that since the days of that remote antiquity language has permitted an abstract expression of the essential ethical relations. The resemblance stops there. It lies only in generality and abstraction of the formula. If there was also resemblance in its signification the meaning of the terms would be almost the same in different civilizations. Now that is not at all the case. How is *neminem* to be understood ? To what acts may *laedere* be applied ? In half civilized societies, the stranger is not included in *neminem.* The boat cast up by the storm on a foreign shore is pillaged, the men who sailed it murdered, or brought into slavery, without anyone finding

an infraction of the rule *neminem laedere*. Such examples abound not only in the past but with us, and in our day. The manner in which the natives of even civilized colonies, like the Annamites, are generally treated by Europeans, shows that "ethical truths" suffer a singular eclipse outside the land of their origin. Similarly for the rule *suum cuique tribuere*. How is *suum* defined? In a society where caste exists, justice consists in treating everyone according to his caste, the Brahmin as a Brahmin, the paria as a paria; with a number of half civilized races, it consists in regarding female children as an importunate charge, and women as beasts of burden; in feudal society it consisted in regarding the villain as liable to taxation and statute labour at pleasure. Even in more developed societies, certain applications of the formula of justice call forth protestation from a small number of consciences, while others are not disturbed by them. The manufacturer who considers that he is not making sufficient profit may close his mill from one day to the next and consider that he "is wronging no one," since he paid his workmen, now unemployed, for the work done by them up to that day. In the middle of the nineteenth century at the time of the rapid development of manufactures in England, and of the horrible sacrifice of women and children working sixteen or eighteen hours a day in the factories, it does not seem that the masters were conscious of violating the rule of justice; *suum cuique tribuere*. Did they not pay suitable wages?

Those formulae, taken in the abstract, do not possess the power attributed to them of expressing at all times and in all lands the eternal essence of justice. Considered in themselves they are empty. They only receive their signification and their ethical value from their content, which is not provided *a priori* by a sort of ethical intuition nor by an immediate estimation of general utility. It comes to them from the social reality existing at each epoch, and which imposes on every individual the manner in which he ought to behave in a given case. Thus they represent the expressions of ethics of such or such society at a particular time, and not expressions of "ethical truth" in itself.

They say equally to the Egyptian, contemporary with the earliest dynasties, to the Assyrian of the time of Sargon, to the Greek of the time of Thucydides, to the baron and prelate of the eleventh century: "You must be just and render to each man his own." But these cases and others that might be put forward, have nothing in common except the formula bidding men conform to definite rules of action under penalty of social punishments, precise or vague, which are echoed in every individual conscience.

The effective progress of social justice cannot then be attributed to a pre-existing conception of justice in men's minds as its decisive or even principal cause. Undoubtedly when progress in morals or in laws is realized, it was demanded, for a long, and sometimes for a very long time, by a certain number of consciences. But why do those consciences feel the need of it? It is not a fresh result drawn from the formula of justice known before, for why should the result be felt at that particular moment, and not have been perceived sooner? The deduction then is merely apparent. The actual fact of which it is the abstract manifestation is, most often, a profound modification produced in another series of social phenomena, and almost always in the economic series. Thus slavery and serfdom, after being regarded as normal phenomena, as excellent institutions necessary to the social order, were gradually eliminated by the economic transformation of European societies, and excluded from what is right by the conscience and condemned in the name of morality. It is thus that the condition of the proletariat under the rule of the modern capitalist, after being long regarded by economists as normal, inevitable and even in a certain sense, providential, is regarded quite differently now that the proletariat, having become conscious of its strength, exacts and obtains more humane conditions of life. The common conscience begins to acknowledge that the claims of the proletariat are just. The economic transformation once begun, the idea of the necessity of realizing a better justice will doubtless help immensely in quickening the movement. But the idea itself would never have been born, and would

certainly not have been developed, or have acquired strength enough to obtain millions of adherents, if the whole of the conditions in which society found itself had not caused it to arise. Just as historical materialism is difficult to maintain if it claims to subordinate all evolution of society to its economic life, so is it true that no series of social phenomena, ethical and juridical phenomena no more than the rest, are developed independently of the other series.

Justice and more generally ethics should be conceived as a "becoming." There is nothing *a priori* to authorize the affirmation that becoming is a progress and an uninterrupted progress. To admit that postulate would be to return to the idea of a natural ethics. It would merely take a different form. Instead of supposing that justice was revealed directly in the conscience of every man coming into the world, we should imagine that it was revealed successively in the historical evolution of civilized societies. But the hypothesis, although thus projected into time, would not change its character. It would remain at bottom teleological, religious, and anthropocentric. From the scientific point of view the study of the facts does not prove that the evolution of human societies, not even of higher societies, is such that each series of phenomena, and all together, only vary in the sense of "better." On the contrary, it shows that a multitude of causes, internal and external, may check the development of one or several series, or cause it or them to deviate, and consequently all the others. If we consider the successive conditions of a portion of the ancient world (Spain, Italy, and Gaul) between the first century of the Christian era and the twelfth, it is difficult to assert that the progress towards better conditions has been uninterrupted. No matter from what point of view we regard it (economic, intellectual, moral, political, or any other), it is incontestable that the change, in the whole mass, was rather a retrogression than a progress. For by reason of the law of solidarity of the social series, a change for the worse in social relations from the ethical point of view and a corresponding obscuration of the conscience and the idea, was produced simul-

taneously. That is exactly what happened. Arabian civilization, that of India, of China, furnishes analogous examples.

Thus the variable content of " ethical truths " does not, even among the most civilized peoples, undergo an uninterrupted process of purification. It evolves parallel to the general evolution of the society. It loses its old elements and demands new ones. Sometimes from one point of view it loses what it would have been better to keep, or keeps what would have been better lost. In fact, it acquires what it would have been better for it not to have incorporated. The ever possible eventuality could only be excluded by the care of an omnipotent Providence who guided social evolution : it is perfectly compatible with the principle of the conditions of existence. Consequently, the conscience of a given time, in relation to the whole mass of the social reality of that time, will never provide the general formula of justice with a content that will be worthy of the respect demanded for it in all its parts. By what it prescribes, by what it forbids, and even by what it never dreams of prescribing or forbidding, it necessarily retains more or less important traces of what may be called the social superstition and ignorance of that epoch. Superstition—in the etymological sense of the word—whenever it is a question of the distinction of classes, of old-established obligations, or interdictions, is now under the sway of the prevailing ideas and beliefs, now rejected by the conscience, but it nevertheless persists. Ignorance is insufficiently warned by facts, and our justice remains indifferent to the budding laws that have not as yet the strength to impose themselves.

It is futile to imagine that the waving of a magic wand will rid us of that superstition and ignorance. So far as ignorance is concerned, the impossibility is manifest. How could we learn the modifications of justice that will be exacted by changes still in the distance, and scarcely traced by the whole mass of social conditions, when very often we do not even discern those which are quite near us, and more than half accomplished ? And that proves once again how

chimerical is the idea of a justice absolute and immutable in itself; for at every new period of social life justice assumes a form that preceding periods could not foresee, and which would never be realized if the evolution of society was different. For instance, we can quite well imagine that the rule of capitalist production had not been set up in Western Europe; in that case a large part of what social justice now demands would never have been conceived. Similarly, whatever the greater number of liberal and socialistic economists may say, we are now in profound ignorance of the social rule which will take the place of ours in a more or less distant future, and consequently of the modifications that the content of "ethical truths" will undergo. We can only slightly remedy our ignorance. We can only (but even that is not to be neglected) make as complete and as objective a study as possible of the present ethical reality. We can determine the meaning, the power, the character, socially useful or harmful, of the different tendencies that are struggling with each other, of the laws which are in jeopardy, of the laws that are coming into being. Thus we may render the transitions less difficult to men's minds, less painful in the facts, and help to secure that the evolution of our society—if it is too ambitious to talk of the evolution of humanity—may take as much as possible the form of progress and of pacific progress.

As to "superstitions" (in the sense we gave the word just now), we can only weaken them very gradually, especially the oldest of them, which, being transmitted from generation to generation, ended by acquiring a power comparable to that of instinct. There should, too, be no illusion as regards the word "superstition" or "survival." We do not regard it as the eighteenth century philosophers did, who, in the name of a rational abstract ideal, pitilessly condemned all the traditions that could not be reconciled with that ideal. To imitate them would be to recognize "natural ethics," the existence of which seemed evident to them, and which seems to us incompatible with the reality of facts. It is not for us to undertake a rational crusade against the "superstitions" which still

live in our conscience. It is true that all or nearly all is superstition since everything is a heritage of the past, and of a past that sometimes goes back beyond history. It matters little that the beliefs that are at the root of a custom are ill-founded, that the reasons which have led to such an interdiction have no longer any meaning in our eyes. If that custom or that interdiction has had a favourable influence on the progress of society, if it is so closely mingled with its life that it cannot be torn away without destroying the whole, in the name of what principle should we undertake to uproot it? To be truly rational, our action on social reality ought to be guided not by an abstract ideal —which claims to have an absolute value and merely expresses the exactions of the conscience to-day—but by the results of science. When science has determined for each of the obligations of the conscience, how it was established, strengthened, imposed, what effect it has produced, and what part it still plays in social life, we shall know in what degree it is expedient—and possible —to modify it. That will be the work of "the rational art" that we conceive to be the methodical application of the results obtained by ethical speculation become scientific.

CHAPTER VIII

ETHICAL FEELING

I

Feeling and ideas are inseparable from each other—The intensity of feeling is not always in proportion to the clearness of ideas—In what sense a separate study may be made of feeling—Special difficulties of that study—Method pursued by contemporary sociology—Results obtained.

IT is commonly said that, with very few exceptions, it is not the idea which determines the actions of the greater number of men, but feeling. The natural tendencies or inclinations, the passions to which individuals are subject, the needs from which they cannot free themselves, are the great movers and regulators of human activity. They, and not ideas or representations, explain the general direction and the particular decisions. They scarcely bring about action, except in cases, very frequent it is true, in which the ideas are closely bound up with powerful tendencies and feelings that desire to be satisfied.

We need not enter on an examination of that psychological thesis. We do not set out from the "nature" of the individual subject, supposed to be known, to deduce from it dialectically the manner in which he acts or ought to act. We are partisans of an entirely different method, which considers the given social reality objectively, which studies it in the civilization in which we live, and which compares it with others of which we have knowledge. In short, we ask, so far as the peculiar characteristics of social reality allow, that the same method may be used which has

proved so fruitful in the sciences of physical reality. So that the "psychological" or "ethical" study of feeling, interesting as it is in certain respects, is no part of the science with which we are dealing. Our guiding principle is to go back to facts, duly analysed, to their constant laws, to results duly certified, and to the forces that produce them. If instincts, needs, feeling, and more particularly ethical feeling, are included among those forces, the study of given social reality will acquaint us with them, and in the only scientific way, that is, by the confirmation and extent of their results.

To speak the truth, to take things thus, it is not easy to see what "feeling" is, if it is isolated from ideas, beliefs, and customs. If purely physiological needs, like eating and drinking are put aside, as well as the fundamental and obscure instinct of "the desire to live," common to all organisms, the actions of the man living in society (and especially in primitive communities) are determined not by feelings, so far as they are distinct from ideas and images, but by complex psychological conditions in which energetic and imperative images dominate. That imperative energy is translated for him by the vivid consciousness that he *must do* such an action, *must refrain from doing* such another, and if he involuntarily commits what is forbidden, he realizes it by repentance, by remorse, by an almost mortal horror. What more powerful feeling exists than the Polynesian's respect for his taboo? And is that power anything more than the inviolable character of a certain belief, of a certain collective idea, in so far as it is imposed on certain individual consciences of the group? For the "taboo" of the nobles may very probably not evoke the respect of the plebeians; or women in the same tribe may have theirs distinct from those of men, etc.

Consequently, the scientific study of ideas, beliefs, customs, collective morals, comprises *ipso facto* that of feelings at least in so far as it finds a place in ethical speculation properly so-called, that is, in the scientific knowledge of the given ethical reality. But those are very complex facts.

They are composed in the individual conscience of ideas and beliefs (that is, of images and ideas bound together in a certain way), of practices and usages (that is, of series of impulses and acts consecutive with the ideas); and lastly, of feelings of obligation, repentance, remorse, and respect. It may happen that the purely representative element may grow weak, become indistinct and even effaced, while the actions and practices remain, always strongly felt to be obligatory. We are tempted then to have recourse to the psychological "explanation," according to which the practices have their chief origin in feeling. But that is not so, and scientific study will restore the representative elements which seem to have disappeared.

Do we not see in our own society that religious feeling—not a vague, undefined feeling, but a specifically Catholic or Protestant feeling—persists in many men's hearts after belief properly so-called has vanished, and manifests its persistence on many occasions? Not only does it preserve an attachment to certain practices, but it exercises its influence on general conduct. Often, beliefs which we think we no longer possess, form the impulse to action, and inversely, new convictions which we deem active have as yet no effect on practice, so that our actual conduct does not correspond with the intellectual image which we, in all sincerity, hold of ourselves We continue to be moved by antiquated ideas and old beliefs, although we imagine ourselves to have abandoned them for others which we deem truer. It is not enough for us to wish to abandon them for them to abandon us.

Hence, the clearness of ideas and beliefs, the degree of distinction they have in the individual conscience, the more or less clear perception of their presence, cannot be taken as the measure of their energy as impulses to action. That measure chiefly depends on their "imperativeness," which, in its turn, depends on a great number of conditions—historical and actual—which have nothing in common with the clearness and distinction of ideas. The "imperativeness" is translated into each individual conscience under the form of feelings which impel it to perform or approve

certain acts, to abstain from or to blame others. In that sense, but in that sense alone, is there place for a study of feeling as separate from ideas and beliefs; in that sense, ancient feelings respected by tradition may be opposed to new ideas and beliefs. The antagonism is at bottom rather between ancient ideas and the acts and feelings accompanying them, and more recent ideas which tend to introduce new acts and feelings. However, we shall conform to the current language, and shall consider, at least in their general form, the reciprocal actions and reactions of feelings and ideas, but it must be clearly understood that we do not conceive ideas without feelings, nor feelings without ideas.

The study, it is true, presents special difficulties. Feelings do not leave material traces, nor objective witnesses of their existence, which survive that existence itself. The scientist is obliged to restore them by an often hazardous retrospective process of induction. Doubtless all knowledge of an historical character resting on testimony implies a psychological interpretation whether the documents that have come down to us are inscriptions or monuments, written works or traditions, public or private acts. But when we have the detailed description of the burial or nuptial rites of a given community, we run small risk of deceiving ourselves in regard to the ideas and beliefs associated with those rites; and our interpretation approaches certainty (if we dare speak of certainty in such matters), when we can confirm it by analogous facts in other communities and at other epochs. It is the same with the myths that are preserved in the form of ancient texts or oral tradition, and with family institutions crystallized in law. But nothing exists of the feelings accompanying the ideas, beliefs, practices, institutions, which gradually abandoned them or more or less survived them, to testify directly to their intensity, even their right to reality, nor at certain times even to their presence. They are the soft parts of social fossils. They have disappeared while the skeleton has remained. In order to restore them the sociologist finds himself confronted with the same

problem as the palaeontologist when he has to clothe the bony structure with its apparatus of flesh and blood. It is to be feared that the sociologist's attempt is the bolder. For the relations on which palaeontology bases its arguments furnish so far secure analogies.

In studying ethical feeling objectively, prudence counsels us to limit ourselves to the observation of civilized communities, the manners, beliefs, religions, and institutions of which are sufficiently known to us through a fair abundance of documents and testimonies, so that there is small risk of making errors in the restitution of the feelings: reserving the use of the knowledge of the relations thus obtained between feelings and ideas, in order to pass by inference to the relations as they must have existed in more primitive societies. But that method is far from being entirely satisfactory. In the first place, the most ancient historical civilizations that we know are very complicated and probably very old. Although we go back to 4,000 years before the Christian era in Egypt, and to 9,000 it is said, in Assyrio-Babylonia, we are confronted in that antiquity, apparently so remote, with a political, economic, juridical, and religious organization which must have behind it centuries of formation of which we know nothing. And therefore it does not afford much more information as to the relations of ethical feeling with the other series of social phenomena than a careful study of the classical and Semitic civilizations whence ours have arisen.

Besides the chief problem is not as in palaeontology, one of anatomy or classification; it is a historical problem, as is proper to the character of the subject studied. What is of the highest moment is to discover how the ethical feeling which we find established and predominating in the most ancient historical civilizations, gained its ascendency. The analysis of those civilizations will not help us. At most it may suggest hypotheses not to be verified practically. It is useless to tread the path of inference when no idea can possibly correctly testify to the accuracy of the supposed origin.

There would be no way out of the difficulty if, by the side of

the historical communities, and the communities unknown to us that preceded them, there did not exist others of an inferior type, some of which are described for us with sufficient accuracy and abundance of detail ; for example the aboriginal communities of Australia, certain tribes of North America, India, Africa, Polynesia, Melanesia, etc. At the same time as we still find there, *de visu*, institutions that have elsewhere vanished leaving traces still visible, like totemism, we also observe ethical feelings a legitimate analogy of which may point to their existence in prehistoric civilizations. We find there, if not an equivalent, at least a valuable substitute for the societies of which nothing remains, except perhaps feelings and habits which we cannot decipher. By careful study of the manners, religions and sentiments of those inferior societies, we shall acquire valuable ideas for reconstituting the moral and mental condition of a relatively primitive humanity, a reconstitution that the most ingenious and obstinate effort would never have been able to realize by the study of humanity only in historical civilizations. Once established, that reconstitution even if summary, will show a basis of feelings in ourselves, so ancient, that they will not seem obscure. *Lumen index sui et tenebrarum.* This is no longer a purely ideal scheme, a simple view of the mind : the work is already begun.

From the results obtained by contemporary sociology it follows that the ordinary setting of traditional psychology does not apply without profound changes to the psychical phenomena as produced in primitive societies. That psychology takes a particular position, and always remains at the point of view of the individual consciousness. Its character is so marked that philosophers generally insist on the impossibility of conceiving how one consciousness can communicate with another. They have even derived from it a particular kind of idealism—solipsism. A dialectical artifice allows them to rediscover the universality on which the objective value of scientific and ethical truth seems to depend, without compromising the irreducible unity of each consciousness—a universal subject joined to an individual subject ; impersonal

reason ; harmony of monads, etc. All those hypotheses become superfluous in the psychology that concerns us. It has in fact no reason to shut itself up in the consciousness of the individual. Primitively it only refers the facts of sensations properly so called and those which result from impressions made on the senses, pleasure or pain, hunger, thirst, wounds, etc., those in short which evoke a more or less immediate reaction of the organism to that consciousness. But it regards all other psychological facts—conceptions, images, feelings, volitions, beliefs, passions, generalizations, and classifications, as collective and individual at the same time. In an inferior society, the individual thinks, wills, imagines, feels himself compelled, without opposing himself by reflection to the other members of the groups to which he belongs. The ideas that fit his still confused thought, and the usual motives of his actions are common both to him and to them. The consciousness is truly that of the group, localized and realized in each of its individuals.

If this is so the problem presented to psychologists is reversed. We no longer ask : if the individual consciousness exists only for itself, how can it possibly communicate with another ?—a problem of which there is perhaps no solution, unless by metaphysics. The question takes the following form : series of psychical facts of a collective character being given in each individual, how is the truly individual consciousness constituted by means of progressive differentiation ? The question is a positive one and evidently comprises a scientific solution. For it is a question only of relative individuality. Psychical facts can never entirely lose their original collective character which is maintained and developed in certain respects by the multiplication of the relations between human beings of the same group, and especially by the progress of language. But it is to be conceived that by reason of that progress the consciousness of the individual existing more and more for itself has been brought " to pose itself in opposing," as the metaphysicians put it.

Thus, psychical individuality existing for itself is not an absolute thing, compelling reflections on the most daring

paradoxes of idealism or pantheism if we wish to understand the relations of individuals to each other and to the society in which they live. Such difficulties arise because the metaphysician or psychologist substitutes his abstract and secret ego for the reality of mental life. It is another aspect of what Mr. James calls the "*psychologist's fallacy*." It is necessary to avoid it, and it suffices not to despise the *primitively social* character of all that is human in us. "Humanity must not be explained by man," said Comte, "but on the contrary man by humanity." That formula may be accepted if applied to the study of psychical facts, on condition of restricting it in the following fashion. "We must not set out from the consciousness of the individual to explain what is common in the psychical life of individuals in a given society, but, on the contrary, seek the origin of the individual consciousness by working from the collective consciousness."

The immediate result of employing that scientific method is to take human societies out of the isolated position into which traditional psychology puts them, and place them at the top of the animal ladder. For the primitive psychical life of human groups thus conceived, does not differ in character but only in degree from psychical life in animal groups, especially in those the members of which most nearly approach man by their habits and way of life. Espinas has well shown how in those societies the individual consciousness is subordinated to the life of the group; whence it follows that we may speak of collective consciousness, and take the group for the veritable individual. We may admit with a probability approaching certainty that in human groups which differ as greatly from Australian communities as we differ from them, that the individual scarcely exists, mentally, "for himself," is scarcely aware, if we may venture to say so, of his individual consciousness, and that his psychical life is of an almost purely collective character.

II

Sociological analysis of the feeling of obligation in its relation to collective ideas—Criticism of the idea of " natural ethical feeling "—Example of the filial piety of the Chinese—How contradictory feelings can co-exist indefinitely in the same conscience—The power of persistency greater in feelings than in ideas—Examples drawn from our society.

If it is so, we are henceforth furnished with a general method, with a " guiding thread," for the analysis of ethical feeling, discovered directly or indirectly, in a given society. Although the conscience of each individual experiences them as original and personal, as " being born from himself," especially in highly civilized societies where the individual is considered " autonomous " and the " legislator " of the ethical world, we shall consider them as collective in principle and as joined to the collective beliefs, ideas and passions that have prevailed in that society for an indefinite time. We shall in that way explain the character of universality, attributed by the conscience of each individual to its own dictates ; or, rather, that it exacts for them. For the character of universality is only the logical translation of imperious feeling, itself bound to the collective idea which commends one act because it is good, forbids another because it is bad, and grows angry at the idea of any infraction—whether it is the deed of others or of ourselves. In the last case, feeling takes, as we know, the particular form of remorse, shame, or a mortal horror.

It seems natural to admit that the process of development, which has caused human societies to pass from a condition analogous to that in which we see the Australians, to that of Western civilization, influenced feeling as well as beliefs and institutions. Just as individuals had a clearer idea of themselves, increased by the " socialization " of the individual mind, since the common heritage of ideas, of knowledge, of generalizations, acquired and crystallized in language, has almost continually increased ; so

although the social continuity and solidarity become more and more evident in proportion as societies are more differentiated and more complex, each individual, nevertheless, experiences more that ethical feelings are "his own." Nothing appears to him more characteristic of his individuality than the vivacity of these feelings in himself, and he does not separate them from his conscience. More than one philosopher liked to oppose the feeling of duty and moral merit to "impersonal" reason and science, necessarily bound up with the personal effort of the individual. In fact, the progressive realization of the ethical personality by the peculiar virtue of its idea is incontestable, but we must not, therefore, despise all that remains of the collective in those ethical feelings which are integral parts of that ethical personality, and which form its principal strength. The feeling of duty, the feeling of responsibility, the horror of crime, the love of good, the respect for justice, all the feelings that a delicately differentiated consciousness, from the ethical point of view, thinks to derive from itself, and itself alone, are not the less of social origin. All derive their strength from the collective beliefs and ideas which are common to the whole social group.

Nearly always, the deepest feelings are the most general and the most ancient. More even than the corresponding beliefs and customs, they show an uninterrupted continuity between our society and those that have preceded it, even those of which we have lost the remembrance, and which belong to a prehistoric period. It is precisely remote antiquity which assures the irresistible power peculiar to what is presented as natural, instinctive, and spontaneous to those ethical feelings. That fact has not escaped the philosophers. They "explain" it in their way. Some say that the ethical principles and the feeling of ethical obligation were "*a priori*." Others believe to discover in us the existence of an innate "ethical sense." Others, again, think that man, sociable by nature, is also moral by nature. This is to confess implicitly the collective and ancient character of the emotional reactions which

are produced in a member of a given society, when either he or other members of the group have acted either in conformity with, or contrary to, the common beliefs and traditional exigencies of that society.

Hence result several important consequences: (1) Since the ethical feelings of a given society rigorously depend on its collective ideas, beliefs and customs, they are at every moment what those ideas, customs and beliefs (present and past) exact that they shall be. If those ideas testify to an infantile imagination, incapable of seeing clearly the difference between what is real, objective, and what is chimerical, subjective; if those beliefs seem to be absurd and to contradict our logic; if the customs are, for the greater part, irrational, and a hindrance rather than a help to social progress; by what miracle could feelings alone present different characteristics; and would they be properly "ethical," in the sense in which our conscience now regards that word? In fact the principle of the conditions of existence also applies here. Every society capable of life, we have said, lives as long as it offers sufficient resistance to external and internal causes of destruction—as miserable, as ill put together, as poorly organized, as it may be, no matter how vast is the accumulation of useless suffering and futile labour. The principle has value, not only for each society considered as a whole, but for each series of social phenomena taken separately; consequently, then, for the feelings also in the proportion in which they can be considered separately. They are at each period precisely what they can be according to the whole of the given conditions—a state of affairs that is compatible, as experience proves, with a very low level. "Natural ethical feeling" does not exist any more than "natural ethics."

Doubtless, if the collective feelings of a given group tend to the destruction of the group, it would soon cease to exist. But since human societies are lasting, it follows that the collective feelings of particular members are not essentially anti-social. But that statement is very far from excluding the presence in those societies of oppressive,

sanguinary, horrible, absurd, collective feelings, like the social reality itself of which they form a part, and which they help to preserve. The employment of the comparative method easily verifies that conclusion. Infanticide (especially committed on female children), human sacrifices, ill treatment of women and slaves, of the infirm, interdictions of all sorts, ancient superstitions, reveal the collective feeling in a large number of societies tolerating or even commending in categorical fashion acts that our common sense regards as "immoral."

Even in societies of advanced civilization, like China, we find the solidarity of irrational beliefs and customs side by side with intense collective feelings, which are regarded as ethical feelings *par excellence*. Such is the filial piety of the Chinese—so strange to Europeans—according to some, admirable devotion, according to others, contemptible egoism, in reality, enfolded in a net of traditional customs and beliefs, from the most remote antiquity. In the eyes of the Chinese there is no greater misfortune than to be deprived after death of the worship necessary to secure that the soul shall dwell in peace. Besides, every soul that does not receive that satisfaction is dangerous for the living, especially for those who ought to have assured it. For the Chinese the worship of his dead ancestors is the chief and most urgent of duties, and the fulfilling of it, the first of virtues. But then his most lively anxiety is to have, as soon as possible, male descendants, qualified in their turn to render him the duties that he has fulfilled. He wants to be creditor and debtor at the same time, and to know for certain that, if he dies, the filial piety of his children will do for him what he did for his own parents. Hence arise precocious early marriages ; hence the over-population that causes terrible poverty almost throughout the whole of the Empire, despite the fertility of the soil, despite the industry, patience and sobriety of the inhabitants ; hence the horrible famines and the thousands of deaths when the harvest is bad. The foreign observer—missionary or layman—often confesses himself powerless to indicate any remedy for the evil. Feelings, beliefs and customs are so

closely bound together that no one knows what would be the best method to follow in attacking the beliefs concerning the souls of ancestors; but the collective feeling which has been attached to them from time immemorial renders them practically invulnerable. It seems to the Chinese that, if they were deprived of them, they would be demoralized. The Jesuits, it is said, tacitly tolerate those beliefs in their neophytes; to oppose those feelings would be a futile attempt so long as the beliefs persist. We see, with the most perfect evidence, how ethical feeling, responsible for certain collective ideas and beliefs, gives to them and borrows from them, at the same time, so much strength that it becomes almost ineradicable—even when, everything being equal, it is socially more harmful than useful. It would be easy to show how other peculiarities in the ethical feelings of the Chinese (want of sympathy, passive resignation to fate, etc.) are closely bound up with the whole of the general conditions of their society.

Nothing surprises or shocks us in our own ethical feelings because they are our own. Their apparent harmony with our collective ideas, with our beliefs and customs prevents anything seeming strange, inconsistent, harmful, or out of date. But the spontaneous testimony of our consciousness to itself is not decisive. It proves no more in favour of its own morality than a Chinese consciousness does. On the other hand, we know that those feelings form part of the whole mass of phenomena which constitute the life of our society, that they are responsible for the phenomena of other series, that they share their characteristics, and that in order to gain full knowledge of them we must make a sociological study of the chief phenomena of the series, a study as yet hardly even sketched out. Far then from being able to find in our feelings a model for our judgments, we are not even in a condition to judge our own feelings. It is true that they are often the causes of our actions, or, if we act contrary to them, the ethical feelings so injured provoke a painful reaction in us. But we find that power of theirs just as strong in the Polynesian feeling of taboo. It is not sufficient to call it up

to legitimize our feelings. They are worth exactly what the social reality of which they are at once an expression and a support is worth.

2. Neither can we be sure of the homogeneity of our ethical feelings, although nothing within us points to doubt. It is almost certain that everything in the conscience that is living, is preserved by it in the same degree and with the same energy. But the objective consideration of the feelings existing at a given epoch will soon convince us that the homogeneity is only apparent.[1] It does not exist for the beliefs nor for the collective ideas with which the feelings are closely bound up : neither does it exist for the feelings. Even if we took for granted a coherence, a logical harmony not yet found in any society between collective conceptions and beliefs—ours is far from such a harmony, and thoughts and conceptions of the finest minds of our time are often widely different—it would not follow that the feelings were also in harmony with each other. For, the power of persistence of collective feelings being superior to that of collective ideas, they may be maintained indefinitely with customs and morals, after the beliefs on which they rested have yielded to others. They seem then to exist for themselves although at a time the remembrance of which is lost, they had their cause in the whole of the social conditions and in the collective ideas.[2]

Besides it is true that contradictory conceptions and beliefs can co-exist for a long time without entailing mental discomfort, because they are not perceived. But in societies not intellectually stagnant, once the contradictions are perceived, they are bound to disappear, and the experience which enriches, ends by eliminating ideas incompatible with it. The progress of science brings about a more and more close adaptation of general conceptions to the objective reality. On the other hand, neither logic nor experience has any influence on the co-existence of contrary feelings in the same consciousness as long as it experiences them. Con-

[1] See above, chap. III, pt. ii.

[2] See E. Durkheim, " La Prohibition de l'inceste," *Année sociologique.* I, 1898, pp. 1–70 ; Paris, F. Alcan.

sequently the process of modification of feelings is generally slower than that of ideas. We should add that feelings are intimately allied with the physical accomplishment of acts, that is with impulses. Thus they share the organic character of habits.

The collective imagination which produced myths and religious cosmogonies, betrayed the same indifference to logical contradiction. It saw no difficulty in admitting that God is one and that there are several gods; that God is the world and that He is outside the world; that He created matter and that it is eternal like Himself; that the soul forms the life of the body and that it is entirely foreign to it; that it feels the reaction of everything that happens to the body, and that it is lodged in it as an inviolable principle. It affirms at the same moment immanence and transcendence. With even stronger reason feelings that accompany certain collective ideas can persist when they are replaced by others. One great fact has much significance in that respect: the long time that religions last after their intellectual decomposition is finished. They continue to resist the most violent attacks for centuries; sometimes they have apparent returns of vigour even when the dogma has lost its hold on cultivated minds. How is that to be accounted for if not from the almost indefinite persistence of collective feeling attached to symbols, gestures, ceremonies, monuments, treasured memories of all sorts, that those religions represent and that they alone can satisfy?

Thus among the collective sentiments presented to us by our consciousness as ethical, very ancient ones are mingled with more recent ones. The study of their origin, of their order of appearance, and of their relations, belongs to the science of social reality which is beginning to be constituted. But a sort of law that experience has never belied may be formulated even now. When an ethical feeling is accompanied in the individual consciousness by the ideas and beliefs with which it is bound up, we can not judge as to the date at which it was formed. If, on the contrary, the collective ethical feeling is purely and simply imposed in the name of conscience and with an authority

which claims to suffice to itself, it is almost certain that the origin is very ancient. There are, then, two hypotheses between which the examination of the facts has to decide. Either the collective contemporary idea of the feeling persists just as the feeling does, but enfeebled and scarcely perceptible to the individual conscience, whence, however, it has not entirely disappeared. Or while the feeling continued to be transformed from generation to generation at the same time as the manners and customs, the idea was also entirely differentiated and transformed. The last case includes those powerful collective feelings that we are unable to explain to ourselves, and yet feel most deeply, so that we should be suspected by others, and degraded in our own eyes, if we ceased to be moved by them. Many criminals suffer from a peculiar insensibility which is only a lack in them of the collective feeling powerful in our society. Perhaps that trait in their character inspires more horror and disgust than their crimes. The normal man who experiences that horror and disgust, transported into the midst of negroes or Chinese would, in his turn, give proof of similar insensibility. But he would not look upon himself as a criminal, because the collective feeling would be silent under those new conditions.

3. The evolution of collective feeling, although bound up with that of collective beliefs and ideas, does not go on *pari passu*. It is generally slower. It is a result of what has just been stated; it may also be affirmed directly. For instance, prejudices relating to the citizen spirit, to slavery, were attacked in the time of the ancients from the fourth century B.C. by the Socratic philosophers, and especially by the cynics. The stoics in the third century showed in terms, the admirable clearness of which has never been surpassed, that in the city of Jupiter all men are citizens by the same right, equal before the law, and that mankind forms an unique society in which all are brothers without distinction of birth, or social condition. At Rome in the first century A.D. Seneca spoke of the human dignity of slaves just as an eighteenth century philosopher might have spoken. It is to be imagined, however, that this humanitarian concep-

tion was not immediately accompanied by a modification of the ethical feelings: for slavery with its juridical and ethical consequences was maintained until the end of the ancient world.

The influence of philosophical conceptions only made itself felt slowly, when a few changes were introduced into the legal status of slaves by the Roman lawyers of the second and third centuries A.D. Collective feeling was doubtless gradually modified; but the change was too slight to counterbalance the traditional manners that the daily spectacle of the established social order tended to preserve. Tacitus relates that in the reign of Nero a patrician was one day found assassinated in his house. All his slaves, several hundreds in number, were examined in conformity with the law, and executed. Tacitus adds that those barbarous measures led to an explosion of angry feeling, a veritable rising among the Roman populace. Thus a modification in the collective feeling with respect to slaves was brought about under exceptional circumstances; but in the ordinary current of life it was still insufficient to determine the change of a social condition incompatible with new ideas, although the ideas were widely spread and generally accepted.

Opportunities are not wanting in contemporary society which show a corresponding delay in the victory of collective feeling over conceptions. Such is the case, for instance, with the idea and sentiment of social justice in questions respecting the rights of property. Scarcely a century ago, the political economy of men like Ricardo and J. B. Say would have hardly found any opponents on that subject. It explained that by reason of "natural" laws—the word in the language of classical economy signifies both "necessary" and "providential"—the distribution of wealth could not be different from what it was in our society. Although wealth is the fruit of labour, there must be on the one side a restricted number of capitalists, and on the other the millions of the proletariat who were not allowed by the general law of wages to earn more than just enough to keep them from dying of hunger. But they live, at

least so long as commercial and industrial crises are not too acute or too prolonged ; they are accustomed to their condition ; money does not make men happy, etc. In short, there was sufficient harmony between conceptions and collective feeling of which the economist is sometimes the candid interpreter. The contractor feels no scruple in reducing the workman's wages to the lowest sum on which he can possibly live. He does not consider that he is unjust in demanding the largest possible amount of work for those wages, for he pays the current rate, and the economist assures him that his ruin is certain if he acts differently. General feeling is not against the theory which seems as " natural " as the supposed law on which it is based.

But during the nineteenth century orthodox political economy was attacked on all sides, and its dogmas appeared no longer tenable. Finally, all the theorists except a small group of obstinate conservatives, admitted that property, according to Comte's phrase, is " of a social nature," and that consequently the distribution of property could not exclude *a priori* all control or interference by the State. The workmen are not only allowed the right of union and of strikes, but a legislation has developed in the most advanced nations which regulates the hours of work, looks after the hygiene of workshops, protects women and children, authorizes syndicates, etc. It would seem that a corresponding change in feelings ought to go along with the change in ideas and legislation. And a few symptoms may actually be discerned. We hear nothing spoken of but social solidarity. That fine sounding phrase, the meaning of which remains vague for the larger number of those who hear and use it, has become for politicians what actors call a " safe effect." No one dares any longer to maintain with the doctrinal unconsciousness of a former age that the dreadful poverty, the physical and mental distress of the whole working population, are the necessary consequences of a natural law as inevitable as the law of gravity. On the contrary, in regard to any particularly striking fact—the collective suicide, for instance, of an indigent family, who could not procure work and who did not know how to

beg—newspapers most devoted to the defence of capital are the first to proclaim that "it is a disgrace" and a public scandal that in a society like ours where means of production abound, where the plethora of products is at times even inconvenient, men should kill themselves because they are cold and hungry. But the feeling thus expressed still lacks, if not sincerity, at least depth. It consists, indeed, of a semi-physiological sympathy, aroused at the sight of a moving misfortune. The sympathy is carefully nursed by the press which seizes upon the heroes of the drama, and acts on the nerves of the public in multiplying details and realistic pictures.

But like the rising related by Tacitus, the momentary explosion does not prove that the old way of feeling is profoundly changed. If we really *felt* that we were confronted with a social injustice for which each member of society was personally responsible, because he helped to keep it what it was by his unvarying agreement with its present institutions, how could we remain indifferent to so many other miseries, less dramatic, it is true, but innumerable, daily, incessant, equally inhuman, and unjust, at the sight of which scarcely any one is moved? For instance, the Paris newspapers publish weekly sanitary reports. We learn that diphtheria, measles, scarlatina, or typhoid are prevalent "as each year at this season," and that fatal cases are fairly numerous, but "nearly all in the outlying districts," the centre of the town being free. The statement is pleasant enough for the well-to-do readers who live in the centre of the city and love their children. It never occurs to them to ask what the fathers and mothers living in the outlying districts think of it. They tacitly admit as being in the order of things that poor persons, earning very little, must be ill-housed, ill-fed, ill-warmed, that their children must be more accessible to contagion, less well taken care of, and more likely to die. They remain then in the sentimental and consequently doctrinal condition of the capitalist class of last century. They naïvely regard the social conditions under which they are privileged as natural and providential.

The tradesman "retired from business" with his well-gotten gains, who enjoys his income with a perfectly calm conscience, and whose enjoyment is not disturbed by the thought nor even by the sight of the poverty, suffering, and social injustice around him, is not a monster of cruelty. He only experiences traditional feelings which confirm him in the idea that the actual state of things is normal, that the money he has earned is "his very own," and that he is wronging no one in spending it as he pleases. The old manner of feeling upholds the old idea of justice while the new idea of justice has not yet acquired sufficient strength to make the new manner of feeling prevail, at least in the larger number of consciences. And the same process being repeated with regard to other collective feelings, relating to religion, country, political liberty, etc., long and painful conflicts must arise. Since human societies cannot discern their causes and laws, they must submit to them.

III

Energy of the reactions determined by ethical feelings—Nothing more difficult to modify than collective feeling—Among the ancients religious feeling is related to the whole of nature, among the moderns only to ethical nature — Signification from that point of view of the religion of Humanity—How we can reconstitute the now vanished sentimental conception of physical nature.

Collective ethical feeling, although it is most intimately bound up with collective ideas and beliefs is immensely strong. It follows the same process of evolution (which is not always progress), but with a slower movement, and with greater difficulty in dissociating itself from the past. It is, if we may venture to say so, a superlatively conservative series. Thanks to that

fact the social superstitions discussed in the last chapter are perpetuated in a given group. Traditional collective feeling, together with customs and beliefs, forms almost indissoluble amalgams, so well fused together that it is impossible to state the share of each element and to say whether it is the feeling that upholds the habit and belief, or the habit and belief that uphold the feeling.

The peculiar power of feeling is shown again in the intensity of the reactions determined by it. The man who thinks differently from others even about a problem which has no immediate effect on action and which all consider dispassionately, calls forth a certain uneasiness and surprise not exempt from ill-will. We keep away from him as a dangerous and disquieting person. But if the divergence is one both of idea and feeling, if it relates to things directly concerning practice and morals, it arouses not only disapproval and suspicion, but indignation and a desire of vengeance. In a general way conservative resistance is based on an almost instinctive devotion to traditional ways of thinking and acting. Since innovators can only oppose them by new ideas, they have the worst of it. In order that they may prevail, those ideas must be fused with collective feeling, and the social mass must be impregnated with that feeling.

For in the ethical reality there is nothing more difficult to modify—at least directly—than collective feeling. It is not, perhaps, quite so impossible as in some series of physical phenomena, over which we have no power, although the science dealing with them is fairly advanced (astronomical facts for example). The solidarity of social phenomena is such that if we can influence some of them the interference is surely felt in the other series, although we cannot always foresee it, or measure the result. But on that matter the series greatly differ. We know methods of influencing economic, juridical, intellectual facts even in a given society. We have no power over collective feeling except in first modifying other series. So far, appreciable changes in collective ethical feeling are only produced as the result of great religious or economic trans-

formations, accompanied by the diffusion of new ideas or the revival of temporarily effaced old ones.

The reason is that it, of the whole series of social phenomena, exacts from us the greatest effort in order to be "represented" and consequently to be known in an objective way. Economic facts are easily translated for us into formulae and curves; intellectual, religious, juridical facts are allied to external phenomena, to impulses, to signs which allow us to exteriorize them and to regard them independently of the individual consciousness in which they are realized; but how much more difficult the representation is when it is a question of feeling! It seems that whatever way it is taken a feeling can only be translated in terms of a similar kind, that is, in feelings. So far ethical thought has not attained any other result. The presence in us, when we reflect on the matter, of ethical feelings awakes a fresh sentiment of veneration, respect, religious and holy submission for those feelings themselves: that is, collective feeling becomes more profoundly and energetically conscious of itself in the individual. But the individual who feels it with increased intensity does not for that reason "know" it any the more.

We do know, however, that only the sociological method, the historical and comparative method, can lead to that knowledge; and the first condition of employing that method is to study sentiments not in regard to our individual feeling for them, but as they form a part of the given ethical reality. The reality in this order of facts, as in the others, must be regarded by the student with the same objectivity as physical reality. And if this methodological necessity inspires us with a sort of repulsion as a profanation of what is most sublime in us, let us remember once more that a similar repulsion was felt when physical reality became the object of scientific research.

The ancients regarded the whole of nature as divine. It comprised the whole mass of phenomena and beings, of men and gods. Their religious feeling was extended at the same time to the divinities properly so-called, to the God who lives within us under the name of soul, and to all the forces

that animate the universe. The ancient religions were truly religions of nature. For Christianity—the Infinite, the Absolute, the Perfect became the unique object of the religious feeling: nature, so to speak, vanished in the presence of God. That nature can inspire a religious sentiment is an impious thought that horrifies a Christian. By the action of manifold causes, however—and the revival of the ancient philosophies is not the least efficacious—faith in Christian dogmas has been weakened. Has then a religion of nature reappeared? No, unless an expression of vague sympathy for the thought of the ancients, and of protestation against the Christian spirit is to be so regarded. Certainly all that portion of nature of which man is beginning to make himself master by science has not again become an object of religious feeling except in a general way, as far as it forms part of the infinite universe into which we are plunged. But it is a remarkable fact that the philosophers who have entirely broken with the Christian religion, and who regard its intellectual rôle as ended, have founded a religion of Humanity (Feuerbach, Comte). How are we to account for it if not by the fact that religious feeling is returning to the only portion of nature regarded by our contemporaries as the ancients regarded the whole of nature?

We are then permitted to foresee for ethical nature a process analogous to that undergone by physical nature: and the more social reality becomes an object of science, the less it will be an object of feeling. Comte's work exactly symbolizes the transition. Ethical or social reality under the name of humanity is presented to him under two aspects. On the one hand he founds sociology which he calls also "social physics," he re-integrates social reality in nature, he shows that the statical and dynamical laws of sociology are bound up with other natural laws. But on the other hand, so far as the positive régime institutes a religion, humanity becomes the Great Being to whom all the feelings formerly given to God are transferred. Comte—and it is one of the most characteristic traits of his doctrine—saw no difficulty in preserving the two atti-

tudes at one time, one scientific, the other religious, in presence of the same reality. But the divergence which immediately appeared in his followers proved that the two could not be reconciled. For the adherents of his religion care little about the progress of sociology : and inversely actual sociologists, heirs of his scientific thought, are indifferent to the religion of Humanity.

Thus the example of the founder of sociology shows in striking fashion the degree in which the modern idea of social reality is still mingled with feeling, and what efforts will be required to render it entirely objective and properly scientific. But the inconveniences of the actual condition are not without compensations. By a retrospective analogy we can re-constitute the mental attitude of the period when the whole of nature was conceived in the same way as social reality is now. Accustomed as we are to an entirely objective and intellectual idea of physical nature—at least so far as science is applied to it—we find great difficulty in understanding that the idea was formerly quite different, very little objective, scarcely intellectual, or to put it better, that its place was held by a mass of images, beliefs and feelings. We shall never succeed in so doing unless we conceive a portion of nature thus. The religious and imperative character of beliefs and practices, the intense pressure of the collective consciousness on individual consciousness, the confident attempt of results determined by certain traditional and most often unintelligible practices, render an innovation synonymous with impiety : all those features now characterize the idea of ethical reality. Let us refer them in thought to the conception of physical nature, and we shall be able to form an idea of what it formerly was, in the same way as the actual science of that nature allows us to conceive in advance in some degree, what the intellectual idea of social reality will one day be.

CHAPTER IX

PRACTICAL RESULTS

I

Idea of a rational art founded on moral science—How it will differ from the ethical practice it proposes to modify—Ethical progress is no longer conceived to be solely dependent on good will—It will affect particular points, and will itself depend on the progress of the sciences—Attempts so far made to reform the social reality systematically—Why they were premature.

THE tree is judged by its fruit and principles by their results. Directly speculation concerns itself with ethics, criticism, with the unanimous agreement of the public, unhesitatingly condemns every doctrine of which the legitimately derived results would wound what the conscience is accustomed to regard as sacred. It is ~~is~~ clear that as a general rule "ethical practices" fully satisfy that demand of the conscience. Whatever may be the theoretical divergences of ethical systems, they are convergent, for any given epoch from the standpoint of ethical practice: we have had occasion to point out and explain that fact.

But, since we have not desired to establish in this work a system of "theoretical ethics," and since, on the contrary, we have tried to show that "speculative ethics" do not and cannot exist, there will not be found here under the form of practical results anything resembling the "practical ethics" derived by philosophers, at least, apparently, from their "theoretical ethics." Scientific knowledge of the laws of social reality will be substituted for dialectical specula-

tion on ethical concepts and feelings; similarly, traditional practical ethics will be replaced by a "rational art," ethical or social as people may please to call it, founded on that scientific knowledge. Thus we shall complete from the point of view of application what we have tried to establish from the point of view of theory. If, according to Descartes, ethics is an art comparable with mechanics and medicine, the art will make use of the knowledge of sociological and psychological laws to improve existing manners and institutions just as mechanics and medicine utilize the knowledge of mathematical, physical, chemical, and biological laws.

We shall not then attempt to institute rules of conduct, precepts destined to be followed by each conscience, nor to establish a hierarchy of "duties" for every free and reasonable being. We shall try a very different thing: to determine, so far as lies in our power, what the "rational ethical art" would be. Our attempt must of necessity be very imperfect, for applications can, as a general rule, only be discovered when science has reached a certain degree of advancement, and sociological science is still in its inchoative period. In fact, we must regard that art as a *desideratum*. Unable to anticipate what it will be later, we shall define it, either by analogy with other rational arts which more advanced sciences have made it possible to constitute, or by opposition with what now takes its place, that is, with actual practical ethics, politics, pedagogy, etc.

From the last point of view a difference strikes us from the very beginning. Ethical rational art, whether individual or collective action is in question, has to be entirely constructed. It will only be formed in proportion to the progress of the sciences on which it depends, very slowly perhaps, by successive and partial inventions. "Practical ethics," on the contrary, exists as a whole at the present time. Attached or not by more or less logical or artificial bonds to such or such metaphysical or religious principle, the prescription of what he may or may not do is imposed with equal force on the conscience of all and each. It is presented as definitive and complete. Doubtless experience con-

tinually evokes "species" the peculiarities of which have not been foreseen by necessarily general precepts. Hence there follows a casuistry as indispensable for moralists as for jurists. But that casuistry justly supposes that the principles on which it is based are admitted by all, and that the general duties and the great guiding rules of conduct are established *ne varietur*. The mere idea that those rules and principles are not immutable causes the conscience an uneasiness to which it is not accustomed. That our ethics should not be "absolute" at least in its essential rules is, in its eyes, an "immoral" idea. That conviction is revealed for instance in the manner in which ethical progress is ordinarily represented. It is to be imagined that men will recognize their duties more and more, will become more and more attached to them, will more and more prefer the consciousness of having accomplished them to any other satisfaction; that they will become, in short, more wise and more virtuous. But it is not imagined that the duties themselves will change and be transformed, although reflection and history show that as a matter of fact they are not immutable. Every society obeys the imperious need of regarding rules on which it instinctively believes its stability and existence to depend as absolute.

Considered objectively, the "practical ethics" imposed on the conscience at a given epoch, in a given society, is a function of all the other social series of which that series is composed, and the very exact determinations included in it originate in its solidarity with the series in their present and past condition. In fact, it represents the reality itself, or at any rate a part of the reality, which social rational art if it existed would have to modify. It should not then be confused with it.

There is another difference connected with the first. Ethical rational art, even if we imagine it to be sufficiently advanced, can only modify the given reality within certain limits. We see how far our knowledge of physical, chemical, and biological laws allows us to interfere in natural phenomena and turn them to our advantage, and if we regard the progress made in a century with satisfaction, we also know

that in infinite cases interference is either useless or impossible. In order to realize the limits of our power, we need only consider the actual condition of medicine and surgery. What a long period of time will be required before sociological science will give us social arts as developed as those! And do we know accurately whether the progress of that science will teach us that efficacious and scientific interference can only be practised under conditions difficult to realize, and within very narrow limits? "Practical ethics," on the other hand, recognizes no difficulty of which it does not in principle give the solution. Of all human arts it is the only one which does not confess itself imperfect and hindered, at least starting from a certain point, by insurmountable obstacles. The only obstacles it recognizes are those it meets in passions, prejudices, weaknesses, in brief in the emotional nature of man. Suppose it to be entirely submissive either by a constant and always victorious effort, or by the divine aid of grace: morality and holiness are realized as far as they can be. As "practical ethics" does not actually depend on theoretical knowledge, it has its own perfection, and can be complete while that knowledge is still rudimentary.

But the contrast is specially striking from the point of view of social ethics. There is no hesitation in the precepts of that ethics relating, for instance, to the family, to sexual relations, to property, to the relations between different classes or castes, etc.; we even find those precepts extremely precise, imperative and detailed in many communities in which ethics styled "individual" are still vague and undefined. And while "social ethics" are found everywhere, the science on which ethical rational art is to be founded has as yet no existence; there is as yet no scientific knowledge of what the family is, that is of the juridical, religious, economic conditions under which it assumed such and such a form, nor of the various forms of property, etc. Thus it is imagined that social ethics meets no resistance in the nature of social reality; the reason being not that it rests on a scientific knowledge of that reality but simply that it is an expression or rather a portion of that reality itself.

PRACTICAL RESULTS

Hence springs a third difference. When social rational art begins to derive practical applications from sociological science, they will at first refer to more or less special points. The art will necessarily seem incomplete and fragmentary (like our applied mechanics and medicine); it will not have the character of a perfect and coherent whole such as practical ethics present in every epoch. That is, however, a delusive appearance. For the coherence of the rules of those practical ethics is only such for the conscience to which they appear indistinctly with a common prestige of irrefutable and sacred obligation. It can, in fact, only be an unperceived incoherence, resulting from the simultaneous presence in that conscience of feelings, beliefs, impulses to action of various origins and tendencies, some very old, others more recent, the incompatibility of which is not betrayed, so long as they are united in the imperatives of one individual conscience.

It results, then, from all that has been stated, that "practical ethics" is sufficient unto itself. It is what certain philosophers have observed. They notice the original and spontaneous character of the common conscience, the "absolute" form of its dictates; and Kant who described the fact admirably, deemed it necessary, in order to explain it, to grant that practice has its principles independent of theory, in other words, that the conscience only depends rationally on itself. To command, it has no need of science; it is as clear, often even more clear with the man who has only the simple "natural light," than with the man whose intelligence is cultivated. But social rational art, on the contrary, will rest on science; not on a science of ethics that can be constructed *a priori* by the speculative and dialectical effort of a philosopher, but on a complex science or rather on a number of complex sciences, the object of which is the social "nature," scarcely begun to be explored by the positive method. Those sciences, like the others, will be the collective work of successive generations of scientists, each of whom will take up the problems at the point at which their predecessors left them, correcting their observations, completing or replacing

their hypotheses, and so accustoming the human mind to conceive all facts presented to it as obedient to laws.

It is true that the common conscience of each epoch does not consider its practical ethics as a given reality, but as an expression of what it "ought to be." The fact that it manifests itself under the form of commands and duties sufficiently proves that it does not believe merely to translate natural reality—but that it claims to modify it. Through that claim it really seems to take the place of the "ethical and social art" which we seek. And that is not a mere illusion: it does to some extent take its place in proportion as it influences the reality which modifies it.

If we compare it with what that art will become, we shall find that it presents the greater part of the characteristics peculiar to the human arts in their pre-scientific period. At first there is the absence of any clear line of demarcation between what it is possible to attain and what it is not possible to attain. Before the positive conception of nature, the sorcerer, the magician, the medicine-man, the astrologer, the alchemist, working without a clear knowledge of the relation between cause and effect, and with beliefs or arguments of very general compass (sympathetic magic, observation of superficial analogies, associations of images or of words, etc.) see no more difficulty in one case than in another, whatever may be the objective difference. It is no more difficult to them to cause rain to fall than to melt ore, to cure a nervous disease than an eruptive fever. Their faith in the power of their processes prevents them recognizing their ignorance of the phenomena they claim to modify. Perhaps in order that the scientific study of such phenomena may be established, that faith must be disturbed by a conjunction of favourable circumstances.

Similarly practical ethics so far as it proposes to modify the given social reality is in no way embarrassed by the lack of a scientific knowledge of that reality. It makes up for it by its confidence in its processes. In principle it recognizes no limit to their power. For it, everything comes back to converting souls. If they were invincibly attached to their duties that necessary condition would be sufficient:

society would become *ipso facto* as well ordered, as impregnated with justice and as productive of happiness as it could possibly be. Do we not find philosophers upholding that "the social question is an ethical question." The statical and dynamical laws of social facts are not taken into account in that characteristic conception; science alone can discover them, especially economic laws, so complex in a civilization like ours; neither are the extraordinary mass of beliefs, sentiments, tendencies, desires, prejudices that the long series of centuries of historical and prehistorical times has accumulated in the souls of men taken into account. The practice of duty would stand above all: it would exercise a sort of omnipotence on that nature. It is, too, especially from the social point of view that the ethical ideal most clearly shows its religious character (city of God, reign of grace, kingdom of ends, the *moralische Weltordnung* regarded as a definition of God, etc.).

In the pre-scientific period, the empire of man over nature, just because it is imaginary, is thought to be realized by the direct solution of a few vast and simple problems of which the most diverse particular cases are only applications. Thus the alchemist searches for the formulae which will give him entire power over matter (the philosopher's stone, the transmutation of metals); the physician before the advent of science makes use of certain sovereign receipts which chase away disease and produce health. Art, intrepid and credulous, with eyes fixed on the immediate result to be attained, does not perceive the infinitely complicated network of phenomena which is the true cause of the evils we suffer. By an analogous illusion traditional ethical practice possesses a few simple processes for producing a happy life, virtue, holiness, for getting rid of injustice and vice; and the theory which, as we have seen, only reflects the practice, proposes to solve the "ethical problem." That is a scarcely comprehensible expression. There is no more an "ethical problem" than there is a "physical problem" or a "physiological problem." We can no more flatter ourselves that we are able to realize happiness in general, than mechanics can realize the "collecting of natural force" in general, or

than medicine can procure "health" in general. Directly the science is constituted and begins to progress, it takes no heed of such abstractions. It devotes itself to the discovery of actual relations, the knowledge of which will one day permit us to hold sway over the forces of nature.

But as a matter of fact there is nothing to assure us that the results aimed at by practical ethics can ever be attained. Human societies are not perhaps capable of diminishing the sum of evil and of increasing the sum of good for the greater number of their members beyond a certain limit. It may be that only a certain degree of justice can be realized—the conception of justice evolving with the societies themselves. Only the progress of sociological science can give us positive ideas on those different points. Until then the postulates implied and granted by ethical art, although there is no ground for warranting its legitimacy, must remain hypothetical. But just as the men who believed that they influenced nature by magical or mysterious means, do not seem to have ever been discouraged by rebuffs, so firm was their faith in those means, so "practical ethics" is never tired of leading man to the "happy life," to holiness, to perfect social justice, notwithstanding the continual contradiction of experience. If the sky remains cloudless when the magician asks for rain, he concludes that the rain-god is not to be forced or turned from his inflexible course: so the moralist perceiving that injustice, wickedness, suffering does not diminish in a human society—finds the reason of it in the fact that man does not wish or know how to reform himself.

The illusion is the more remarkable because wherever "practical ethics" is efficacious it well knows how to use the mechanism of natural phenomena. Thus in ethical instruction properly so-called, given by parents, by old people, by priests and generally by those in authority, the laws of the association of ideas and images, of suggestion, of imitation, of social contagion are often most ingeniously used as if the discoveries of the most recent psychology were known: a pertinent and sagacious observation take their place. So there is established a well organized, clever

"practical ethics" most often exactly suited to the end it should attain. There is a striking contrast between the positive character of the method used in the instruction and the illusory character of the general ends towards which it tends in the thought of those who give it—when it is not a mere question (of course that is the most frequent case) of the transmission of the social customs of one generation to the next.

To sum up, if we regard the obligations and duties imposed on consciences at a given epoch as forming part of the given reality of "nature," we do not see that so far the efforts that tend to modify that reality are based on a scientific and positive study. Preferably the efforts are directed towards the research of suitable means to force man to act in conformity with the demands of duty. Such means taken as a whole, form, if we please, an art, but an art which moves entirely in the interior of the given ethical reality and by that fact alone, is very different from the rational art which would be based on the scientific knowledge of that reality in order to modify it. Besides, it is true that for a long time Utopians and reformers conceived or at least imagined a social condition very superior, according to them, to that which experience placed before their eyes. The eighteenth century philosophers especially, and their heirs Saint-Simon and Comte, had a very clear idea of politics which would be based on experimental science. Communists and socialists proposed measures in the nineteenth century which would, they thought, lead scientifically to an improvement of the social reality. In that sense the idea is not new ; it dates from far, and has developed and become clear in proportion as "ethical and social science" has tended more and more towards a positive conception of their object and method. It remains, nevertheless, as is inevitable, that the preoccupation of practice has been dominant in all ; and as our social science is still of small account, social art, so far, has for the most part been only empirical and not rational.

II

Objection: Will this not end in ethical scepticism? —Answer: Nothing is further from scepticism than the conception of a reality subject to laws, and of a rational action based on the knowledge of those laws—Meaning of that action—Under what conditions the improvement of a given social state is possible.

An objection, a protestation, perhaps, may have already arisen in the reader's mind. "Is that all that is to be gained from the practical point of view in your new conception of ethics? We expected a guiding principle for action, a rule of life which would render it possible to organize individual conduct and to introduce more justice into social relations; and everything is reduced to the conception, so far entirely schematic, of an ethical rational art which is to be realized later, we do not know when, directly sociological science has reached a sufficiently advanced stage! But while we are awaiting the results to be hoped for from that art, we must live, we must act, we must decide about serious individual and social questions. What are we to do? You give us no indication. Or rather you show us that ethics altogether are necessarily relative, variable in their action in all the other social series with which they are bound up, and that ours in particular is a part of the existing social reality, in its ideals as in its prescriptions; hence ethical scepticism must result almost of necessity, for it is clear that in a different civilization, different obligations would be imposed on consciences with an authority and a legality equal to those which in our eyes belong to our duties. Thus not only do you not offer us a rule of action, but so far as it depends on you, you destroy what we had. And your great scientific effort ends, definitely, in leaving us disabled, deprived of support, paralyzed before the necessities of life. Anything is preferable to such a state of impotence, anything, even doctrines that are least scientific and least acceptable to reason, provided that they respond to the exigencies of action. The rôle of the sceptic, Spinoza said, is to

keep silent. May the sceptics ordinarily refrain from touching the rules of practice."

We have already explicitly answered that objection, apparently so formidable [1] but actually in no way hostile to our conception.

Let us examine the last point first, for we have shown that the reproach of scepticism has no foundation. There is no reason that because our ethics is relative it should at once lose its value. We are not obliged to choose between the two alternatives: our ethics either has an absolute character or it loses all authority. The proof that an intermediate position is possible, and not paradoxical, is that all empirical systems of ethics (and they are numerous enough both in ancient and modern times!) obtain their places without thereby compromising the validity of their precepts. As relativity of knowledge may be admitted without depriving human knowledge of all logical value, so to admit the relativity of ethics, or rather of ethical systems, does not *ipso facto* deprive them of all authority and legality. But the authority and the legality themselves become relative and that is what we intended to state.

However, the most important part of the objection remains. Ethical art, which is to be founded later on the sciences of social nature, does not provide us with the rule of life of which we now have need. My answer is that the art, even if it was already constituted and sufficiently advanced, would not furnish what appears to be expected of it, a thing it has not the power to give. What will be its actual function? To modify the given ethical reality by rational processes for the good of human interests, just as mechanics and medicine intervene in physical and biological phenomena in view of similar interests. But that function supposes that the reality exists, that it is given objectively by the title of "nature," and that we must begin by spelling and deciphering that nature which we have not made, which in all probability, was not made for us by an intelligence like ours. The objection offered implies a contrary hypothesis. It consists at bottom in refusing to admit what we tried to prove

[1] See above, Chap. V, pts. ii and iii.

in the earlier chapters of this book, and to deny that ethical speculation has anything to do with given facts, that it is necessary to observe, analyze, classify, to reduce to laws, if we desire it to lead to applicable and fertile results. It maintains, on the contrary, that there is no ethical objective reality in the sense in which we understand it, that the very existence of ethics is bound up with the principle whence it is entirely derived, and if that principle was destroyed and overthrown, ethics would fall with it.

But besides the reasons which we have put forth, experience itself testifies against that objection. Every man living in a certain society finds a system, often very complicated, organized there with rules for his activity, dictating what he is or is not to do in a given case. Those rules assume the aspect of duties in his conscience ; but they are not the less in relation to him, an objective reality he has not made, which is imposed on him, the reaction of which, if he resists it, will make itself felt in him in the most positive and sometimes in the most cruel manner. It does not follow however that the individual is therefore deprived of all initiative in ethical matters. There as elsewhere reflection and reason call forth problems : scruples, hesitation, sometimes tragic conflicts arise in men's consciences. But such conflicts nearly always suppose the existence of an ethical objective reality. When a man, for instance, asks himself if he shall perform an action qualified as a crime on account of what, in his judgement, is a higher interest, in the name of another rule more sacred in his eyes, what does it involve for him ? Is it the existence of the ethical rule that he is going to violate ? Certainly not : his hesitation, the vivid idea of the penalties to which he is exposing himself go to prove that he has a very clear notion of his duty. What he finds doubtful is to know whether at the particular juncture it would be better to conform or to overstep the bounds and let happen what will. Just as the savage who violates a taboo testifies by the circumstances of his act to the existence and sacred character of the taboo as much as his companions who respect it ; so in our civilized society the delinquent and the criminal testify in their fashion to the existence of

ethical obligations which they disobey while the virtuous man obeys them. In short, in human societies, more or less advanced, nothing is easier to affirm than the objective reality of the obligatory rules of conduct. If they are not obeyed (and that occurs fairly often), reasons can generally be easily assigned; but it is not because the rules are unknown or despised. So philosophers are wrong, as we have said,[1] if they imagine that ethics has to be made; whatever the epoch and the society into which they are born, they find themselves confronted with objectively real ethics which is imposed on them as on others.

Indeed it seems difficult to dispute that obligatory ethical rules in a given society are closely bound up with the whole of the conditions which produced and maintain a certain condition of that society. We do not doubt that the curious ethics of the tribes of Central Australia are a "function" of the social organization of the tribes. Neither do we doubt that Chinese ethics are in the closest relation to the beliefs and to the family and economic organization of the country. The same observation evidently holds good in every case, that of our own civilization included. The ethical ideal of a society whatever it may be—no matter whether unique or multiple—is an expression of its life in the same way as is its language, art, religion, juridical and political institutions. Whether philosophical thought reduces it to an abstract and apparently rational form, or whether it remains in the condition of practical motive of action, changes the fact nothing at all. For the philosopher, like the poet, the artist, the statesman, is "representative" in his work of all who feel and think more or less confusedly what he is able to express in clear language. The more influence and authority his doctrine has, the more natural it is to admit that it is the conscience of all speaking by his voice. It is to be supposed that if the philosopher recommended methods of acting strange or hateful to the common conscience—a thing scarcely probable—his doctrine would be immediately rejected. It would more probably be entirely ignored. But that is an almost gratuitous hypothesis. In

[1] See above, Chap. V, pt. ii.

ethics the boldest innovators are of their time ; what they change bears small comparison with what they preserve. There, as elsewhere, the successful revolutions are those that have been so well prepared in the period immediately preceding that they become both natural and inevitable.

To conclude, it seems to us that there is no answer to the demand: "Give us a system of ethics!" because the demand has no object. Only the system they already have could be given to those who ask, because if another were suggested they would not accept it. A living society does not conform to a system of ethics *ad libitum*. Its ethics forms an integral part of the mass of phenomena bound up with those which constitute it: we think that we have already proved that. But does it follow that impassive and indifferent, we are reduced to assist in social evolution without greater means of influencing it than of influencing the motion of the planets? It is sufficient to give the ordinary answer to the reappearance of the "idle sophism." It is just when we understand that natural phenomena are subject to laws, and when we obtain scientific knowledge of those laws that we can undertake to modify them with certainty, if intervention on our part is possible. A rational art may then be substituted for more or less empirical and illusory practices. In the case which is occupying us, can we doubt that if we had a scientific knowledge of our society, that is, on the one hand, of the laws which rule the relations of phenomena in the different series, and of the series between themselves, and on the other, of the anterior conditions of which the present state of each of the series is the result, if, in short, we possessed statical and dynamical laws, can we doubt that the science would enable us to solve the greater number of conflicts of conscience, and to influence the social reality in the midst of which we live in the most economic and efficacious manner?

Consequently, if ethical rational art does not offer us a "system of ethics," if it does not teach us wherein "the sovereign good" resides, if it does not solve the "ethical problem," it promises not the less to have important con-

sequences ; for, thanks to it, the ethical reality can be improved within limits impossible to fix beforehand.

Improved, do you say ? But what meaning can that term have in a doctrine like yours ? You judge the value of institutions, laws, rules of action, by a principle which is exterior and superior to them ? You return to the point of view of those who in the name of ethics distinguish what ought to be from what is ? The objection is not new. We have already repeatedly met it. Refuted under one form, it immediately reappears under another, so vivacious is the sentiment which rouses it : " if ethics is not something absolute, superior in essence to the phenomenal reality, if it is allied with that reality and relative as it is, there is no ethics." But it is easy to understand that the given reality may be " improved " without the necessity of invoking an absolute ideal. Helmholtz said that the eye was a mediocre optical instrument, without appealing to the principle of final causes, by simply showing that a more advantageous disposition of the visual apparatus is conceivable. In the same way the sociologist can affirm such or such " imperfection " in the actual social reality without having recourse to any principle independent of experience. It is enough for him to show that such belief, for instance, or such institution is out of date, obsolete, and a real *impedimentum* for social life. Durkheim made that point perfectly clear. In fact the ethical homogeneity of a human society at any moment is always only apparent. Each century that it has traversed has perhaps left its indelible trace ; invasions, mixture of blood, relations with foreign civilizations, successive religious and social forms, myths and conceptions of the universe, in short the whole of the past life by reason of the continuity which is as it were, the unconscious memory of societies, exists in a more or less recognizable form in the life of the present. By what extraordinary chance do elements of such diverse dates and origin find themselves compatible ? Do they necessarily harmonize because they are coexistent ? Are not the intestine struggles continually going on in men's consciences and in communities often caused by that incompatibility ?

Thus by means of a social rational art, a given society can in some degree be improved. Let us take as an example an indispensable function in our own : the repression of offensive and criminal acts. Is our actual penal system the best conceivable ? Can we dissimulate that it rests on a mass of traditions and laws, beliefs and theories of the coherence of which we are uncertain, and which are joined together by reasons that are in no way logical reasons ? Do we agree between ourselves or with ourselves about the conditions and meaning of the responsibility, about the reason of penalties, about their useful purpose ? Fifty years ago the most widely received theory saw in punishment not only a means of intimidation and correction but also, and especially, reparation for the damage done to the social order. Now utilitarian theories predominate. Who knows that other theories will not find favour to-morrow ? The dialectical discussion may be prolonged or renewed indefinitely. But supposing that the sciences of social reality had made sufficient progress, and that we knew in a positive manner the physiological, psychological, and social conditions of the different sorts of offences and crimes : that knowledge would surely furnish rational means, which would no longer be matter for discussion, not perhaps for causing the disappearance of offences and crimes, but for taking preventive or repressive measures which would reduce them to their minimum ? The science would evidently lead to the constitution of a social hygiene. It is only our ignorance that prevents us from feeling how much we need it. Social hygiene would not of course furnish identical precepts for different societies, no more than bodily hygiene recommends the same manner of living in our climate and in the tropics. Just because it would be based on the science of the laws of phenomena, and on the knowledge of the past of each given society, it could prescribe for each what was best suited to it.

The same considerations apply to economic and political organizations, to pedagogy, etc. All the important series of social phenomena ought first to be studied in a scientific manner, and the rational art which will improve them will

arise from that study. But they cannot be studied nor amended by themselves. As Comte showed, the characteristic " consensus " of social facts is such that the evolution or variations of a given series (e.g. the economic series) cannot be understood without the knowledge of the other series, the influence of which is always felt by the former, which in its turn reacts on them. That is why social rational art cannot be founded on the science of certain categories of phenomena more accessible or better known, to the exclusion of the others. It will utilize all the sociological sciences, as medical art utilizes most of the biological sciences, and also the physical and chemical sciences. The principle of division of labour will doubtless apply here as elsewhere to the great advantage of theoretical science. It will be most advantageous and entirely legitimate to " divide difficulties in order to solve them better." The vast science of social nature will spread into a large number of branches. But from the point of view of application the close solidarity of the series is opposed to all intervention, even rational intervention in any one of them, which does not take into account the certain reaction on the other series, and the return shocks inevitably produced. History is full of unhappy surprises caused to empirics of the political art by the ignorance of that solidarity. Once known, it gives, on the contrary, a clear feeling of the difficulty, danger and often the futility of intervention.

Nothing is more instructive in this respect than the loud and ever recurring quarrel, which is waged by *réglementaristes* and abolitionists about prostitution. Every time the discussion is reopened, the same impossibility of limiting it reappears, and the most general questions are at once put forward. How is respect for individual liberty to be reconciled with the protection of the public health ? Ought prostitution to be subject to special laws ? How is it that it exists and is developed, a humiliating denial of our fine phrases about the respect due to the human person ? Is it not that the whole of our social organization is bound up with it, and that to do away with it and with the evils which it produces in its turn nothing less is required

than a radical transformation of properties and persons? For it is clear that while the common conscience condemns it in principle, it condones it in fact. Those are contradictions of which science will have to determine the cause and origin before social rational art can remedy them. Just as the physician takes into account both the general indications, and the special counter-indications in his patient's condition before formulating his prescription, so social art will not be applied automatically, like an algebraical formula, but will take into account in every special case, the whole of the circumstances belonging to the case. And like the physician again, when his intervention produces more harm than good, he will desist. For every sick man is not curable, and it is no more sure that every society can be improved. May be there are some which will continue to vegetate just as they are, or which will die. Why is a given society vigorous, able to resist, and to come out of terrible crises rejuvenated, while another seems to undergo a sort of process of decay and creeping paralysis? The fact is certain: are the conditions physiological, economic, ethical? or if a great number of causes are involved, as is most probable, what are they, and what part does each play in the total effect? On that point again we are confronted with our ignorance of social "nature" and of the laws by which it is governed. Until now only religions, and philosophies of history have answered those kinds of questions. We are only just beginning to conceive that one day science will answer them.

III

The prescriptions of a rational art are only of value for a given society and under given conditions—Necessity for criticism of the obligations prescribed by our own ethics—Impossibility of allowing them an immutable and universal value—Social hypocrisy a product of actual ethical teaching—How existing ethics can be an obstacle to ethical progress.

Although we cannot even now determine in a more exact manner what social rational art will be—every attempt of

that kind would be useless in the actual condition of our science—we can better see its relation to our ethical practice. In the first place it is not destined to be entirely substituted for it ; it will not disappear in order to make way for it. To fear or to hope so would be going back to the conception we have criticized under many forms, namely, that ethics is " to be made," and that it depends on us to make it " such or such." We have, on the contrary, tried to show that ethics in a given society is closely bound up with the other series of social phenomena, and with that series forms the existing social reality, and the rational art will act on that reality. It will not however transform it as if by the stroke of a magic wand, as if it was in our power to cause it suddenly to disappear and to replace it by another quite different, but it will modify it within the somewhat narrow limits in which knowledge of the laws will render our intervention possible.

Practical ethics, considering itself placed on a rational basis, claims an universal value for the obligations which it formulates. In Kant's phrase it legislates not only for all men of all times and countries, but for every free and reasoning being. In fact, its positive precepts are the expression of a given social order, applicable only in that social order, impracticable and even unintelligible for contemporaries who belong to a different civilization. Directly we get away from the general but undefined formulae, " be just, be kind," and there is a question of fixing the various rights and duties respect for which is named justice, irreducible divergences appear. The Mussulman does not understand the Western man. But the apparent universality of the principles conceals the actual particularity of the precepts.

Rational art occupies an exactly inverse position. It claims no universality of right. As it is based on the positive study of social reality, and as that study leads to the recognition of the fact that there exists not one human society, but *societies*, that a long solidarity with their own past makes them differ vastly one from the other, it does not hesitate to confess that each of those societies has its ethics,

like its language, religion, art and institutions. While admitting that comparative study may reveal what there is in common in the development of the ethics of the different societies, scientific intervention will not consist of identical measures everywhere, but it will be regulated by what is different in, and common to all cases. For instance, suppose that we have a scientific knowledge of our own society in its past and present, and also a scientific knowledge of the present and past of Chinese society, the application of the knowledge to the improvement of both societies would not coincide.

Social art, more modest in its claims than our actual practical ethics, is in reality more broadly human. For actual practical ethics, imagining itself to legislate for man "in himself," is really contented with hypostasizing the man of our civilization and our time under the name of humanity. Then it considers that it has the right to exact the same absolute respect for everything that seems obligatory to it. The field of its abstract speculation is undefined; the radius of its actual vision is very limited. It is quite otherwise with social rational art which takes sociological study for granted as a preliminary and indispensable condition, that is, the comparative and critical study of existing ethical systems. And the outcome of that study will doubtless be valuable practical indications which reflection would never have obtained by the abstract analysis of one ethical system or of one society.

Many consciences are perhaps frightened or revolted by the idea of assuming a critical attitude respecting their own ethics. They regard it as profanation, as derision of all that is most sacred in their eyes. We have already often met that sentimental energetic opposition, unconsidered and almost instinctive. It forms a fresh proof, if one is required, of the fact that "ethics" is a social objective reality like religion and law, and will no more vanish than they will, because, like them, it is studied scientifically. But we may go further. It is no paradox to maintain that a critical attitude towards our own ethics, far from menacing its existence, is, on the contrary, most helpful in favouring

and accelerating its progress. It will assist in weakening one of the most obstinate resistances to its development.

One of the most difficult of those resistances to overcome is the respect with which the common conscience envelops and protects *indifferently all* ways of acting, *all* obligations or interdictions, *all* rights and duties transmitted to it by the preceding generation. Uneasy on one point it bristles up, so to speak, on all. It invariably presents itself as a block which must not be touched on any of its sides. As, on the other hand, it feels itself closely bound up with religious beliefs, with juridical and other institutions, it desires to be inviolate, and nearly always succeeds. Thus, in spite of the diversity of ethical systems, evident if the whole mass of civilizations is taken into account, the stability of each in each existing civilization permits it, when it is reflected in philosophical speculation, to take itself for immutable, and consequently for absolute and eternal. The illusion can be explained although it cannot be justified. In fact, ethics develops with extreme slowness. In societies like that of China, it may seem entirely stagnant. De Groot almost represents it like that. In quickly moving societies like ours, its necessary solidarity with the other social series (religious, intellectual, economic, etc.) compels it to develop as they do. Yet it does so more slowly, and often at the cost of serious conflicts.

That existing ethics, by the tenacity with which it indistinctly defends all that composes it, can form an obstacle to ethical progress is only a special case of a long recognized law. The same may be said of the general organization of a given society in relation to its general progress : the same observation may be made on any particular social series. Indeed nothing seems more in conformity with the conditions of existence of " social nature " had we not a tendency—whether instinctive or acquired matters little, but almost irrepressible—to represent that nature to ourselves as organized and directed by " the principle of the best." Energetic forces of which we do not know the scientific laws are employed in every human society in maintaining and preserving what is (language, institutions, law, ethics, etc.),

and they form a counterbalance to those forces, as little known as the former, which tend to bring about changes. But how can we be sure that those forces act in a way to produce satisfactory results ? And may not what is satisfactory, useful, indispensable even at a given moment, become just the contrary after a certain time ? The habit of abstract speculation on concepts, for instance, which comes to us from the Greeks is one of the most precious legacies left us by that admirable people. Without it we should not have had our philosophy nor, doubtless, our sciences. But there comes a moment in which abstract dialectics working on concepts, far from furthering the progress of the science, hinders it : it is that habit which has paralyzed, at least partly, the ethical and social sciences. The present domestic and economic organization of China, is, for all we know, an advance on its former condition : but later, the organization seems to have put a stop to the development of Chinese civilization. The Civil Code in France has made progress during a century, at least in a large number of points in comparison with former juridical conditions ; but it is beginning to be felt very keenly that it, in its turn, is opposed to progress, and who knows when the obstacle will be overcome ?

In short every institution which, so to speak, consolidates and materializes an acquired progress, tends to become an obstacle in respect to further progress. What was protection becomes tyranny. The fortress becomes the prison, the right becomes a privilege. Violence is often needed to uproot tyrannies, destroy prisons, abolish privileges.

In relatively fast moving societies like ours, as all the social series do not develop *pari passu*, resistance to change is particularly evident in some of them, and in ethics more than in any of the others. The general conscience feels its stability threatened by the common evolution of the social organization. It is instinctively alarmed at the threat and is forced to defend itself by a more energetic affirmation of the immutability of ethics. A praiseworthy effort, perhaps, in principle, but one which necessarily results in a sort of generalized hypocrisy.

Individual consciences by a tacit convention pretend to accept certain duties as obligatory which they do not feel themselves actually obliged to fulfil. If we glance at the list of duties—duties towards ourselves, duties towards others, duties towards God—which still hold a place to-day in manuals of ethics, religious, lay, or neutral, we shall see how many of them have only an illusory and verbal reality for the actual conscience. But it may be said that it has always been so. The common conscience has never exactly corresponded with the state of advancement of the other social series in the detail of its prescriptions : it is enough that it is sufficiently in harmony with them not to be shocked by contradictions. That is true : but the discord does not only bear on points of detail. It touches fundamental questions, even the conception of life. It is proved by the "indifference" displayed by the man of to-day towards several of those traditional duties. He did not perhaps fulfil them better at other epochs, but at least when he violated them, he knew that he violated them. They were present to his conscience ; they made themselves felt by command, and at need, by remorse. Now they are no longer transgressed but ignored. Why ? Because the religious beliefs which were their soul and cause are themselves weakened, and no longer serve them as a support. As each of us can distinguish between the object of a real sanction of the common conscience, and a mere formal, verbal prescription or interdiction, it follows that our real ethics no longer coincides with the ethics which we profess. Among the obligations that all pretend to recognize, there are some apparently most important, that no one any longer troubles to fulfil. It is not as formerly because we are prevented by our weakness, egoism, or passions : it is because at bottom they are no longer felt to be obligations.

It may perhaps be alleged that because the universal hypocrisy is universal and deceives no one it does no great harm. Even if that is true the consequences of the hypocrisy would not be less grave socially. Firstly, it vitiates and corrupts ethical teaching. The qualities of uprightness, frankness, respect for oneself and others, which

that teaching should specially develop, are irremediably compromised. Every child will profess in words respect that he does not feel, and sees no one around him feel. He is taught to despise falsehood but it is practised in that very teaching, and he acquires the taste for and habit of practising it also : truly, a strange school of morality ! Besides, the habit of affirming we believe what we do not believe, adds a further difficulty, and not one of the least, to all those which already prevent us seeing things as they are. It makes the effort needed to subordinate our imagination to objective knowledge of the real more difficult and more rare. In obstinately maintaining the apparent reality of social "superstitions" it also inclines the conscience to preserve out of date beliefs of all sorts, obsolete institutions, everything in fact which in the actual state of society represents the dead weight of the past and hinders progress.

Tiresome as these inconveniences are, it would not doubtless be sufficient to insist on that to put an end to the hypocrisy that produces them. To force them to disappear is not an affair of simple persuasion. The only means of attaining such a result is perhaps to hold closely to the objective and scientific knowledge of the social reality, since such knowledge would enable us to distinguish what is truly living and real from what is only so in appearance. That is how the efficacious action of the "social rational art" of which as yet we have only the idea, would work.

IV

Conclusion—General provisional scheme of the evolution of the relations between the practical and the theoretical in ethics—Three great periods—Disappearance in the third of religious, teleological and anthropocentric postulates—Study of the social reality by a scientific method—Possible applications of that science in the future.

If now we abandon the practical point of view and

return to the consideration of human ethics in their concrete diversity from the point of view of knowledge, proceeding from the lowest to the most advanced, we shall distinguish three principal forms without claiming that they must all necessarily traverse the same stages of evolution. Nothing permits us to affirm *a priori* that it must be so, nor does anything so far prove it *a posteriori*.

In the first form, which may still be seen in inferior societies, and which probably existed in the others, the ethics of a given society at a given time is purely and simply what religious beliefs, institutions, economic conditions, the prevailing and past conditions of the society make it. It is in proportion to the other series of social phenomena, and if they develop, its evolution follows theirs according to laws that we still do not know, with more or less exactitude and rapidity. It depends on them solely: its eccentricities, or at least what seems so to us, are to be explained by the social whole of which it forms a part. It may then be called "spontaneous"; not that it appears without visible cause, since on the contrary everything has its reason in the given social reality, but because reflection does not intervene either to produce it or to modify it at least in any appreciable fashion. At that period every individual knows his ethical obligations just as he speaks his language, practises his religion, lives his social life. His conscience undistinguishable, or at least little distinguishable from that of the group, depends on certain collective ideas which determine his conduct: to ask whence they come, or on what their authority is founded, is an idea that does not occur to him. If it is suggested to him, it remains entirely incomprehensible to him. The feelings accompanying the collective ideas are only the stronger: compare, for example, the numerous cases in which a man who violates even involuntarily a *taboo* falls into mortal despair.

The most characteristic sign of that period is the "particularization" of ethical practices. There are special ones for men, for women; for the members of the totem, clan, family, and for those who are not members; special ones

with respect to such or such a category of persons, with respect to this animal or that, to this season of the year or to that, to this place or that, in time of peace or of war, etc. The network of obligations and interdictions may be extremely complex, and of an organic complexity comparable rather with that of languages than of works of human thought. The individual submits and conforms to them without reducing them to a principle. He accepts each special obligation and interdiction without troubling to inquire why it is defined and formulated in that way, and not in another. Many human ethics have not gone beyond that point. There are a great number of individuals in superior societies in whom that form of conscience is still to be recognized.

The second stage is that in which reflection begins to be applied to the ethical reality, not so much in order to gain knowledge of it—does not the immediate knowledge reside in the dictates of conscience ?—as to regulate and legitimize it in the eyes of reason. An effort at analysis and generalization tends to determine the ideas of good and evil, of justice and injustice, of virtue and vice, of reward and punishment, etc. It is under an abstract form, the work of moralists, psychologists, philosophers, and under a less systematic form, the work of story-tellers and poets. There are few human societies in which the effort has not been made. But in societies where there is little intellectual progress, it is especially the story-tellers and poets who express collective ideas and feelings; in more advanced societies, the psychologists, moralists, and philosophers employ a method, be it of direct observation and above all literary, be it of dialectical analysis and above all conceptual, which does not carry them very far towards positive knowledge of the social reality.[1] But all the same their attempt is of the greatest importance. In trying to base practical ethics on a principle peculiar to them, the invincible solidarity which binds them to the other social series is not broken ; but it helps to release that series from those with which it is more particularly in relation (religious

[1] See above, Chap. VII, pt. i.

beliefs and practices, juridical institutions). It procures it a relative independence, and by so doing, in some degree modifies the existing social reality. For, however loose the bond may be between the theoretical and practical ethics of a given society, the fact alone that practical ethics is represented, even wrongly, as deduced from theoretical ethics, tends to introduce some logical order, and, consequently, more reason into the mass of traditional practices. There is no doubt that the philosophical thought of the Greeks influenced the evolution of their ethics, and by it the ethics of the whole of Western civilization.

The characteristic sign of that period is the universalization of the principles of ethics. In the preceding phase, the objective social reality is merely imposed on each individual under the form of obligations and interdictions, and the respect which it inspired and exacted savoured something of religion. For philosophical thought the sentiment was laicised. The " imperativity " of the prescriptions, to be made intelligible, was based on the universality of the principles whence they were thought to be derived. Hence come the " systems " of ethics which connect the rich complexity of the ethical life with an unique principle, as metaphysicians reduce the whole phenomenal reality to the absolute or Being. The universal range of the principles is admitted without difficulty, because they appear rational, and especially because philosophical thought at that period " reflected " the existing ethical reality, but did not criticize it. It is a significant fact that an analogous character is found even in empirical doctrines. Opposed as they are to the *a priori*, to the absolute, to all that goes beyond experience, they also claim to determine by the method peculiar to them, the general conduct of man, good, justice, etc. Discord breaks out between the apparent universality of the formulae and the effective specialty of the obligations taught in their doctrines not less than in rationalist systems.

Lastly, at the present time we observe in the most advanced societies, from the intellectual point of view, the dawn of a third period in which social reality will be studied

objectively, methodically, by an army of eager scholars in the same spirit as those who have for so long attacked both inorganic and organic nature. In this period, of which we can hardly say that it is beginning, and of which we have endeavoured to define the guiding ideas, we learn that a reality most vividly felt can nevertheless be very ill known, and such, precisely, is the ethical reality imposed on each of us. At the same time we take into account that this ethical reality is different in different civilizations which have each their independent evolution : whence the possibility and even the necessity of a comparative study. After thus becoming familiarized with the idea of the plurality of systems of ethics, which correspond at each given epoch with the whole of the conditions existing in each society under consideration, we shall be prepared to make research into the religious, economic and other causes which have acted on them. Those researches evidently suppose special sociological sciences as well as general sociology. Later on, in a future of which we are hardly permitted to obtain a glimpse, those sciences will be sufficiently advanced to render applications possible. Rational arts will appear giving men a power over "social" nature, analogous, if not equal, to that which he already exercises over physical "nature." We already see some feeble beginnings in pedagogy and in social economy. In the interval, our society will continue to live with the ethics peculiar to it. In spite of the critical work inseparable from scientific research, there is no reason to fear a rapid decomposition for that ethics, the social forces which tend to preserve it even in its out of date or dead portions being greatly superior to the forces that tend to modify it, at least in the actual condition of our society.

The most characteristic trait of the period—so far at least as we may venture to define it—is the custom of considering the ethics of a given society, even of ours, in its necessary relation with the social reality of which it forms a part. It is an attitude both modest and critical. We no longer imagine that the conscience of the age in which we live and of the country we inhabit, is by a marvel-

lous coincidence the absolute conscience dictating what it is incumbent on every free and reasoning creature to do or not to do for all time. We rather ask if it does not still preserve some traces of the inferior or savage state which seems so far removed from us, and to which we are however so near; if we do not often unconsciously obey collective ideas and feelings the origin and meaning of which are lost for us and the importance of which in respect to our actual condition must be examined; if indeed, before constructing the improved ethics to which we aspire, we have not first to learn what is the ethics that we practise.

The knowledge of physical nature, all imperfect and young as our sciences still are, has enfranchised men's minds of a multitude of puerile or absurd conceptions, prejudices, unfounded beliefs, and imaginary systems; at the same time it has opened for us the world of the infinitely great and of the infinitely small which makes more powerful appeal to our soul than that made by the finite world with the earth and man for its centre. It is to be presumed that the sciences of social reality will not be less liberating or fruitful. They, too, will gradually free men's minds from puerile and absurd conceptions, from unfounded beliefs and imaginary systems, and will, as an immediate consequence, cause useless, barbarous, maleficent practices and the inhuman feelings connected with them to disappear more or less quickly, but quite surely. Similarly, the "social nature" which these sciences will cause us to know, will doubtless greatly surpass the "ethical world," and the "kingdom of ends," and the "city of God," poor and monotonous imaginings that theologians and philosophers have transmitted, in living complexity and pathetic interest.

In short, to borrow a wise saying from George Eliot: *We are all born in moral stupidity.* The reflection applies to societies as to individuals. If we desire to get out of that condition, science alone offers us a chance of success. Socrates and his great disciples said that admirably. Let us return to their idea; but instructed by the experience of centuries and the success of the sciences of physical nature, let us not return to their method. Let us

leave aside the dialectical analysis of concepts. Let us apply ourselves modestly but resolutely to the study of social reality, that is, to the scientific analysis of the past of different human societies and of the laws which rule the different series of social phenomena and their relations. Let us thus become aware both of our ignorance and our prejudices. If possible, let us measure all that we have to learn, and also all that we have to unlearn. The extent of the task will not terrify us if we reflect that it will be the work of centuries, and that each generation will have well deserved of the following if it has done only a small portion of what there is to do, undone a small portion of what has to be undone. We could not doubtless catch a glimpse of the task without the accumulated labour of the generations that have preceded us. But to say that we conceive ethical reality as an object of science, implies that we do not accept the whole heritage of the past with a uniform and religious feeling of respect. We feel bound, on the contrary, to submit it to a critical examination ; not according to our individual or collective feeling, which would only have a subjective value, but according to the scientific, objective knowledge of the social reality.

Thus we must always come back to the idea of the knowledge which frees. But do not let us imagine that the enfranchisement is produced of itself, nor that a sort of beneficent necessity assures in advance the progress of the sciences. The spectacle afforded by the history of humanity is quite different : we see scarcely anything except societies arrested in their development, stagnating or perishing or subject to conditions which have not permitted a decisive progress in the positive knowledge of nature. Greece alone was a striking exception, and we still live by her spirit. However, we shall only truly live by it, if it is active in us, that is, if we pursue the methodical conquest of the whole of the real by science. We must, it is true, conquer a formidable force of inertia. We must free ourselves from mental habits and preoccupations that past centuries have made both tyrannical and venerable if we would organize and successfully guide the objective

study of "ethical nature." But our society will not shun the effort that must be made: first, because it feels the necessity of it, and vigorous minds are already undertaking it; lastly, because the success and the uninterrupted progress of the sciences of physical nature offer example and afford encouragement.

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.