











**GUIDE TO THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF MORALS AND POLITICS**





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to find man's *raison d'être* in the next world rather than in this one, and locating his spiritual home in the city of God rather than in the city-state, had from the first introduced a distinction. This distinction became under the influence of Protestantism a division, so that by the time the Reformation had run its course, we find that we have on our hands what are in effect two distinct subjects, ethics and politics. Ethics discusses such matters as the meaning of the words good and bad, the criterion of right action, and the nature and source of moral obligation. Is there, it asks, one good, or are there many? Are right and wrong fundamental and independent principles in the universe, or merely the names which we give to the objects of our approval and disapproval? Is a right action one which is approved of by a moral sense, or one which proceeds from a free, moral will, or merely one which has the best possible consequences? If the latter, what do we mean by "best possible consequences"? These questions, which form the subject matter of ethics, will be set out in greater detail at the beginning of Chapter V. For the present, it is sufficient to point out that, though they are obviously interdependent—it is, for example, difficult to answer the question, what do I mean by saying that so and so is good?, without also implying an answer to the question, what is the criterion of right action? For if we hold that the word "good" means something, a right action must, presumably, be one which promotes that which is good—they do not *directly* involve any reference to political questions. Questions which relate to the nature and the source of moral obligation—for example, what is the meaning of the word "ought", and what the source of its authority—can be, and historically have been, discussed without any reference to the principles which underlie that form of human association which we call society, and writers of books on moral philosophy—Shaftesbury and Butler in the eighteenth century, Martineau in the nineteenth, and G. E. Moore in the twentieth—have not thought it necessary to enrich the conclusions of their ethical



theorising with a discussion of their social and political implications. Part II treats, then, of ethics as an isolated branch of enquiry from which, so far as possible, all reference to politics is excluded.

**Political Questions.** Similarly, during the period of three hundred years between the end of the Renaissance and the nineteenth century, a number of writers were treating of politics in more or less complete isolation from ethics. What, they asked, is the origin of society, and from what human needs does it spring? What are the principles which underlie it? What, in the light of these principles, is the *best* form of human society? Is it, for example, to be found in the rule of one, autocracy; in the rule of a few, aristocracy; or in the rule of all through their elected representatives, democracy? If it is to be found in the rule of the few, by reference to what qualifications should the few be selected? If in the rule of all, by what methods are the representatives of all to be chosen, and how far is it either wise or possible for all to delegate their authority to their representatives? Unless they delegate a substantial amount, the representatives cannot, it is obvious, act with the promptitude and assurance that effective government demands. If they do delegate a substantial amount, what guarantee have they that the representatives will not abuse their authority? Is there in a community with reference to every concrete situation a right or best thing to be done, apart from what any person or body of persons wishes to be done, or thinks ought to be done? What rights has the individual in relation to the State, and what are the limits of the authority of the State over the individual? Can the State, be said to possess any authority except such as is derived from the individuals who compose it; or any rights other than those which they confer upon it by consenting to belong to it? Why, in the last resort, should the individual obey the state and co-operate in running it? As in the case of the ethical questions, these political questions have been discussed, as if they belonged

to a separate and distinct branch of enquiry. They were so discussed by Hobbes and Locke and Rousseau in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by Hegel, Marx and Herbert Spencer in the nineteenth century. An account of these discussions will be found in Part III, where some of the more important theories which have been propounded in answer to these questions are summarised.

At this point I feel constrained to introduce a word of defence against anticipated criticism.

**Defence of Scheme.** The separation of ethics from politics in Parts II and III is for the purposes of exposition only. I am fully aware that the issues raised by these two branches of enquiry cannot be satisfactorily discussed in isolation. I am also aware that some of the writers whom I am proposing to assign to the one branch or to the other, treating them purely as writers on ethical or as writers upon political questions, did in fact pursue both: that Hume and Kant, for example, who appear in Part II, wrote on politics, T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley, whose views are discussed in Part III, on ethics. I urge in my defence that I am not writing a history, and that I am not seeking to be comprehensive. My concern is with the direction and divisions of human thought rather than with the history of its thinkers. My approach is logical rather than chronological. What I have sought to do is to present a number of theories which have been actually entertained by European thinkers upon a confused and ill-defined subject, or rather upon a pair of interlocking subjects, in the clearest and simplest form of arrangement which the nature of the subject matter permits. As to the names of those who, in the course of history, advanced the theories, I introduce them only when it is convenient to affix labels, or when a knowledge of the time and circumstances in which a particular theory was entertained may be held to contribute to an understanding of that which it asserts. Such a mode of treatment not only

permits, but requires a framework within which to arrange the multitudinous material, and it is precisely such a framework that the scheme I propose provides.

**Closing of the Split: The Twentieth Century.** In the twentieth century the streams have come together again. Their confluence is, indeed, one of the most distinctive features of the thought of our time. That ethics and politics are by their very nature inextricably interwoven must, I think, be conceded. It follows that the pursuit of either in isolation is apt to be unprofitable, and to yield results which are incapable of fruitful application. To this extent the twentieth century is in the right of it. At the same time, it is permissible to wonder whether contemporary thought in returning to the Greek standpoint, which insists upon their fusion, has not shown a tendency to adopt its perversion rather than its truth. That the good life for man cannot be realized apart from society is no doubt true, but that the good life for man can be realized only as *a part* of the good of society is a palpable falsehood, leading to those monstrosities of modern thinking which treat the individual only as a means to the well-being of the State.

That Hegel was right in supposing that "the existence of the State is the movement of God in the world. It is the ultimate power on earth; it is its own end and object. It is the ultimate end which has absolute rights against the individual": or Mussolini, in asserting that "the State is an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative only to be conceived of in their relation to the State"; or that "justice and Hitler's will are one and the same"—these things I do not believe.

**The Individual as an End in Himself.** In opposition to the view which finds its appropriate expression in such announcements, I should like at the outset to put on record my own, which is that the individual is an end in himself; that he is, indeed, the only thing which is an

end in itself; that the State is nothing apart from the individuals who compose it; that it has no value except such as is realized in their lives; and that its *raison d'être* is the establishment of those conditions, mental and spiritual as well as physical, in which individuals can develop their personalities and achieve such happiness as belongs to their natures. If, then, we are to speak at all of "the good of the State"—and the expression, harmless in itself, is one in which the experience of the last twenty years should have taught us to see danger—we should never do so without reminding ourselves that the State's good is entirely dependent on, that it is entirely constituted by, the quality and happiness of the lives of the individuals who are members of it.

It is not my intention in the pages that follow to advocate any particular view of ethics or politics. My concern will be to expound the views of others, not to air my own.<sup>1</sup> It is as well, however, that the reader should know at the outset what these are in order that he may be in a position to discount any bias into which they may betray me.

**The Author's Own Standpoint.** I confess myself, then, to be a liberal (in the sense in which to be a liberal does not preclude one from being a socialist) and a democrat. I believe the individual to be an end, and the State a means to the fulfilment of that end. It is an unsatisfactory and often a formidable means, and apt to display a Frankenstein-like tendency to destroy its creator, but it is a necessary one. I am in sympathy, therefore, with that attitude to the State which regards it as a necessary nuisance. I believe the object of government to be the good of the governed and, with certain qualifications, I believe that that good is to be found in the happiness

<sup>1</sup> I have introduced in the last Chapters of Parts II and IV (Chapters XII and XIX) a number of conclusions which owe, so far at least as their mode of presentation is concerned, something to the author. But these conclusions are presented only in the form of corollaries to which the preceding survey of the views of others has seemed to point.

of the governed. I do not hold in ethics the view that happiness is the sole end of life, but I do believe that it is the only one of which politics can presume to take account. The business of government then is, if I am right, to promote the happiness of the governed.

This view is in the modern world widely disowned. If I were to put to them the question, "Am I more properly to be conceived as an expression of the State's will, as a drop of blood in an ocean of racial purity, as a cog in a proletarian machine, as a unit in an industrial ant-state, or as an end in myself with a right to happiness in this life and a chance of immortality beyond it?" few of those who dominate the thought and set the standards of contemporary Europe would be found to answer that I am the last of these. I cannot, then, escape the reflection that in asserting that I am an end in myself, I am running counter to most of the theories which are fashionable to-day. Nevertheless, I cannot help myself. I have my doubts about the immortality, but I have none about the importance, of individuals. Souls are souls even if their life here is transitory, and though they may not be immortal, it is none the less, I conceive, the business of government to treat them as if they were. The announcement of the importance of the individual is, in my view, the great gift of Christianity to the world.

In ethics I hold that there are certain ends, truth and beauty for example, which possess value apart from human consciousness. In the realm of politics, however, I hold that the states of consciousness of individual men and women are alone worthy to be taken into account, and any theory must, in my view, be wrong which suggests that there can, in this sphere, be anything which is of greater importance than the experience of individual persons. I have attempted to defend this view elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and it is not my purpose to repeat the defence here.

I state my own opinions thus dogmatically, only that the reader may be in a better position to discount them when

<sup>1</sup> See my *Liberty To-day*, Chapters IV and VI.

following my exposition of others' views. In a book of this kind, clarity and impartiality are the touchstones of success. How far I have succeeded in being impartial, he will be in a better position to determine after reading the foregoing confession of faith. For, knowing the background from which I start, he will be the better able to judge whether, and to what extent, it has coloured the foreground.

Moreover, an initial confession of beliefs indicates frankness in the author and begets confidence in the reader. These are two admirable qualities in those who are proposing to undertake together the somewhat formidable journey through the pages of this book.

My thanks are due to the following for kindly reading through various chapters in manuscript and for making valuable suggestions which I have adopted:

Professor L. S. Stebbing (Chapter V)  
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I have also to record my indebtedness to Mr. E. W. F. Tomlin who discussed with me the plan of the book before it was written, supplied valuable notes and references, made many suggestions both as to contents and to mode of treatment, and read through the whole in manuscript.

C. E. M. JOAD

Hampstead, *December 1937*

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**PART I**

**ETHICS AND POLITICS:  
THE GREEKS**



# CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM STATED

## SOME GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

**The Common Conclusion of Greek Thought.** For the Greeks, ethics and politics were two aspects of a single enquiry. It was the business of ethics to prescribe the good life for the individual; it was the business of politics to determine the nature of the community in which the good life as prescribed by ethics could be lived. The *raison d'être* of politics, in other words, was to be found in an end beyond itself, an end which was ethical. The end was, however, one which could only be realized in an environment whose nature it was the purpose of politics to discover. This conclusion was common to Plato<sup>1</sup> and to Aristotle<sup>2</sup>. It is, indeed, at once the common and distinctive conclusion of all the Greek philosophers who concerned themselves with these questions. The purpose of this and the following chapters is to indicate the reasoning which led to it.

**That Society is Based on a Compact.** Our most convenient starting point is afforded by the speeches delivered by Glaucon and Adeimantus in the second book of Plato's *Republic*. Their avowed purpose is to show that what is called morality is in no way intrinsically superior to immorality. People, they affirm, are moral as a result not of conviction, but of convention. They act morally, that is to say, either because they fear the consequences of acting immorally, or because they desire the esteem with which the community has taken care to reward those who behave in a manner which is conducive to its advantage. In other words, it is the reputation not the reality of goodness that is desired, for nobody ever does right simply because it is right.

<sup>1</sup>427-346 B.C.

<sup>2</sup>384-322 B.C.

The case of Glaucon and Adeimantus falls into two parts. First, men are by nature lawless and non-moral; they are bundles of imperious desires, and their actions are prompted by no other motive than the gratification of their desires; this, at least, is true of man as he was in a state of nature. In course of time, however, it was borne in upon him that the measures necessary for the gratification of his desires were impeded by similar measures on the part of others seeking to gratify their desires. The acquisition of the necessities of life—food, for example, or shelter, or a wife—was exposed to serious dangers from the greater physical strength of neighbours in search of the same necessities as oneself, and the insecurity of life presently became intolerable. It was all very well, as Glaucon points out, to be able “to do injustice” oneself; but that others should be able to do injustice in return, was not so well. For they, after all, were many, while the individual was single-handed. Thus in a state of nature in which every man’s hand was against his fellows, the individual was liable to fare badly; so badly, indeed, that there came a time when he decided to forgo his right to gratify his desires as and when he pleased, provided that his neighbours made a similar concession, and to indulge only those of his desires which were not incompatible with the indulgence of the desires of others—which were not, that is to say, socially injurious. He decided, in other words, to live in society. Society is thus the result of a compact to end a state of nature which man’s purely selfish conduct had rendered intolerable.

**Man in Society.** Man in society proceeds to make laws, the object of which is to restrain himself and his fellow-citizens from anti-social conduct designed to satisfy the self irrespective of the convenience of others. As a member of society, the citizen conforms to its conventions and obeys its laws; but he does these things not from choice, but from fear; not, that is to say, because he naturally prefers to do what is right, but, lest a worse thing befall

him, if he transgress the ordinances of society. Morality, then, which we may identify with law-abiding conduct, is not natural to human nature; it is the offspring of convention, an offspring born not of a natural preference for doing right as compared with doing wrong, but of the consequences with which society has taken care to visit socially injurious conduct. Thus society is based upon a contract, expressed or implied, by which every man gives up his natural right to "aggress against" his fellows on condition that they give up their natural rights to "aggress against" him. The above argument is one which recurs frequently in the writings of political theorists. The particular form in which I have just summarized it follows fairly closely the reasoning of Hobbes,<sup>1</sup> the most consistently logical of all the exponents of the view that society is based upon a compact or contract.

**Gyges's Ring.** To return to Plato's exposition of the contract view of the origin of society, Glaucon proceeds to cite a legend which recalls how a certain Gyges became possessed of a ring which enabled him to become invisible at will. He was thereby placed in a position of complete irresponsibility, since, doing what he pleased, he was able to escape the consequences of his actions by becoming invisible. So he killed the king and took the king's wife and proceeded to establish the absolute rule of a despot whose sole object is the gratification of his own caprices. Now is there anybody, asks Glaucon, in effect, who, given a similar immunity, would not behave in a similar manner? Let us suppose that we could act precisely as we pleased without let or hindrance. Would we really behave as we do? And if honesty compels us to admit that we would not, are we not conceding the truth of Glaucon's main contention that nobody is moral from choice, but only because of his fear of the consequences, by means of which society has taken care to deter him from being any-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 472-478, for an account of Hobbes's political theory.

thing but moral? Remove the fear of these consequences, as, for example, by endowing a man with the power to become invisible at will, and he would at once lapse into the natural, lawless state of his pre-society days, satisfying his desires as and when he pleased, without reference to so-called moral considerations. Man, then, is by nature not just, but unjust; not moral, but non-moral.

**That Society Rewards the Virtuous.** Plato next introduces Adeimantus to reinforce the argument of Glaucon. Adeimantus does not deny that almost everybody does for the most part behave morally. Not only do men behave as if they valued morality; they do, he admits, in fact value it. But why do they value it? Because of the care which society has taken to cause it to appear valuable; because, in short, of the rewards which society has assigned as inducements to its pursuit. Thus the second part of the case is devoted to showing that man's apparent regard for morality is not really disinterested, is not, that is to say, a regard for morality in itself, but is generated by and proceeds from a consideration of the respective consequences of so-called moral and so-called immoral actions.

Human society, to commit an anachronism and adapt a metaphor of Schopenhauer's, is like a collection of hedgehogs driven together for the sake of warmth. Spikes in close proximity would prick, unless they were well felt. Hence those kinds of behaviour are encouraged by society which felt the spikes and so render social intercourse possible. Society's encouragement takes, in the first place, the form of moral approval; it defines as virtuous those actions which benefit society. Thus courage is regarded as morally good because the soldier's willingness to face the enemy is more advantageous to an army than the coward's practice of giving way to his natural reaction to belching cannon and running away; meekness and contentment, because those who are satisfied with their stations in life make good citizens and give no trouble to the Government; truth-telling, because if we all told lies,

nobody would believe anybody else, and there would be no point in telling lies. The advantage to others of the virtue of unselfishness is obvious, and selfishness is reprobated because society loses by the selfishness which it reprobates. Thus, virtuous conduct is simply the habit of acting in ways of which society approves, and society takes care to secure its performance by punishing with the ostracism of public opinion, backed by the penalties of the law, those who have the temerity to outrage its moral code. The conclusion is the one already reached; men act morally not because they are by nature virtuous, but to avoid the censure of society.

**That Honesty is the Best Policy.** But the rewards which society offers to the good—that is, to those who act in ways which conduce to its advantage—are not confined to the intangible benefits of moral approval. By a hundred maxims of the “Honesty is the best policy” type, we strive to convince a man that right conduct is the path to prosperity and happiness. Nor are the benefits accruing to “right conduct” confined to this world. Most social systems have emphasised the pleasure which the gods take in an honest man, being careful at the same to paint the results of displeasing the gods in the liveliest colours.

Thus, every man is bidden to choose between two different types of life; the first involves taking out a short-term insurance policy, the benefits of which are drawn in terms of earthly pleasures to be enjoyed here and now, pleasures both dubious—so say the moralists—and short lived; the second envisages a long-term policy involving the payment of certain premiums in the form of self-restraint and law-abiding conduct in the present, for which the holder is compensated with the prospect of an eternity of divine bliss in the hereafter. It is not surprising that most men choose the second, and, suppressing their natural, primitive desires, conform to the requirements of society by maintaining a decent level of moral behaviour.

This does not mean that they reverence morality and hate immorality, but simply that they prefer the consequences which attend the former to those with which society has taken care to discourage the latter. Thus, morality is honoured not for itself, but for its rewards. Compare justice and injustice as they are in themselves, stripped, that is to say, of their consequences; nay, more, visit the just man with the consequences which usually attend upon injustice, and give him the reputation of being unjust into the bargain, and who would wish to be just?

Is it, in the face of these arguments, possible to prove that justice is intrinsically superior to injustice, that morality, in other words, is *in itself* better than immorality? If it is possible, say Glaucon and Adeimantus in effect, will you please, Socrates, to prove it?

**A Political Answer to an Ethical Question.** The case is a formidable one, and the remainder of Plato's *Republic* either directly or by implication, is devoted to answering it. With the details of Socrates's<sup>1</sup> answer we are not at the moment concerned. What concerns our present purpose is to point out that though the question is an ethical one—is morality in itself superior to immorality and, if so, why?—the answer to it takes a political form. For, in order to answer it, Socrates proceeds to the construction of an ideal State.

**Reasons for Construction of the Ideal State.** The ostensible reason which Socrates gives for adopting this course is that, if we are in search of the principle of morality (a principle which in the *Republic* is called the principle of justice) in order that, having found out what it really is in itself, we may be in a position to decide whether it

<sup>1</sup> Socrates is the leading character of the *Republic* and, indeed, of most of Plato's Dialogues. There is controversy as to whether the Socrates of the Dialogues is closely modelled on the historical personage, or is merely a dramatic character invented as a mouthpiece for Plato's own ideas. The weight of opinion at present inclines to the former view, at any rate in regard to the Socrates of the earlier Dialogues.



is or is not desirable and whether, in particular, it is or is not superior to the opposite principle of immorality, we are more likely to find it where it is "writ large" than where it is "writ small". Now the State is the individual "writ large". Therefore, we are likely to find the principle of morality more easily in the State than in the individual, and most easily of all in the best of all possible States, since the best of all possible States is likely to exhibit it the most clearly. After what model, then, are we to conceive the best of all possible States? To answer the question, Socrates embarks upon the construction of an ideal State, an undertaking which occupies him more or less continuously throughout the rest of the *Republic*. The analogy between the State and the individual, an analogy which entails the important implication that what is true of the one will *mutatis mutandis* be true of the other, what is good for the one, good also for the other, is often invoked by writers on political theory, and we shall meet it again in the writings of nineteenth century political theorists. The question inevitably arises how far the analogy is a valid one; this question is considered in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> Plato regards the analogy as fruitful, frequently applying to the State the principles which he has discovered to operate in the soul of man, and vice versa interpreting the workings of the soul after the model of those of the State. It is on the basis of this analogy that in the *Republic* he now turns his attention to politics. Before we follow him, I propose to say something about the corollaries which follow from this somewhat abrupt transition, from the transition, that is to say, from an ethical question to a political answer. These are both important in themselves and highly characteristic of Greek thought.

**Socrates's Search for an Ordering Intelligence.** The first of these corollaries is embodied in the celebrated announcement that man is a social or political being. The implications of this announcement are far reaching.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 759-765.

Among the most important is the tendency of Greek thinkers to interpret happenings in terms of their final causes, and to explain people and things teleologically. In order that the significance of this tendency may be realized, it is necessary that I should give some account of the early thought of Socrates. (470-399 B.C.)

In a celebrated passage in the Dialogue called the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes the course of his early philosophical speculations: Originally, he says, he turned his attention to the outside world and endeavoured to find there an explanation of the things that puzzled him. His concern was, in fact, with what we should now call physics and astronomy. Pursuing his enquiries, he studied the works of the leading philosophers of the time. To his surprise he found that they threw no light on the questions that interested him. They only explained *how* things happened, while he was interested in *why* they happened as they did. For there must, he felt, be some reason why they happened as they did, and a reason implied a mind that reasoned. Hence, when Socrates heard that a philosopher, Anaxagoras, had said that the world was ordered by a Mind or Intelligence, he was exceedingly interested and looked forward to receiving further light on this fruitful suggestion. His hope was, however, disappointed, for it turned out that the only order in the universe that Anaxagoras postulated was the kind of order appropriate to a machine in which every part was determined by every other. As for the action of Intelligence, it was limited, apparently, to giving the initial impulsion to the machine; this done, it withdrew from the scene. Anaxagoras's Intelligence, in other words, started motion in space and thereafter mechanism reigned supreme.

Now whether this was or was not *the way* in which the universe worked, it threw no light at all upon the question why it worked as it did. If, Socrates argued, the reason why things happened as they did was that an Intelligence was ordering them, it would surely order them for the best. The reason why things are as they are must, in fact,

be that it is best that they should be as they are; or rather, that it is best that they should completely become themselves, for things do not, the fact is obvious, always realize the whole of their potentialities. Human beings, for example, only too often, remain undeveloped with capacities untrained and energies unused. Even plants do not always completely reproduce the characteristics of their kind. Hence, to say that it is best that things should be as they are, is to say that it is best that they should realize all that they have it in them to be, that they should, in fact, become completely themselves. The inference is that the explanation of things is to be found in the end or purpose which may be supposed to animate each living thing, which is that it should as completely as possible become itself.

In order to discover what becoming completely itself means in a special case, Socrates bids us direct our attention to the soul of man. His great contribution to philosophy was, indeed, his insistence on the importance of the individual soul. As we should now put it, he diverted the attention of speculation from physics to psychology, insisting that, if you wanted to know the essential nature of things, the proper method was not to take bits of matter to pieces and see what they were made of, but to try to understand the nature of the human soul. For if we fully understood the true nature of a soul, of a soul, that is to say that had succeeded in becoming completely itself, we should also understand the nature of the end or purpose of the soul's existence.

**Human Nature considered Teleologically.** For one of the distinguishing characteristics of a soul as opposed to a piece of matter is that, unlike matter, it may be conceived to have an end or purpose. You cannot appropriately ask about a piece of matter, what is it after, or what is it trying to become? But these are precisely the questions which are relevant to an enquiry into the nature of the soul of man. Hence any such enquiry must take into account the purpose

which the soul may be conceived to be fulfilling and the end which it is seeking to realize, since in the fulfilment of the purpose and the realization of the end will be found the reason for its being what it is. And not only the reason for its being what it is, but also the nature of what it is. For just as we may appropriately say that it is the nature of a watch to tell the time, describing its nature in terms of the activity which it is designed to perform, an activity which in turn depends upon the purpose which it is required to fulfil, so we may say that the nature of a soul will be realized in the performance of its specific function and the realization of its appropriate end. What is more, unless the function is performed, unless the end is achieved, the full nature of the soul will remain unrealized.

An interpretation of the nature of a thing in terms of the end or purpose which it may be regarded as seeking to realize, is usually known as a "teleological interpretation", the word "teleological" being derived from the Greek work *telos* which means end.

**The Scientific Mode of Explanation.** In affirming, then, that the resort to teleological modes of interpretation is characteristic of Greek thought, I am asserting that Greek thinkers habitually interpret actions and movements by reference to their end or goal. This method of explanation requires to be sharply distinguished from the method normally adopted by contemporary thinkers. The contemporary thinker who sets out to describe the nature of a thing, whether the thing in question is a developing organism, a moral code, or a political institution, tends to adopt what may broadly be called a scientific mode of description. A scientific mode of description is that which applies most appropriately to the workings of a machine. Every movement in a machine is the result of a preceding movement which is regarded as the cause of the movement in question. This preceding movement is linked with, and caused by, a yet earlier movement. Thus in seeking

to give an account of any particular movement which we may have set out to investigate we shall, if we adopt the scientific method, find ourselves committed to following a chain of linked movements which terminate only with the first movement which initially set the machine going. This movement was not itself uncaused; it was the effect of a stimulus applied to the machine from without. You wind the watch and the watch goes; you turn the crank and the engine starts. Thus the typical scientific explanation of an event tends to look for the exciting stimulus to which the event in question, whether it is the movement of a machine, or the behaviour of an insect, animal or man, may be regarded as a response.

Analogous to the explanation of the movements of a physical thing in terms of their mechanical causation is the explanation of the nature of a growing or developing thing in terms of its origins. Let us, by way of illustration, apply what I have called the scientific mode of explanation to the case of religion. Confronted by the fact of the religious consciousness, the anthropologist instinctively asks where did it originate?—and answers, among our savage ancestors. The life of the savage, he will point out, is at the mercy of forces which he cannot control. His crops are destroyed by rain or drought; his communities decimated by famine and pestilence. Accordingly, he “personalizes” these hostile forces, projecting into them a whole hierarchy of gods and spirits, some good, some bad, hoping by prayers, offerings and sacrifices to win the favour of the good and to avert the malevolence of the bad. Thus religion originally arose from the savage’s feelings of loneliness, and fear, which prompted him to attempt the propitiation, of the forces or beings who occasioned the fear. Having discovered the origin of religion in the feelings of fear, loneliness and helplessness, and in the need for propitiation, we shall, adopting the scientific mode of explanation, proceed to affirm that fear and propitiation are still its essential element to-day. Admittedly, they are in various ways disguised and sublimated. Nevertheless,

we shall maintain, man's fear of the unknown and the steps which he takes to remove or to mitigate his fear are, under all the various guises which they assume, the essential core of the religious impulse in the contemporary world.

Similarly we shall deduce from the discovery that civilized man has developed by traceable steps from the savage, that at heart his nature is still that of the savage, and that his civilization is only a veneer. As for man's ideal aspirations which express themselves in the sacrifice of the martyr, the endurance of the hero, the works of the artist, or the ardours and vigils of the saint, these, we shall insist, are only transformations of savage impulses or sublimations of animal wants.

**The Teleological Mode of Explanation.** In contrast to explanations in terms of origin teleological explanations look not to what a thing has been, but to what it is endeavouring to become, and interpret its nature in the light of its goal rather than in that of its source. The explanation of a thing in terms of its original nature, or constituent parts, may serve well enough when the thing in question is a piece of matter—it is, the teleologist would point out, distinctively the method of the physical sciences to take a thing to pieces and see what it is made of—but it is inadequate when the subject of enquiry is a living and developing organism, and grossly inappropriate when the organism in question is a human being.

Geneticists, for example, have attempted to exhibit the characteristics of a living organism as the automatic resultant of the combinations of its inherited genes. Such an explanation, although it may give us valuable information, must, the teleologist insists, always be inadequate; and its inadequacy is due to the fact that there is more in the fully developed man than in the genes from which his nature took its rise. For would you, the teleologist would ask, if you were trying to describe human nature, be justified in taking as your sample specimen an embryo, a baby, or even an adolescent? Would you not rather

take as your example a man in his prime when his powers are at their height, his faculties at full stretch, his potentialities fully realized? Imagine yourself to be exhibiting a member of the human species to an inhabitant of another planet who wanted to know what human nature was like. Is it not obvious that you would choose for your specimen not an embryo, not even a baby, but just such a fully developed adult as has been described? In short, the teleologist concludes, in order to understand and give an account of human nature you must observe it in its highest manifestation, and not merely in its initial condition, interpreting it by reference to what it may become, and not by reference to what it began by being.

In their application to human beings, it is difficult to resist the force of these contentions. It is obvious, for example, that to know that Einstein was once a fish-like embryo and still possesses the rudiments of gills, tells us very little about the mind of Einstein now. What is the conclusion? That it is to their fruits as well as to their roots—perhaps to their fruits rather than to their roots—that you must look when you are seeking to interpret the nature of living things. Now the investigation of fruits involves a reference to goals or ends, and the reference to goals or ends entails in its turn a consideration of function. For, it may be said, you can only find out what a thing is trying to become by observing the sort of things which at any given moment it is doing, while a complete account of what it is doing involves in its turn a reference to the purpose it is seeking to realize.

**The Two Modes of Interpretation Contrasted.** Let us now apply these two modes of interpretation to the consideration of a concrete case. You see a man running a race; you see, that is to say, that his legs are in rapid and continuous movement. What explanation are you to give of these movements?

Let us consider, first, the way in which the scientist would seek to account for them. What, he would ask, is

the predisposing cause which induces this moving figure to agitate its lower limbs with such frequency and rapidity? Now the scientist's answer would be that a set of impulses travelling along the figure's motor nervous system is producing certain contractions and expansions of his muscles. The impulses travelling along the motor nervous system would in their turn be said to be due to movements in the brain, and the movements in the brain would be thought of as responses to stimuli from the world outside, received by the brain in the shape of messages travelling to it from the sense organs.

The details of the answer could be expanded almost indefinitely, but whatever form the answer finally given assumed, it would need, if it were to qualify as a scientific explanation, to satisfy two conditions. These are that whatever is cited as the cause of the movements of the figure must be a physical thing or event, and must precede in time the movement which it causes. Now, the idea of winning the race, involving, as it does, a conception of something which does not as yet exist, namely, victory in this particular race, satisfies neither of these conditions; it is not physical and it is not past. It is precisely to this idea that, a teleologist would say, we must look for an explanation of why it is that the man's legs move as they do. And since the idea involves a reference to an end which the man's activity is seeking to realize, it constitutes an illustration of the teleological mode of explanation. This teleological mode of explanation which, in the case of the runner, happens to be the obvious one, is difficult to fit within the framework of the conceptions applicable to physical science. Science, it has frequently been said, finds difficulty in making provision for the conception of purpose. Science would also shrink from admitting that something which does not yet exist, but is as yet only in the future, namely, the attainment of victory, can influence events which precede it in time.

To take one more example of what is *prima facie* an obviously teleological activity, let us consider the case of



man working for an examination. Resisting the attractions of dancing, playing games, or going to the cinema, he sits at his table reading and making notes. Now it is, of course, possible to explain such behaviour mechanistically, in terms, that is to say, of some cause which is, as it were, pushing the student from behind into his studious activity. Possible, but difficult; for it is hard to see what precisely the pre-existing stimuli, in the light of a response to which his activity is to be regarded, can be. The most plausible account that we can give of what he is doing is to attribute it not to a push from behind but to a pull from in front. What pulls him and, because it pulls him, causes him to do what he does, is the examination, the thought of passing which, although it is a thought of something which does not yet exist in the physical world, nevertheless determines his present activity. To use the term most applicable to his conduct, we should say that his *motive* is "to get through" his examination. Now *motive* implies a goal or end not yet present which the activity motivated seeks to realize. Hence, a teleological explanation is one which regards activity as being determined by goals or ends which have still to be realized.

**Conclusions as to the Nature of Man.** We are now in a position to draw some conclusions in regard to the question from which the foregoing discussion took its rise, what is the essential nature of man? In introducing this question, I mentioned Socrates's turning away from physical to what we should now call psychological studies. He looked, we are told, to the soul of man for a key to the explanation of things. In the light of the preceding discussion, the significance of this statement will be apparent. In the first place, it is not enough, Socrates would say, when you are giving an account of the behaviour of human beings, to seek for your explanation in the pre-existing stimuli to which their bodies respond. You must also look to the goals, not yet reached, which they are seeking to achieve. Thus you will interpret idealism and

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self-sacrifice not as transformations of animal desires, but as intimations of the divine in man struggling for fuller expression. What is more, you will extend this mode of interpretation to all human psychological experiences, seeing even in our most elementary physical desires some traces, however faint, of aspirations to higher things. As opposed to those of an animal they are never, you will say, *purely* physical. Secondly, it is only in so far as human beings act teleologically, seeking by a distinctively human form of activity to achieve the ends appropriate to man, that they realise their full nature; that they become, in other words, entirely human.

With this clue to guide us, let us turn again to the problem raised by Glaucon and Adeimantus, and endeavour to answer the questions they raise in the spirit rather than according to the letter of what Socrates actually says in the early books of Plato's *Republic*.

**Conclusions in regard to Man in Society.** First, the whole conception of a pre-social state of man is misleading and irrelevant. For if the nature of a thing can only be determined by reference to its highest development, human nature can only be fully realized in a society. Whether there ever was a pre-social state of man we need not at this stage of the enquiry pause to consider. It is enough to point out that, if there was, it was the state of a being not fully human, for, it is obvious, the full potentialities of a man can only be realized in friendly and co-operative contact with his fellows. A race of congenital Robinson Crusoes would not be a race of human beings. They would, for example, be undeveloped morally. If I have nobody to lie to, nobody to steal from, nobody to betray and nobody to be unkind to, no occasions for the testing and training of my moral character arise. If I have nobody to protect, nobody to love, nobody to keep faith with, nobody to make sacrifices for, I am lacking equally in occasions for the moral experience and activity without which my character cannot develop. Now lacking

moral development and lacking in consequence a moral character I am not fully a man.

A man, in other words, is not a self-sufficient creature. He needs intercourse with his fellows in order that he may develop the full potentialities of his nature and, as the teleological view would insist, that he may become completely himself. Society, then, is necessary to human beings, if human beings are to be human, since without it they cannot become fully themselves. Thus the implications of the statement that man is a social or political being are not so much that men have always lived in society (although as a matter of historical fact this will probably be found to have been the case), as that it is only in society that they can become themselves. Society, in other words, is necessary to men in order that they may be men.

**How far Morality is merely Conventional.** What, in the second place, becomes of Glaucon's suggestion that morality is embraced by men only as a second best, because of their inability to enjoy the benefits of their own aggression without suffering the discomforts attendant upon being the victims of the aggression of others? The suggestion was, it will be remembered, based on the alleged artificiality of society. What was natural for man, Glaucon urged, was to commit aggression: finding, however, that the miseries resulting from a universal aggressiveness were intolerable, he gave up his own right to aggression and accepted the protection of society. In society, admittedly, he acts as a law-abiding citizen, but only through fear of the consequences, if he does not. Thus, Glaucon argued, morality is merely conventional while immorality is natural. Certainly it is, Socrates replies in effect; if society is itself merely conventional, since morality is, from this point of view, at once the prop and the product of society. But emphatically it is not, if society is itself natural. Conceive of society as something imposed by force in the teeth of man's natural anti-social instincts, and you will be bound to think of morality as something which is also imposed and which is,

therefore, conventional. But conceive of society as that which is an essential condition of human nature, teleologically regarded, realizing itself, and society is just as "natural" as your alleged state of nature. In fact it is more natural, since men in a state of nature, if ever there was such a state, were not fully men. But if the foundation of your case, which is the amorality of an alleged pre-social state of nature is unsound, the superstructure, that man is naturally amoral and is constrained to morality only by fear and convention, falls to the ground.

At this point a further question suggests itself. If the Glauconian view of human nature is the right one, how, one is entitled to ask, is the existence of society to be explained at all? For on Glaucon's premises nobody could ever have co-operated with anybody else, because nobody would ever have been willing to trust anybody else. It is no answer to the question to say that, while trustful co-operation is not natural to man, it is nevertheless found to pervade the relationships of men in society, because men in society have agreed to forgo their natural aggressiveness and to co-operate with their fellows as a result of the contract on which society is based; for it is the making of the contract which is in question, and the making of the contract presupposes a willingness to trust one another on the part of those consenting to participate in it. Now such a willingness and the trustingness and trustworthiness it pre-supposes must have existed *prior* to the contract which was only rendered possible by reason of the fact that they existed. They could not, therefore, have been the products of it. The inference seems to be that, if Glaucon is right, the contract to form society could never have been made.

**That Society is Natural to Man.** What follows? That some form of social organization among human beings must be postulated from the first; or rather, from the very beginning of the period at which they may first legitimately be called human. Whether Neanderthal man lived in

society, the political philosopher does not know, nor does he very much care; it is a question which he is prepared to leave to the anthropologist. He is content to point out that, since it is impossible to explain the coming into existence of society, unless the capacity for living in it was already present in the human beings who were members of it, and since this capacity cannot have arisen, as it were, out of nothing, we are driven to postulate the presence of this capacity from the earliest moment at which human beings are first entitled to be called human; or rather, if the phrase be preferred, we are driven to postulate *the potentiality* for this capacity, a potentiality which must from the first have expressed itself in some kind of social organization, however rudimentary. Thus a new meaning must now be given to the definition of man as a social or political being. Not only is man a being who only attains his real nature in society; he is a being who has always lived in some form or other of society, even if his earliest society was only that of the family group. Thus what we may call the social elements in man have as good a right to be called natural—"natural", that is to say, not only in the "teleological" sense as indicating what, in his fullest development, he may become, but in the "original" sense as indicating what, in his earliest beginnings, he once was—as those anti-social proclivities which Glaucon attributes to man in the state of nature.

I have elaborated these points at some length, partly because of their intrinsic importance, partly because of the frequency with which they recur in the subsequent history of political thought. The dominant political theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also based upon the conception of a state of nature which terminated with the formation of a society. The termination of the state of nature was conceived as an historical act, the implication being that society and the social, law-abiding conduct which it entails, are artificial in some sense in which the state of nature characterized by anti-social conduct, is natural. These Social Contract theories, as they are called,

will be surveyed in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, all exposed in one form or another to the criticisms which I have brought against the theory as originally expounded by Glaucon.

**How far Society is Based upon Force.** A third conclusion suggested by the teleological view of human nature, as reaching its fulfilment only in society, relates to the place and function of force in a society. The question is often raised, in what sense and to what extent is a society based upon force. According to the arguments advanced by Glaucon, arguments which were later to be developed by the philosopher Hobbes<sup>2</sup>, force is part of the nature of society. That it should be so regarded, follows necessarily from the general position which Glaucon adopts. If morality is something which is imposed by convention in the teeth of man's "natural" tendency, which is to be amoral, then it is only by force that the minimum of moral conduct upon which the working of society depends, can be maintained. We keep the laws, says Glaucon, not because of a natural law-abidingness, but through fear of the consequences if we break them. The application of these consequences depends upon the presence of force. Thus the police force and the prisons are essential elements in every society, since, if there were no police force and no prisons, the law would not be obeyed and society would break up. If, indeed, they are not essential, Glaucon asks, why does every society take care to have them. The reason can only be that the rulers of society know that its members obey the laws unwillingly and that it is necessary, therefore, if society is to be maintained, that it should be able to invoke force to compel men to do what they would not do of choice.

Put in this form, the argument is highly plausible; yet if its full implications were admitted, if, that is to say, we were to agree that people only obeyed the laws

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 472-512.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 472-478.



unwillingly through fear of the consequences if they did not, the whole conception of society as natural to man would have to be abandoned. The existence in every society of a police force and of prisons has, therefore, in some way to be explained within the framework of that alternative conception of the origin and nature of society which, following the thought of Socrates in the *Republic*, I have been endeavouring to build up, the conception, namely, of society as a natural and therefore inevitable expression of natural human tendencies.

The explanation might run as follows. We may agree with Glaucon that force is a necessary and inevitable element in every society; even, if the phrase be pressed, that society is "based upon force", without committing ourselves to Glaucon's deduction that because of this necessity for force in a society, men obey the laws unwillingly. Force, it may be said, is necessary in a society not for the restraint of the great mass of the citizens who, being socially minded, have no incentive to act otherwise than in accordance with the commands of the law and the prescriptions of the accepted moral code, but against an unrepresentative few whose activities, if unchecked, would make the continuance of society impossible.

**That A Background of Ordered Security is Necessary to all Civilized Activity.** Every society, it must be admitted, contains a number of anti-social individuals who do, in fact, obey its laws unwillingly. Anticipating a later discussion,<sup>1</sup> I may point out here that evil is parasitic upon good, in the sense that it is only worth while for some people to do wrong because most people do right. Thus the burglar is parasitic upon the householder, since if all were burglars there would be no property to burgle. It is the many honest men who make dishonesty profitable, just as it is the many truthful men who make lying fruitful, since, if all men were dishonest, there would be no advantage to be gained by dishonesty, while, if all told lies, nobody

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 208, 209.

would believe anybody else and lying would lose its point.<sup>1</sup> Since it is the existence of law-abiding citizens that calls into being the law-breaking thug, it is clearly the business of the citizen to restrain the thug. The philosopher cannot philosophize while his neighbour is abducting his wife, nor can the artist paint while the burglar is running off with his canvases. In this sense all civilized activity is dependent upon a minimum background of ordered security, and the maintenance of this background is a condition of its continuance. The use of force, then, is required in society not against the normal, social citizen but against the exceptional, anti-social citizen whom the law-abiding activities of the normal citizen call into existence, that he may be restrained from rendering those activities impossible. It follows that it is society's business to maintain that minimum standard of behaviour on the part of all which is the indispensable condition of the pursuit of the good life on the part of any. With this object, and with this alone, it is entitled, by means of the law, backed by force, to curtail a liberty whose exercise would threaten the purpose for which the State exists, and by reference to its ability to promote which its activities must be justified.

**The Nature of Excellence in a State.** There is a fourth conclusion which follows from the terms of Socrates's answer to Glaucon, a conclusion which leads us to a consideration of Plato's ethical position. Human nature, we have argued, can only be fully realized in society; but, Plato adds, the society must be one which really is a society. Now societies can, it is obvious, vary in merit. (It will be convenient to adopt the accepted phraseology from this point and to introduce the word "State" although, for reasons to be given later,<sup>2</sup> the identification of the "State" with society is apt to be highly misleading.) States

<sup>1</sup> The significance of this fact will be enlarged upon in connection with the discussion of Kant's ethics in Chapter VI, pp. 208, 209.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 765-767.

then, it is obvious, can vary. What is a good State? One that makes the good life possible for all its citizens, or rather—for it is important that we should not at this stage beg controversial questions—one that establishes the conditions in which the good life can be lived by all citizens. In so far as the State performs this function, in so far, that is to say, as it establishes these conditions, it realizes the end for which it exists. Now according to the teleological view outlined above, it is only in so far as a thing achieves its end that it can be said to become itself and realize its true nature. It follows that only the best State is completely a State, since it is only the best State which fulfils the function for which the State exists in relation to its citizens.

This leads to a double conclusion: first, the good life for the individual can be realized only in a State, and the best life in the best State; secondly, the best State is one whose excellence consists in making it possible for all its citizens to live the best kind of life; in so far as it falls short of the achievement of this excellence, it falls short of the full realization of its proper nature, and fails, to be fully a State. What meaning, then, are we in this connection to give to the word "best"? To answer this question, we must consider Plato's ethical philosophy.

#### *Books*

The Republic of Plato, Book II.

The standard edition of Plato is Benjamin Jowett's, *The Dialogues of Plato*.

The Republic of Plato, translated by A. D. Lindsay, contains a valuable introduction to and summary of the text.

NETTLESHIP, R. L. *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, Chapter III.

RIEGER, C. *The Essence of Plato's Philosophy*.

✗ For a modern treatment of mechanism and teleology see C. D. Broad's, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, Section A.

## CHAPTER II: THE ETHICS OF SOCRATES AND PLATO

**The Double Problem of Ethics.** In order to answer the question with which the last chapter concluded—and the answer, as always in Plato's thought, is, broadly speaking, the same for the individual as it is for the community—we must again retrace our steps and give some account of Socrates's ethical theory, of which Plato's is a developed version. Socrates's ethical position is summed up in a celebrated aphorism which asserts simply that virtue is knowledge, or is a form of knowledge. A man, in Socrates's view, had only to know what was good in order to desire it and to pursue it. Hence evil is a form of ignorance; the bad man is he who does not know what the good is.

Now ethics, as I shall have occasion in the course of subsequent discussions to point out, is not an exact science. There are no experts in ethics to whom to refer for instruction and information, no precise standards by which to measure good and bad. For an answer to ethical questions our best course is to refer to the moral consciousness of ordinary men and women in order to find what its deliverances are, and then to reflect upon their implications. With a view to throwing into relief the peculiarity of Socrates's position, it will be useful to adopt this course now. The moral consciousness of mankind seems to have been fairly unanimous in reporting that the ethical problem which confronts human beings is a double one. There is the problem, first, of knowing what your duty is, and the problem, secondly, of doing what you know to be your duty. The first may be called the problem of insight, the second, the problem of will. Now there cannot, I think, be any doubt that in the ordinary course of daily life both these problems do in fact frequently arise.

**The Problem of Insight.** Consider, for example, the problem of insight. One of the commonest forms in which it presents itself is that of conflicting claims. It happens from time to time that two claims are made upon a man, both of which are such as he is morally required to recognize, both of which he does in fact recognize, but which are, nevertheless, such that, if he yields to the one he is inevitably bound to ignore the other. People are accustomed to cite a number of familiar stock cases to illustrate this competition between conflicting claims. There is the case of the man on a sinking ship who wonders whether he should save his mother or his wife. There is only one place left in the lifeboat, and it rests with him to determine which of the two shall fill it; he ought to save both, but he can only save one. There is the example of the man in the burning house confronted with the problem of whether to rescue a baby or a picture. The picture is an old master whose æsthetic value is universally acclaimed. Moreover, the baby can be replaced, but the picture cannot. Nevertheless, the baby is alive and the claims of human life, it may be said, are paramount. The problem which confronts the Christian conscientious objector in war-time is essentially of this order. He has a duty to the State to which he owes not only protection from violence, but his education, his training, his upbringing, his traditions, in a word the whole of that environment, moral, physical and spiritual which, as Plato would say, has made him what he is. He also has a loyalty to a creed, owning, he believes, supernatural authority, which bids him not to take human life, however supposedly good the cause.

In one form or another, this problem of conflicting claims affords the theme of many of the world's greatest tragedies. The typical tragic situation, as Aristotle has pointed out, is not that of the weak man knowing the right course but tempted by avarice, lust or ambition to embark upon the wrong. It is that of the strong man torn by conflicting duties, or distracted by the pulls of com-

peting loyalties. He ought, he feels, to obey the claims of both these conflicting loyalties, and he wants to do what he ought to do; but the circumstances of the case are such that he cannot give his allegiance to both. Thus Antigone in Sophocles's play is torn between loyalty to her dead brother, Polynices, which requires that she should bury his body and the obedience she owes to the king Creon, who has forbidden burial, reinforced by her love for Creon's son, Haemon. In *Hamlet*, the problem is essentially one of conflicting obligations. There is the obligation, as Hamlet conceives it, to avenge his father's murder, but there is also the obligation not to shed blood; for it is far from clear to a civilized man that the best way of expressing moral disapproval of a particular form of behaviour is to emulate it. The natural disinclination to shed the blood of his uncle is reinforced by the duty he owes to his mother. Yet to refrain is to betray his father's memory. It is precisely upon such problems as these that many of the world's greatest tragedies turn, and they are essentially problems of insight. One wants to do what is right but, unfortunately, one does not know what is right.

**The Problem of Will.** The problem of insight, then, is a real one. Nevertheless, it is to the problem of will that most writers on ethics have devoted the greater part of their attention. This is particularly true of those ethical writers who have been influenced by Christianity. For Christianity, arguing from the postulate of original sin, has always emphasized the wickedness of the human heart and the weakness of the human will. The typical ethical problem for Christianity is the problem of temptation. The problem of temptation presupposes that knowing what is right, one is, nevertheless, tempted to do something which one believes to be wrong, and the temptation arises because of the wickedness of one's heart and the weakness of one's will. The spirit, in short, is willing, but the flesh is weak. Hence the Christian insists upon the importance of prayer and the need for religious exercises to

strengthen the spirit in order that it may resist temptation. There is a Latin tag

“ . . . Video meliora proboque:  
Deteriora sequor . . . ”

I recognize the better course and approve it, but I follow the worse, which concisely summarizes this problem of will.

Both these problems, the popular consciousness would I think agree, are real problems. They are also different problems. A man may possess an acute moral insight and a sensitive conscience, yet habitually ignore what his insight approves and his conscience enjoins. Alternatively, he may be a man of goodwill and strong moral character yet through dullness of understanding or grossness of nature, he may waste his good intentions upon unworthy ends. Any ethical system which aims at completeness must, then, it is obvious, do justice to both these problems. Thus Aristotle begins his treatise on ethics by recognizing two different kinds of moral excellence, excellences of intellect and excellences of character, the word “character” being used to denote the feelings, desires and passions which are, or should be, under the control of the will. Excellences of character can, he holds, be implanted by education. We can, that is to say, be trained to obey right rules of conduct before we can see for ourselves that they are right. What is more, unless we are first trained to obey them, we shall never, most of us, come to see for ourselves the rightness of that which our training has inculcated. We must, in fact, act as if certain forms of conduct were right and certain things good, taking their rightness and goodness on trust from others, before we are in a position to see that they are right and good for ourselves. Goodness of moral character must, then, in Aristotle’s view, come before goodness of moral intellect. Indeed, it is a necessary condition of goodness of moral intellect. Thus, to revert to the phraseology which I have been employing, the problem of will must be solved for us by training,

discipline and education before we can solve for ourselves the problem of insight. Many of us, in the view both of Aristotle and Plato, do in fact remain incapable to the end of solving for ourselves the problem of insight. Hence the importance for these philosophers of right education, right laws and right religion which will form for us the habit of right living, thus relieving us of the burden of solving for ourselves a problem which is beyond the reach of our own unaided intellects.

**Preliminary Statement of Hedonism.** Now the peculiarity of Socrates's position is that it recognizes only one of the two major problems of ethics, the one which I have called the problem of insight. Socrates held that, such is the compelling power of what he called good or "the Good" over the human soul, that a man has only to recognize what is good to pursue it. The moral problem, then, is simply a problem of recognition.

The full implications of this view may be most clearly seen, if we take a brief preliminary glance at a somewhat similar position which has been maintained in regard to pleasure. Let us suppose that, for the sake of argument, we substitute for Socrates's word "good" the word "pleasure." A view very commonly held is that, whatever a man does, he does it solely in order to obtain pleasure for himself. This view is known as Hedonism, from the Greek word *hedone* which means pleasure. Why, for example, are people unselfish? Because, the supporter of Hedonism asserts, they derive more pleasure from pleasing others than from directly pleasing themselves. Therefore, in sacrificing themselves for the sake of other people they are only, after all, doing what they like doing best; or, more cynically, by means of self-sacrifice they obtain the pleasures of the complacent prig, the agreeable conviction of their own righteousness, or the feeling of superiority which men derive from their knowledge that other people are under an obligation to them; or, alternatively, they are masochists and enjoy the masochist's pleasure of self-mortification.



All or any of these moral and spiritual pleasures, healthy or perverted, outweigh for them the straightforward pleasures of comfort, appetite or self-indulgence.

Why does a martyr go to the stake for his convictions? Because, being by definition an obstinate, self-willed sort of person, he insists upon enjoying the pleasure of having his own way, the pleasure of defying his enemies, the pleasure of occupying the centre of the stage, even when he has to pay for them by the pain of the fire. When, in due course, he feels the latter, it is too late to reverse his choice. Or again, if we prefer a less cynical interpretation, we may say that the martyr, being a man of high principles and strong conviction, finds it more painful to betray his faith than to face the fire. For it is in this guise that the two alternatives present themselves to him. In a word, if people did not really *prefer* the course they adopt, they would not adopt it. If they did not really *think* that they would like best to do what they in fact do, they would not do it. This is true both of the altruist and of the martyr. Now it is important to realize that the circumstance that a man may not obtain pleasure, when he expects to do so, is no disproof of the view just outlined. It is enough that he should *think* that he will obtain it. In point of fact, men frequently make mistakes of judgment as a result of which they expect that courses of action will bring them pleasure which do in fact bring them pain; and not only pain, but more pain than other courses, which it was open to them to follow. But when they embarked upon the courses of action in question, it was not because they were not aiming at pleasure, but because they had made a false estimate of the consequences of what they were proposing to do. Thus to perform an action which brings the agent more pain or less pleasure than another action which he might have performed is a sort of foolishness; it is the result of bad judgment, the agent, if the hedonist is right, having made a miscalculation. It follows that to suffer pain when one might have enjoyed pleasure is to be guilty of an intellectual error.

I have deliberately used ambiguous language in the exposition of the view that the motive of every action is to obtain pleasure for the agent because, as we shall see later, it is difficult to state the hedonist position with precision without exposing some of the difficulties which underlie it. Some of these difficulties will be considered in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> My present purpose is to state the view as persuasively as I can, in order that it may serve to illustrate the very similar view which Socrates advanced in regard to virtue.

**Socrates on Virtue.** While the hedonists maintained that men always pursue what they take to be their pleasure, Socrates asserted that men always pursue what they take to be their good. Indeed they cannot help themselves, for they are so constituted that what they believe to be good, that they must always pursue. For Socrates, as for the hedonists, any apparent examples to the contrary can always on analysis be shown to be cases of miscalculation. Just as, according to the hedonists, human beings act in such a way as to induce boredom or cause themselves pain because they have falsely estimated the results of their actions, thinking that they will enjoy these results when in fact they do not, so, for Socrates, any apparent examples of a man's failure to pursue the Good are always due to his false estimate of what the Good is. Such cases occur because men think that something is good when in point of fact it turns out not to be so. Now not to do what one thinks to be right, not to pursue what one takes to be the Good is wrong; it is an evil. Evil, then, turns out to be due to a false estimate of what is good; it is, that is to say, a form of intellectual deficiency.

**Courage and Temperance as Forms of Knowledge.** The arguments by which Socrates maintains this view are as follows. Let us, he would say, consider the case of any virtue, for example the virtue of courage. Now it is

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 396-415, for a discussion of Hedonism.

not the case that the brave man is never afraid. Every man has a natural tendency to shrink from storming a hill crowned by a line of machine-guns with which the enemy are sweeping its slopes. "There is only one universal passion," says Napoleon in Shaw's play, *The Man of Destiny*, "fear. Of all the thousand qualities a man may have, the only one you will find as certainly in the youngest drummer boy in my army as in me is fear. But," he continues, "it is fear that makes men fight." For, in spite of their fear, soldiers do in fact advance, rush the slopes and capture the enemy's guns. Why do they? Because, says Socrates, they are more afraid of some things, even than they are of the guns of the enemy. Of what things? Of such things, for example, as the doing of what is disgraceful, of feeling shame, of the reputation for cowardice, of dishonouring the regiment, of betraying their comrades. And in case these psychological fears should not be sufficient, generals have taken care to ensure that they shall be backed by a system of discipline, which trains every soldier to carry constantly at the back of his mind the thought of a court-martial for cowardice, if he runs away in the face of the enemy. Thus, as somebody remarked during the last war, "discipline is a device for substituting the certainty of being shot if you don't go 'over the top,' for the possibility of being shot if you do", the result being that soldiers go 'over the top.' However this may be, the point upon which Socrates insists, in the Dialogue called the *Laches*, is that the brave man no less than the coward is afraid. Why, then, does he differ from a coward? Because, says Socrates, he is afraid of different things, and the things he fears, the doing of what is disgraceful and so on, are such as he ought to be afraid of. They are, that is to say, truly formidable while the other things, the enemy's guns, are such as ought to be faced. The brave man in fact knows what is truly formidable, while the coward does not; thus the difference between the brave man and the coward is one of knowledge or insight. One knows what ought to be feared and the other does not.

Or consider the virtue of temperance, which is discussed in the Dialogue known as the *Charmides*. Temperance consists neither in the indulgence of every side of our nature nor in the repression of every side. On the contrary, true temperance implies that some rule of conduct has been adopted according to which every part of our nature is permitted as much indulgence as is good for it, and will not interfere with the development of the rest. Who or what is it that lays down this rule? Clearly it is reason. Temperance, then, is a form of self-knowledge. It depends upon, or consists in, a recognition by reason of how much scope should be given to the various appetites and passions; it depends upon our knowing which parts of our nature should be in subjection to which. The intemperate man lacks this knowledge. Not only does he not know when to put a stop to the indulgence of any part of his nature, but he does not know the proper ordering or disposition of the different parts, and he fails to recognize that his passions must be subject to a rule which has been laid down by his reason.

Once again, then, we reach the same conclusion, that virtue is a kind of knowledge, a knowledge of "what ought to be"—"ought to be", that is to say, because it is good—, while evil is an ignorance of what "ought to be." Let the ignorance be removed and the compelling power of the newly recognized good cannot but draw the individual to pursue it. Socrates concludes that all the virtues are really one and the same, since each reveals itself on analysis to be a knowledge of the Good, and that, since no man can know what is good without doing it, wrong-doing is always involuntary.

**The Defects of the Socratic View.** The defects of this view are fairly obvious and an enumeration of them will introduce the more developed ethical theory of Plato which, in its turn leads on to the political arguments, by means of which Socrates proceeds to answer Glaucon and Adeimantus. First, then, the Socratic view entails what is in

effect a circular argument. What, we want to know, is virtue? Socrates answers that it is insight or knowledge. Insight or knowledge into what? Into the Good, says Socrates. Now virtue is good or it is at least a good. Virtue, then, which is good, is defined as insight into what is good. This element of circularity affects all Socrates's reasoning on the subject. Courage, for example, is, as we have seen, described as knowledge of what is truly formidable. What, then, is truly formidable? Answer, an impending evil. Now courage is good. Good, then, consists in being able to recognize an impending evil; it consists, that is to say, in the ability to recognize by contrast with the evil what is good.

Secondly, the definition leaves out of account what all would agree to be an obvious element in the good life, namely, some form of pleasurable or gratified feeling. Whatever may be the proper definition of virtue, the habit and practice of virtue must, it may be said, contain at least some element of feeling. Goodness, in fact, is not purely knowledge; it is always also emotional and passional. Unless we derive some satisfaction from doing our duty, it cannot be said that we are really good; unless the unselfish man is willingly or even gladly unselfish, his so-called unselfishness lays a blight upon his actions.<sup>1</sup> For this undoubted element in goodness or virtue, Socrates's definition makes no provision. Thirdly, there is the fact to which I have already drawn attention, that, while the ethical problem is *prima facie* a double one—the problem, first, of knowing our duty and, secondly, of doing the duty that we know—, Socrates's definition only takes into account the first of these. Fourthly, if Socrates is right, we cannot distinguish between the virtues. For, if virtue consists in knowing the Good, then it will be true of every virtue that it is a knowing of the Good; every virtue, that is to say, will be a knowing of one and the same thing. How then, it may be asked, can a man have a virtue and also a vice. How can a generous man be profligate or an

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 217–224, for a further discussion of the question how far virtue must be agreeable.

honest man mean? For, if he has both the virtue and the vice, he is at the same time both knowing and not knowing the same Good.

**Wholes and Parts.** This last criticism suggests a fundamental defect in Socrates's view. Socrates treats the soul of man as if it were one throughout and was wholly present, as it were, in each of its activities. It is with the whole soul that we conceive or misconceive the Good; it is with the whole soul that we desire it, or desire the false semblance of it that we have mistaken for it. But how if the soul be more than one? For why, after all, should it not possess "parts", one "part" only, and not the whole soul, being responsible for the conduct upon which its possessor embarks at any given moment.

It is in the affirmation that the soul does in fact have "parts" that Plato's advance upon Socrates's psychological and ethical theory chiefly consists. I have spoken of "parts", because this word is habitually used as a translation of the expression which Plato employs when he is speaking of the soul. Yet it is an exceedingly unsatisfactory word, suggesting to a modern reader that the soul is made up of "parts" in precisely the same way as that in which a machine or a jig-saw puzzle is made up of "parts". Now a machine or jig-saw puzzle is merely the arithmetical sum-total of its "parts", a characteristic which the machine or the puzzle shares with all physical things. If a physical thing were not simply the sum of its "parts", the laws of dynamics and mechanics would not apply to it. Its constitution would also outrage the laws of arithmetic. Nevertheless, there are some wholes, notably aesthetic wholes and psychological wholes, to which the laws of arithmetic do not in fact apply. The subject is a controversial one and I cannot embark upon a detailed discussion of it here, since it belongs to the metaphysical rather than to the ethical side of philosophy, and is treated at length in my *Guide to Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup> It is enough here to

<sup>1</sup> See *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XV, pp. 415-21.

draw attention to the obvious fact that a picture is more than the sum-total of the chemically analysable canvas and paints which are used in its production; that a movement of a sonata is more than the sum-total of the vibrations in the atmosphere which are set going by the impact of the hammers upon the wires of the piano; and that a living organism is more than the sum-total of the various organs and functions which constitute its body, and which physiologists describe. The picture, the movement, and the living organism are all of them brought into being by the assemblage of their "parts", but they are in a very real sense more than that assemblage.

I have said that they are brought into being by the assemblage of their "parts", yet there are some wholes which seem actually to precede their "parts". If I may be permitted to quote an illustration, which is given in my *Guide to Philosophy*, let us take as an example the policy of a Socialist Government.

A Socialist Government committed to a scheme of Socialist reconstruction is, we will suppose, elected to power. It proceeds to take over the banks, to nationalise coal, transport, and cotton, to establish a National Investment Board. All these measures may, from one point of view, be considered as separate, although related, governmental acts. From another and more fruitful point of view, they are the expressions of an underlying policy. Here, we may say, is the fundamental ground plan of the Socialist conception of society pervading and determining the character of all that the Government does. It is, therefore, immanent in all that the Government does. If we were ignorant of the ground plan, we should, perhaps, be unable to understand the interrelation between the various measures undertaken by the Government. It is only when they are regarded as items in the execution of a policy which is prior to, is immanent in, and yet transcends them, that their mutual relevance can be grasped. Nevertheless, though ignorant of the ground plan, we might, if we were sufficiently expert politically or endowed with

a sufficiently acute political insight, be able to divine the ground plan from the acts.

Now in this case it is, I think, obvious that the appropriate conception is not that of "parts" coming together to form a whole, but that of a whole or unity, a ground plan, as I have called it, which expresses itself in a variety of aspects. It is of this conception that Plato's theory of the soul makes use. The soul, he holds, is fundamentally a unity, but it is a unity which expresses itself in a variety of aspects or, as we should now say, a unity which exhibits a plurality of functions. The soul is, therefore, to use his own expression, neither a One, as Socrates had seemed to suggest, nor just an unco-ordinated Many, but a One and a Many, or a One which expresses itself in Many aspects.

**Plato's Division of the Soul.** Of these many aspects, Plato distinguishes three. There is the reasoning "part" or aspect; the "part" which is made up of the higher and nobler emotions; and the "part" which is made up of the appetites and passions.

The differentiation of the soul into these three "parts"—for the sake of convenience I propose to use the traditional expression—is effected by the simple application of the law of contradiction. There is, Plato points out, a contradiction between the course of action which we know to be right or good, and the courses which appetite demands or passion inspires. That which knows course X to be right and good cannot, therefore, be the same as that which inclines us to course Y. The reasoning part of the soul which, as Socrates would say, knows and desires to pursue the Good cannot, in other words, be the same as the purely appetitive part which is concerned only to secure its own satisfaction.

Now in different people different parts of the soul predominate, and the general character of an individual's conduct will be determined by the activity of the predominating part. Individuals may, therefore, be allocated to one or other of three categories, the allocation



depending upon whether the reasoning, the nobly emotional, or the appetitive part of the soul prevails in them; upon whether, that is to say, their lives and actions are mainly governed by reason, by noble emotions, or by the appetites.

One other feature of Plato's psychology requires to be mentioned before we are in a position to do justice to his ethical theory.

**Reason and Desire.** The account which most psychologists have given of the individual psyche makes provision for a striving or endeavouring element, which is usually denoted by a technical word, conation. This striving or endeavouring element is that which, setting before us certain ends as desirable, impels us to undertake the activities which are necessary to realize them. It may also express itself merely as a kind of restless feeling which is not directed to any particular end. Conation stands, in other words, for the dynamic element in the individual's make-up, and, as such, it is often differentiated from reason whose function is limited to planning the steps which may be necessary to reach the objectives which conation sets before us. I shall have occasion to refer again to this division of so-called faculties in connection with a later discussion of free-will.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, important to realize that Plato envisages no such separation. Reason is not for him one thing, desire another; for although one part of the soul is described as the reasoning part, it does not, therefore, follow that it is without conation or desire. For Plato, every part of the soul is endowed with its own appropriate form of desire. Thus the reasoning part desires, although what it desires is the end appropriate to reason, which Plato conceives of as the discovery of philosophical truth. What is more, the reasoning part can exercise controlling, even coercive functions; it can, and in the good man it should, coerce the other parts of the soul into proper subordination to its authority. The reasoning part of the soul must, therefore, contain an element of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 268, 269.

will. It possesses, as modern psychologists would say, its own particular dynamism. It is only on the basis of this conception that we are justified in speaking of a predominantly reasonable man or a predominantly reasonable mode of life. For, if the reason of Plato's reasoning part of the soul were to be conceived as a purely intellectual faculty, that by means of which we are enabled to understand abstract truth or to follow a chain of reasoning, or as a purely practical faculty, the instrument by means of which we achieve the ends of the desiring part of the soul, then there would be no such thing as a characteristically reasonable life.

**Levels of Mental Activity.** The point assumes importance in connection with later ethical theory, when the question will have to be considered, can reason by itself prompt any activity, or determine any mode of life?<sup>2</sup> Now it is, I think, obvious that it cannot, if it is to be conceived, as many psychologists have conceived it, as a separate faculty whose function on the theoretical side is purely speculative, and on the practical side is limited to realizing the ends which the appetitive part of our natures prescribes to it. For reason uninfused by any conative drive cannot, it is obvious, effect anything or motivate anything. Most modern psychologists are, however, agreed that so to conceive of reason, treating it as an isolated instrument of desire, or as an isolated faculty of abstract ratiocination, is to do violence to the facts of experience, dividing up into separate faculties what is a unified activity of life. It is difficult, when speaking of the human personality, to invoke any metaphor which does not mislead; but this much at least seems to be true, that human consciousness is more like a flowing river than a bundle of sticks. It is not desire plus reason plus emotion plus will plus instinct: it is a whole or unity, which expresses itself sometimes in a predominantly rational, at other times in a predominantly appetitive or instinctive way.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 267-271.

Now this, we may take it, was in essence Plato's view. As I have already hinted, his reasoning, his emotional and his appetitive parts of the soul are not in any strict sense of the word "parts" at all. They are rather to be conceived as different levels at which the soul can function; or, to continue my metaphor, as different channels along which the river of psychical activity may flow, the important point being that it is the whole soul which functions at any one of the levels, the whole river which flows at any moment along each of the channels.

**Plato's Metaphysical Theory.** The essence of Plato's ethical theory, is that, since the soul contains more than one part, virtue consists not in the quality of one part, but in a special kind of relation between the various parts. Plato proceeds to tell us what this relation should be. It is a relation in which the inferior elements of the soul obey the superior. Now the superior element in the soul is the reasoning part. It is with the establishment of this right relation between the parts of the soul that the excellence of the soul, called by Plato "justice", is identified.

At this point, I must digress to give a brief statement of Plato's metaphysical views, since an acquaintance with these is necessary to a full understanding of his ethical theory.\*

That the reasoning part of the soul is not for Plato merely an instrument of thinking, or knowing, that it is impelled by an urge to embody in the life of the individual that which it knows, we have already seen. But it is, nevertheless, *primarily* a faculty of knowing, and we must now pause to consider what in fact it is that it knows. Plato's view was that the world of which we are made aware by our senses is not the real world; the world revealed to sense perception, the world of physical things is, he held, compounded in equal degrees of reality and non-reality.<sup>1</sup> Such reality as it possesses it owes to

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of Plato's Metaphysical Theory see my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter X.

the manifestation in it of what Plato called the Forms (the Greek word for Forms is sometimes misleadingly translated as Ideas) the collection or assembly of which constitute what Plato meant by reality. Thus all white things were, Plato held, white because of the manifestation in them of the Form of whiteness, the Form conferring upon them such whiteness as they are found to possess. Similarly, all square things were square because they participated in the Form of squareness. Any metaphor which is used to describe the relation between the Forms and the world of physical things of which our senses make us aware, is inevitably to some extent misleading; but, if we think of the Forms as a set of seals, and of the stuff of the physical world as a formless, featureless wax, upon which the seals set their impress, we shall not be very far from the conception which Plato sought to convey. While the wax, which is the stuff of the physical world, is changing and perishable, the Forms are unchangeable and eternal.

Among the Forms is the Form of the Good, which confers the quality of being ethically valuable upon the actions, institutions and characters which participate in it, or in which it manifests itself, just as the Form of squareness confers the quality of being square upon such objects as chess-boards or paving stones, which participate in it or in which it manifests itself.

In a famous passage in the *Republic* Plato attributes to the Form of the Good a position of pre-eminence among the other Forms. These are arranged in a hierarchy leading up to the Form of the Good, which exceeds them in degree of reality as they exceed in degree of reality the physical world. If we may accept the somewhat ambiguous intimations of this passage, the Form of the Good is to be regarded as constituting at once the fundamental unity and the essential reality of the universe. There is, however, no support for or development of this view in any other Dialogue, and it is not necessary for our present purpose to discuss it further.

We have now to consider by means of what faculty the Forms are known. Plato tells us that they are known by the reasoning faculty. Of the physical world, he insists, we have not knowledge but only opinion, since, if there is something which is not entirely real, it is not possible fully to know it. It is only of reality, then, that knowledge is possible. The knowledge of reality is achieved by the reasoning part of the soul, and that it may be made available to members of the highest or Guardian class in Plato's State is the primary end and purpose of his educational system.

**The Two Grades of Education.** Outstanding among the features of Plato's State is the elaborate provision for education. Education, as Plato conceives it, falls into two categories. The first category of education is received by all citizens: its main purpose is to inculcate an attitude of mind which is reverent towards the city's laws and is jealous of its traditions. Citizens so educated will take the same views on all matters of ethics and politics as those who framed the laws and established the traditions. Intensely conservative by training and conviction, they will have no disposition to disobey the laws or to question the public opinion by means of which their lives are governed and their standards formed. As Plato puts it, they will honour the things which the city honours and despise the things which the city despises. As a result they will be contented with the status they occupy and with the function they perform in the community to which they belong.

The second category of education is reserved for members of the Guardian class, who are defined as those in whom the reasoning part of the soul is predominant. Its object is so to train and develop this faculty that the Guardians will be enabled by its means to know the real world, that is to say, the world of Forms, as distinct from the semi-real world of physical things upon which the minds of ordinary citizens are directed. Among the Forms of which

knowledge is achieved by members of the Guardian class, are the Form of the Good and the Form of justice. It is in the light of their knowledge of these Forms that, when they are subsequently confronted with institutions which manifest the Form of goodness and laws and acts which participate in the Form of justice, the Guardians will know not only *that* the institutions are good and the laws and acts just, but *why* it is that they are good and just; for, having recognized the Forms of goodness and justice, they will be able to attribute the qualities of the institutions, laws and acts in question to the manifestation of the Forms in them. In other words, the morals and politics of the Guardians are based upon a knowledge of reality, and it is in the light of this knowledge that they frame the laws and determine the standards which are to prescribe the conduct and form the moral and political opinions of the citizens of the State.

**Summary of the Foregoing.** Thus Plato's contention that virtue consists in a right relation between the different parts of the soul and, more particularly, that this is a relation in which the higher, or reasoning, part controls and the lower, or appetitive, part obeys entails the following positions.

First, there is a reality which consists of eternal Forms; included among these Forms are the Forms of moral goodness and of justice. Of this reality it is possible for the soul of man, when suitably trained and educated, to have knowledge. It is by means of the reasoning part of the soul that this knowledge is obtained.

Secondly, the reasoning part of the soul, in the light of this knowledge, prescribes not only what is right for itself, but also what is right for the other parts of the soul, including their right relationship to itself. Morality, therefore, consists in every part of the soul subjecting itself to, and developing in accordance with, a law of life which the insight of the reasoning part of the soul into the nature of reality has dictated. Plato's conception of political virtue

postulates, as we shall see below, a similar law, similarly revealed.

Thirdly, it is only when the third or appetitive part of the soul stands in this right relationship of subservience to the reasoning part that it succeeds in achieving the best life for itself and realizing all that it has it in it to be.

This last proposition raises a new point which, because of its importance both in Plato's thought and in later ethical theory, must be further developed.

**Self-Development in Theory.** Throughout the history of ethical theory there appears, at different times and in different forms, the view that the good life consists in the unrestricted indulgence of the appetites and the passions. The view begins as a doctrine of self-development. We should give free play to every side of our nature, free play, that is to say, to all our faculties, to instinct no less than to reason, to desire no less than to the conscience which admonishes, and the will which seeks to control desire. This philosophy of all-round development is often regarded as a typically Greek view. Aldous Huxley has stated it with his usual clarity and conciseness: "The art of life," he tells us, "consisted for them [the Greeks] in giving every god his due. Thus, Apollo's due was very different from the debt a man owed to Dionysus . . . but every one was owed and, in its proper time and season, must be acknowledged. No god must be cheated and none overpaid." A man's duty, then, is to acknowledge *all* the gods, and to neglect none. Doing our duty, we "make the best of the world and its loveliness while we can—at any rate during the years of youth and strength." As a theory of morals there is much to be said for all-round development. Unfortunately, however, it is very difficult to maintain in practice. Its essence consists in balance, but in practice the balance insists on inclining, and inclining nearly always in the same direction, for, since of all the sides of our nature, what Plato calls the appetitive "part" grows most by what it feeds on, the doctrine of free play

for all tends insensibly to transform itself into a compulsion to give free play to appetite.

**Self-Development in Practice.** It is in this form that the doctrine of self-development has been most persistently advocated. As it has been developed by different thinkers, its injunctions have been enshrined in a series of *mots* and aphorisms. (It is the devil's prerogative, as moralists will admit, to monopolise the witticisms.) That the Palace of Wisdom lies through the gateways of excess, that the best way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it, that "not the fruits of experience, but experience itself, is the end" are typical announcements of a doctrine, which has received literary expression at the hands of some of the world's greatest essayists, poets and novelists. The doctrine has achieved considerable popularity in the post-war world. D. H. Lawrence, for example, tends in his later works to represent any attempt on the part of the reason or the will to restrain the unlimited indulgence of the passions as a mutilation of the personality of the natural man by the restricting conventionalities of an artificial civilization. Restraint of passion is, indeed, for him the damming up of the stream of life which constitutes our very being.

The official, ethical form of the doctrine of passional indulgence is known as Hedonism, which affirms that pleasure and pleasure alone is good or is the Good. I have already referred to this doctrine,<sup>1</sup> and as I am reserving detailed consideration of it for a later chapter,<sup>2</sup> I do not propose to develop it here. It suggests, however, one reflection which is immediately relevant to our present discussion. Just as the doctrine of the all-round development of our faculties usually turns out in practice to mean the indulgence of our appetites and passions, so the philosophy of Hedonism, in which the doctrine receives official expression, has been usually invoked to justify forms of conduct which are different from those which

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 46-48.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 396-415.



the theory envisages. For, while Hedonism affirms that pleasure alone is the Good, and makes no pronouncement as to what forms of pleasure are the most pleasant, hedonists are found in practice to concentrate upon the pleasures of the passional and appetitive parts of our natures.

**John Stuart Mill on Pleasure.** In his book *Utilitarianism* John Stuart Mill is careful to defend the view that pleasure is the only good from the charge of what is commonly called immorality. The charge is, he feels, one to which Hedonism is peculiarly exposed. "Such a theory of life", he writes, "excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure—no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit—they designate as utterly mean and grovelling." But, he continues, the pleasures of the mind are no less intense than those of the body and by men of intelligence are unanimously preferred, for it is "an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties." Mill concludes that "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." Possibly; possibly not. The questions at issue fall appropriately to be considered in connection with the discussion of Hedonism, which it is proposed to undertake in a later chapter<sup>1</sup> and cannot, therefore, be pursued here.

**Hedonism in Practice.** It is sufficient for our present purpose to observe that whether Mill be right or wrong in theory, most hedonists have, so far as their practice is concerned, proved him to be wrong. Whether it is because the bodily pleasures are the most obvious and the demand for them the most clamant, or whether it is that the appetite

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters IX, pp. 330-332 and XI, pp. 396-415.

for them grows most with what it feeds on, it is with the pleasures of the body, and not with those of the mind or the spirit, that the philosophy of Hedonism has been historically associated. To tread the primrose path, to drain the wine-cup to the dregs, and to sport with Amaryllis in the shade, have been the almost unanimous practices of those who have believed, and proposed to act upon, the view that pleasure is the end of life. Thus a school of Greek philosophers, known as the Cyrenaics, who maintained that Hedonism was the only true philosophy, were celebrated for their lives of self-indulgence. Now it is in opposition to this particular school of thought that the full significance of Plato's affirmation of the need for a right relationship between the different parts of the soul, and in particular of the subjection of the third part to the first, will be realized.

**Significance of Plato's view in relation to Hedonism**  
 Scattered up and down Plato's Dialogues are a number of important observations on the subject of the hedonist philosophy, at some of which we shall glance later.<sup>1</sup> His answer to it is to be found in his doctrine of the parts of the soul and his insistence upon the need for a right relation between them. For in saying that the appetitive part of the soul should be in subjection to the reasoning part, Plato is in effect making two different affirmations. The first is that the indulgence of the appetitive and passionate part of the soul is not the end of life, and that the life which is dominated by passion and emotion is not the best life; the second that, even by the standard of Hedonism, the standard that measures the value of all states of consciousness solely by reference to the amount of pleasure they contain, it is prudent to subject the appetitive to the reasoning part, since it is only when they are subordinated to the rule of reason that the appetites and passion can secure the greatest amount of satisfaction of which they are capable. For an answer to

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 407-410.

the inevitable question, what, then, does the rule of reason in this connection prescribe, the reader is referred to Aristotle's doctrine of *The Mean*<sup>1</sup> discussed in Chapter IV.

**Summary and Recapitulation.** Before I pass to an account of Plato's political views, it will be useful to sum up the ethical doctrines which have emerged from the theory of the soul and the right relationship between its parts. The summary may conveniently begin with a metaphor of which Plato himself makes use. The soul is likened to a chariot drawn by a number of unruly horses. Each horse is concerned only to follow his own impulses, and, as first one and now another exerts the stronger pull, the chariot is drawn hither and thither, pursuing a zigzag course and unable to follow any consistent direction. In the end it is dragged away from the track altogether and overturned, or dashed to pieces against the obstacles which it is powerless to avoid. Such is a man's soul which is dominated by its third part, that is to say, by the separate self-regarding desires which, oblivious of the good of the whole, impel it first this way and then that, so that instead of directing its own course and moulding its own destiny, it goes through life like a cork, bobbing on the waves of its own emotions. There is, however, another chariot in the seat of which sits a charioteer who holds the reins of the horses, controls them, and allows to each one only so much of his own way as will not interfere with the satisfaction of the others, dovetailing their different urgings into a single harmonious pull, and driving the chariot along its appointed course to a predestined goal. Such is the soul of which the reasoning part is in control. In the light of this metaphor we may summarize Plato's ethical doctrine as follows:

1. The reasoning part of the soul which knows reality and knows, therefore, the pattern of the Good should dominate the other parts.

2. The other parts of the soul should be content to

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 97-104.

play their appropriate rôles in subjection to the reasoning part. The virtues of temperance and justice which the *Republic*, in answer to Glaucon's and Adeimantus's challenge, sets out to discover, are identified with the maintenance of a harmony between the various parts of the soul and the subordination of the functions of the appetitive and spirited parts to the reasoning part. The just man in fact is he in whom every part of the soul knows its own sphere and is content to keep to it.

3. The third part has its specific virtue which, for Plato is no ascetic, may be described as the virtue of enjoyment and satisfaction; but this it will only achieve, in any full measure, if it is in subordination to the reasoning part.

#### *Books*

Platonic Dialogues dealing more particularly with Plato's ethical theory are—the *Republic* Books I—V (for the division of the soul into four parts, see Book IV), the *Charmides*, the *Laches*, the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, the *Phaedo* and the *Crito*.  
GRUBE, G. M. A. *Plato's Thought* Chapters IV and VII.  
TAYLOR, A. E. *Plato, the Man and his Work*.

An account of the views attributed more particularly to Socrates will be found in A. E. Taylor's *Socrates*.

## CHAPTER III: PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY

**Plato's Ideal State.** I have devoted considerable space to the exposition of Plato's ethical theory, partly because of its intrinsic importance, and partly because it provides the key to the understanding of his political theory. For, *mutatis mutandis*, the latter reproduces the former point by point. On a previous page<sup>1</sup> I drew attention to the significance of the fact that to the ethical problem set by Glaucon and Adeimantus, Socrates returns a political answer. The answer takes the form of the construction of an ideal State in which the principle of justice, a definition of which has been demanded by Glaucon and Adeimantus, together with a proof of its superiority to injustice, may be seen writ large. I have not space to enter into a description of the various features and provisions of Plato's State, curious and interesting as they are. They include a division of the citizens into three classes, Guardians, Soldiers and Workers, the possession of wives in common, at any rate by the highest, or Guardian class, the exclusion of artists from the city on the ground that most of them arouse emotions which are better left dormant, and an economic communism which prohibits the ownership of property by members of the Guardian class, in order that they may have no temptation to distinguish between what is theirs and what the State's. The necessaries of life are made available for the Guardians by the third, or Worker, class; to these necessaries the Guardians have free and unlimited access, but they do not own them. Outstanding, as already indicated,<sup>2</sup> is a system of education which, taking charge of the child from its earliest years,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 59, 60.

has for its object the inculcation of the same opinions and the establishment of the same scale of values as those held and observed by the founders and rulers of the State, and a willingness on the part of the individual contentedly to occupy the position in the community which is appropriate to his class. This rapid summary is very far from conveying the significance of even the provisions I have mentioned, and it gives no idea of the cogency and persuasiveness with which Plato argues on their behalf. Any account, however full, is bound to do injustice to the *Republic*, and those who are interested are recommended to read this great work themselves. My immediate concern is with those distinctive features of the State which afford a basis for the parallel between Plato's political and ethical doctrines.

**Analogy between the Individual and the State.** These are introduced by means of the analogy between the individual and the body politic upon the frequent resort to which by Greek thinkers I have already commented.<sup>1</sup> It is more particularly to the individual soul that Plato likens the State. The soul, as we have seen, is divided into three parts; the ideal State into three classes. The highest class legislates and administers for the State; the second protects and fights for it; the third works for it, supplying itself and the members of the other two classes with food, clothing, housing, and the other necessities of life. What principle determines the class to which a particular individual will belong? His own nature and disposition. We have seen that in different men different elements in the soul predominate. According to the element which predominates, so will a man be classed, those in whom the reasoning element is paramount being assigned to the ruling, or Guardian, class; those who predominate in respect of the spirited element to the military class; and those in whom the third part of the soul holds sway—those, in other words, who must be regarded primarily

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, p. 25.

as bundles of desires uncontrolled by reason, which is reduced to the rôle of the servant or instrument of desire—to the third or worker, class.

**Wherein Justice in the State Consists.** Plato holds that as a general rule the division of the population into classes will be determined by hereditary factors. The children of members of the third class will naturally tend to belong to that class: but he concedes the possibility that a child possessing a predominantly "reasonable" soul may occasionally be born to parents who are members of the third class. Such a child will belong by nature to the Guardian, or ruling, class and provision is made for him to take his place within it. Now just as the character of the individual depends upon, and is determined by, the part of the soul which in him is predominant, so the character of the State depends upon, and is determined by, the class which in it is predominant. For "do you imagine", Socrates asks, "that political institutions have any other motive force than the disposition of the citizens which always turns the scale?" Thus if the disposition of the citizens is mainly that of men in whom the second part of the soul predominates, the State will be a military one; if their disposition is primarily appetitive, it will be a plutocracy. Now plutocracies turn into extreme democracies. This doctrine has, as we shall see, an important bearing upon the theories of leadership propounded by the authoritarian States of the contemporary world.<sup>1</sup>

It follows that, just as the excellence of the soul consists in the maintenance of a right relation between its three parts, the reasoning part (with the assistance of the spirited element) guiding and controlling the appetitive part, so also in a right relation is to be found the specific excellence of a State. A good State, in other words, is one in which the Guardian class rules with the assistance of the soldiers, and the great mass of workers and business folk obeys; and not only obeys, but obeys contentedly. For the incul-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 653-658, especially 657.

cation of a willingness in members of the second and third classes to accept their subordinate positions Plato looks to his system of education, whose object is to instil into each citizen the same views as to what constitutes the welfare of the State and the excellence of the citizen as those held by its founders. Now the excellence of the citizen is to be found in his willingness to function in the sphere allotted to his class, and not to encroach upon the spheres of the other two classes. It expresses itself further in a conception of public duty which leads every citizen to regard himself as the community's servant, his activities, whether as soldier, worker or business man, as duties performed in the community's service, and his possessions as held in the community's trust. Justice in the community, as in the soul, is the principle whereby each part is content to pursue its own proper business and to perform its own specific function, the Guardian class ruling, the Soldier class defending, and the Worker class producing, as its appropriate contribution to the welfare of the whole.

When Plato proceeds to a description of those States which fall short of his ideal, he habitually attributes their deficiency to the failure of the citizens to observe this principle. It is, for example, the fact that in a democracy everybody aspires to do everybody else's business—which means, incidentally, that every citizen conceives that he is within his rights in meddling with the business of governing—it is this fact which, in Plato's view, constitutes the fundamental evil of this form of government. A democracy, he says, corresponds in the sphere of politics to a soul in which the third or appetitive part is in charge in the sphere of ethics. Just as the predominantly appetitive man is at the mercy of his multitudinous desires, and behaves first in this way and then in that as one or another of his desires gains the upper hand, so, in a democracy, the policy of the State is at the mercy of the desires and ambitions of whatever class or party happens at any given moment to gain the upper hand. This view of democracy will be



referred to in Chapter XIX<sup>1</sup>, where reasons are given for rejecting the criticism which it implies.

**The Twofold Excellence of the Guardians.** A further parallel between Plato's ethical and political doctrines is afforded by the two conceptions of the good life which Plato respectively prescribes for his two main classes in the State. (I say "main classes" because the military class tends, as the *Republic* proceeds, to fade out of the picture. In a later Dialogue dealing with politics, *The Laws*, there is a different division of the population into four classes, membership of which is based upon a property qualification).

I pointed out above<sup>2</sup> that the specific good of the reasoning part of the soul was to be found in the contemplation of the immutable realities, which Plato called the Forms; the specific good of the third part in its subjection to the control and guidance of the first. Even by reference to its own specific end which is the gratification of desire, the third part of the soul, as Plato is careful to point out, fares best if it subjects itself to the rule of reason. Plato adopts a similar formula to describe the respective goods of the first and third classes in his State.

For the members of the Guardian class there are, broadly, two sorts of excellence which constitute the "ends" of the Guardians, and two sorts of good life which are devoted to the pursuit of the two excellences. The first excellence is to be found in the life of reason, which consists for Plato in the pursuit of philosophy, since it is philosophy which enables, or seeks to enable, those who have been trained in its special dialectical technique to penetrate through the semi-reality of the world known by our senses to the world of full reality which underlies it. This excellence of the philosophical reason is a purely individual excellence, and the activity in which it consists can, presumably, be pursued in isolation. But the philosopher has a debt of gratitude to the city which has trained and educated him,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, p. 791.    <sup>2</sup> See Chapter II pp. 58, 59.

taught him to master the dialectical technique, and endowed him with the leisure which the philosophic life demands. This debt he discharges by undertaking, at periodic intervals, the active duties of citizenship. As Plato puts it in a famous simile, the philosopher from time to time returns from the sunlight of reality into the semi-darkness of the cave in order to undertake the governance of the State. This is not a duty which he undertakes lightly, or even willingly; for who, as Plato says, that has access to the world of reality, would willingly busy himself with matters pertaining to the world of semi-reality? But as a good citizen of the State, mindful of the city's need of governance and of his civic duty to respond to that need, the Guardian does not hesitate to shoulder the obligation of ruling. As Plato is careful to point out, a reluctant ruler is more likely to rule well than an eager one, for there is a reasonable presumption that the man who is eager to rule desires power in order to serve some private interest, or to gratify some private ambition. His main purpose, in other words, is the service of himself and his friends, and not that of the State. But the man who rules unwillingly, having no private interest to serve, can be trusted to devote himself to the interest of the community. Thus, in addition to the specific excellence of the philosopher, a member of the Guardian class has a subordinate excellence which consists in the proper performance of his duties as a citizen. This excellence he achieves like any other citizen by making his specific contribution to the welfare of the whole of which he is a part, and, since he is by definition a man in whom the reasoning part of the soul preponderates, his specific contribution will consist in ruling or governing.

**The Excellence of the Third Class in the State.** For a member of the third class there is one excellence only, namely, the excellence of the citizen. His virtue, in other words, is not only inseparably, but exclusively bound up with his social position. Upon him, as upon the Guardian,

falls the duty of making his specific contribution to the welfare of the State, but since the relation between the parts of his soul is different from that obtaining in the soul of the Guardian, and since, because the ordering of his soul is different, his class is different, his civic contribution also will be different. Broadly, it consists in contentedly performing the functions appropriate to the status of his class and cheerfully obeying the laws without question. This sounds very like the excellence which dictators prescribe for their subjects. It must, however, be remembered that Plato's State was an ideal one, whose arrangements find their justification in the ideal ends whose pursuit they are designed to promote. Moreover, just as it is only by subjection to the first part that the third part of the soul achieves the happiness which is appropriate to it, so, Plato maintains, it is only by obedience to the Guardian class and observance of the laws which that class has prescribed, that the third class in the State will achieve such happiness as belongs to the nature of its members.

**Twofold Conception of Moral Excellence.** We thus reach a twofold conception of moral excellence. There is, first, the excellence of the philosopher, which is the result of a direct insight into reality, which Plato identifies in this connection with the principle of the Good. This insight qualifies the philosopher to pronounce upon what is good in the everyday world, and to recognize the type of conduct in individuals and the institutions and laws in States which manifest and embody the general principles of goodness which his insight has revealed. Not only, that is to say, does the philosopher realize that this particular action or this particular social regulation is good, but he also realizes *why* it is good. Since in his capacity of framer and administrator of the laws and prescriber of the principles of education, the philosopher embodies in the State the vision of the Good which he has enjoyed in virtue of his insight into reality, we may

say that a State whose affairs are administered by philosophers, in Plato's sense of the word "philosopher", contains the greatest quantity of good of which an earthly State is capable. Hence arises Plato's famous prophecy that not until the philosophers are kings will the perfect State be realized upon earth. Hence, too, his suggestion, to which the teleological view of the true nature of a thing<sup>1</sup> has paved the way, that any State which falls short in its nature of the perfect State is, in respect of its deficiency, not fully a State. The development of this suggestion leads, as we shall see, in modern political theory to highly important consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, there is the virtue of the ordinary man. Not being a philosopher and having, therefore, no knowledge of reality, the ordinary man has no direct insight into the Good. He cannot, therefore, by means of his own unaided vision, recognize manifestations or examples of the Good in practice, when he experiences them. Hence the importance of so training and educating him, that he will hold correct, albeit conventional, beliefs about morality and politics. And he will hold correct beliefs not because he knows *why* what he believes to be right and good is in fact right and good, but because his education has prepared him to take his beliefs, as it were, upon trust. And since every State requires a framework of law wherewith to regulate the behaviour of its citizens, the ordinary man in Plato's State not only believes, but does what is right, being constrained by the mere process of obeying the laws to the habit of right conduct.

Thus he achieves such virtue as lies within the compass of his nature, holding right opinions about moral questions and acting in accordance with them, because of the education which has formed his opinions and the social and legal framework which governs his actions, this education and this framework having been devised by the philosopher Guardians with precisely this end in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30, 31, above.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XV, pp. 601, 602.

view. As Plato puts it, the ordinary man does not *know* what is good or why he ought to behave rightly, but he does have correct opinions on these matters; or, as some modern psychologists would say, he is *conditioned* by his training and environment to think and act conformably with the principles which determine the welfare of the State. Once again, this conception of Plato's is a forerunner of important developments in later thought. A school of writers on ethics, known as the naturalistic school, has sought to interpret *all* morals, both social and individual, according to the principle in terms of which Plato describes the purely conventional morals of his third class.<sup>1</sup> All morality, that is to say, is explained and interpreted by naturalistic writers in terms of social expediency; it is never the expression of an insight into an objective difference between right and wrong. The existence of such an objective difference would, indeed, be denied.

**Summary.** A recapitulation of the main points of the foregoing exposition may be useful.

(1) There is, first, a conception of vocation. There are, broadly, two sorts of men for whom there are appropriate two sorts of lives. For both Plato recommends in youth such training and education as will discipline the passions and emotions and inculcate the ideals which are required of a good citizen. For the members of the highest or Guardian class, however, there is prescribed a further education which seeks so to train the intellect that the Guardian may become capable of apprehending the Forms which constitute reality. For the Guardian class, then, there is a further excellence which its members possess, not as citizens, but as individuals. This is fundamentally an excellence of the intellect.

(2) Secondly, the ideal State is a hierarchy of three orders, each of which stands in a specific relation to the other two. The members of the second and third orders

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 351, 352 and 373-379.

do not exert any influence upon the government which is carried on, albeit unwillingly, exclusively by members of the first. Because, however, of the cast of mind induced in them by their training and education, the members of the second and third orders are not conscious of what we should call their disfranchisement, nor do they feel a sense of grievance. For the fact that the State is the embodiment of the principle of justice precludes them from wishing to meddle with matters which do not concern their own particular order, the core of justice being found in the principle of non-meddling.

(3) The virtue of the State so conceived is not other than the virtue of the individual soul. In the soul as well as in the State excellence is to be found in a right relation between harmonious parts; the State is, indeed, merely the soul writ large.

(4) The State so conceived is static. Its laws and institutions are an embodiment of the principle of the Good manifested in the world. They are, therefore, presumably incapable of improvement. Since each order is content with its status and function the relations between the orders cannot alter except for the worse. The perfect State is, therefore, an unchanging State.

## COMMENT AND CRITICISM

(1) That there is No Equality of Opportunity. To attempt to criticize Plato's scheme at length would be to embark upon an undertaking which would carry me beyond the projected confines of this book, whose main purpose is exposition. Moreover, most of the criticisms which will occur to the contemporary reader presuppose as their basis the acceptance of certain assumptions in regard to politics and ethics, which will be revealed later in the course of the exposition of the theories which embody them. There is, for example, the criticism which is based upon the democratic assumption, that every citizen has a right to an equal opportunity to the full

development of his personality. Plato, except for a rather grudging admission that children born to parents in the third class may sometimes be qualified by native endowment to rise into the first, apparently ignores this right. There is again the criticism which presupposes the assumption that all men are born free and equal, whereas Plato's State denies a large part of what to us constitutes freedom—the citizen is not, for example, free to live or even to wish to live under a different form of government, or to leave his own class—and canonizes inequality.

**Plato's Reply in Terms of Vocation.** Plato's reply would no doubt take the form of questioning the assumptions upon which these criticisms obviously rest. Men, he would say, are not equal, and freedom has no meaning except in regard to function. There are different types of men who are fitted by their native endowments to perform different functions and to live different kinds of life. For each type, excellence consists in the proper performance of the specific function of the type and in the right living of the life appropriate to the type. In other words, there is a different sort of excellence for each type of man, that is to say, for each class in the State. Now every citizen in Plato's State has an equal opportunity to perform the function for which he or she is by nature fitted, and by training and education prepared; every citizen is, in other words, free and equally free to live the kind of good life that is appropriate to the sort of man that he is. Now this, Plato would insist, is the only kind of freedom which matters. Admittedly, the citizen is not free to choose his good life for himself. Admittedly, his status in the community is fixed not by him, but for him: but who is to blame Plato might ask, that he should make for himself a difficult a choice? It is only the Guardians who know not only what is right and wrong, what good and what evil, but why the good is good and why the right is right, who can form an adequate judgment on the issues involved in such a choice. Now it is the Guardians who determine the

behalf of each citizen what status he shall assume, what function perform, what kind of life live. 'In providing that the Guardians who are *ex-hypothesi* wiser than the ordinary citizen should, in the light of their knowledge of his needs and character, make this choice for him I have,' Plato would say, 'given the ordinary man the best chance of realizing such happiness as he is capable of enjoying; for such happiness as he is capable of enjoying depends upon the right performance of the functions appropriate to his nature, and upon the holding of the beliefs which are suited to his status, just as his appetites only receive their maximum satisfaction, when they are disciplined by his reason. And, seeing that he is not as a rule reasonable enough to discipline them for himself, I have done my best to provide him with a substitute for self regulation in the education by which I have sought to train his mind and character, and the laws which provide the framework of his conduct.' Plato, one imagines, would heartily endorse a somewhat similar sentiment which Dr. Johnson was apt to express on the same issue:—

"One evening, when a young gentleman teased him with an account of the infidelity of his servant, who, he said, would not believe the Scriptures, because he could not read them in the original tongues, and be sure that they were not invented.—'Why, foolish fellow,' said Johnson, 'has he any better authority for almost everything that he believes?' BOSWELL: 'Then the vulgar, Sir, never can know they are right, but must submit themselves to the learned.' JOHNSON: 'To be sure, Sir. The vulgar are the children of the State, and must be taught like children.' BOSWELL: 'Then, Sir, a poor Turk must be a Mahometan, just as a poor Englishman must be a Christian?' JOHNSON: 'Why, yes, Sir.'"

'As for the individuality,' Plato would continue, 'this is a characteristic which is dependent upon and proportional to the degree of the development of consciousness, and more particularly, of the rational consciousness. The individuality of members of the third class must, there-



re, in any event remain less marked than that of members of the first. Such as it is, it will be developed best by the proper exercise of the functions which the individual is qualified to perform. For this,' Plato would conclude, 'I have done my best to provide in my State, and, so long as the philosopher-Guardians are in control, the revision will continue.'

2) That there is No Right of Self-Government. More formidable is the criticism which is based upon the adage, "It is only the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches." This, as we shall see later, embodies one of the basic presuppositions of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Nobody, the democrat argues, can know what it is like to obey laws and live under a form of government except those who are actually subject to the laws and those who actually suffer the government. That is one of the reasons, and not the most important of them, why the subject should have a voice in making the laws and choosing the government. It may be, in fact it is, the case that people who are imperfect are better suited by imperfect laws which provide for their idiosyncrasies, make allowance for their weaknesses and reflect their needs, than by perfect ones which presuppose the ability to conform to a standard of behaviour which outruns their capacity. In any event, people must in the last resort be allowed to determine for themselves by what principles the society in which they live is to be governed, even if, owing to their imperfection, folly and stupidity, they make a worse job of running society than Plato's philosophers would have done. For it is better to be free to go wrong than to be compelled to go right.

Plato would, I suppose, answer that, granted the effectiveness of his system of education, these aspirations for freedom and self-government could not possibly arise. For the laws could not conceivably irk a citizen whose education had for its sole object the moulding of the citizen

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 789-796.

behalf of each citizen what status he shall assume, what function perform, what kind of life live. 'In providing that the Guardians who are *ex-hypothesi* wiser than the ordinary citizen should, in the light of their knowledge of his needs and character, make this choice for him I have,' Plato would say, 'given the ordinary man the best chance of realizing such happiness as he is capable of enjoying; for such happiness as he is capable of enjoying depends upon the right performance of the functions appropriate to his nature, and upon the holding of the beliefs which are suited to his status, just as his appetites only receive their maximum satisfaction, when they are disciplined by his reason. And, seeing that he is not as a rule reasonable enough to discipline them for himself, I have done my best to provide him with a substitute for self regulation in the education by which I have sought to train his mind and character, and the laws which provide the framework of his conduct.' Plato, one imagines, would heartily endorse a somewhat similar sentiment which Dr. Johnson was apt to express on the same issue:—

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re, in any event remain less marked than that of members of the first. Such as it is, it will be developed best by the proper exercise of the functions which the individual is qualified to perform. For this, Plato would conclude, I have done my best to provide in my State, and, so long as the philosopher-Guardians are in control, the revision will continue.'

2) That there is No Right of Self-Government. More formidable is the criticism which is based upon the adage, "It is only the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches." This, as we shall see later, embodies one of the basic presuppositions of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Nobody, the democrat argues, can know what it is like to obey laws and live under a form of government except those who are actually subject to the laws and those who actually suffer the government. That is one of the reasons, and not the most important of them, why the subject should have a voice in making the laws and choosing the government. It may be, in fact it is, the case that people who are imperfect are better suited by imperfect laws which provide for their idiosyncrasies, make allowance for their weaknesses and reflect their needs, than by perfect ones which presuppose the ability to conform to a standard of behaviour which outruns their capacity. In any event, people must in the last resort be allowed to determine for themselves by what principles the society in which they live is to be governed, even if, owing to their inexperience, folly and stupidity, they make a worse job of running society than Plato's philosophers would have done. or it is better to be free to go wrong than to be compelled to go right.

Plato would, I suppose, answer that, granted the effectiveness of his system of education, these aspirations for freedom and self-government could not possibly arise. or the laws could not conceivably irk a citizen whose education had for its sole object the moulding of the citizen

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 789-796.

to fit the laws; nor could there be any sense of injustice among persons deprived of the power to choose the legislature, since Plato's State is the embodiment of the principle of justice and the principle of justice consists, as we have seen, in not meddling.

Given Plato's premises, this is an effective answer. But to admit that on Plato's premises it is effective, is only to reveal more clearly than we have hitherto done the extent of Plato's subordination of the individual to the State. It is difficult for the modern mind—or, perhaps I should say, for the pre-war mind, for post-war developments in government have embodied many of Plato's proposals, albeit without the vision of the Good, which alone justifies his proposals—not to feel that Plato is too prone to sacrifice, or at least to subordinate, the happiness of the individual to that of the social organism; too ready to replace waywardness of mind, idiosyncrasy of taste, the pride of personal possessions, and the love of family by abstract devotion to the State, and to hold as of no account the thousand and one little pleasures and interests—playing games and making love, eating and drinking, going on journeys, and cultivating hobbies—of which in all ages the ordinary man's life has been made up, and which confer upon most of us such enjoyment as we are likely to know. Variety is the spice of life and Plato's State might, to say the least of it, have struck the inhabitants of a twentieth century democracy as a little dull. As John Stuart Mill was later to observe, "It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake of the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race by making the race infinitely better worth

belonging to." Our criticism is, then, that, whereas the State is quite obviously made for man, Plato is a little too apt to regard man merely as an element in the good of the State. Yet "good", it may be urged, is surely something that only individuals can attain, and the State is nothing apart from the individuals who compose it.

**Philaethes Speaks for the Modern Democrat.** The point of view from which this criticism springs is taken so much for granted by the modern world<sup>1</sup> that it is unnecessary to develop it at any length. I propose, therefore, to restate it in a form more cogent and succinct than I could hope to give to it. Not long before his death, G. Lowes Dickinson, a lifelong admirer of Plato, who cast many of his writings in the form of Plato's Dialogues, published a Dialogue, *After Two Thousand Years*, in which a contemporary young man, Philaethes, visits Plato in the Shades, and converses with him on the subject of the contemporary world. Describing the life and lot of the ordinary wage-earner, the man who, in Plato's State, would belong to the third class, Philaethes criticizes Plato on the score of having made insufficient provision for his ethical and political development. The criticism is as follows:—

“PH. Well, all of those, you seem to have been content to say, must be left to that kind of work, and need not be considered at all, when there is any question of what is really Good.

PL. I admit it. The true Goods I held could only be attained by those who were well born and well educated.

PH. Yes, but even by them, how attained? For no sooner had your philosophers, after long education and training, caught some glimmer of these Goods, than they were to be haled back remorselessly to govern the community.

<sup>1</sup> (Or, perhaps I should say, by the world in which my generation grew up. It is coming to be increasingly questioned by the post-war world.)

- PL. Yes. For that was their task and their duty upon earth.
- PH. But it is earth with which we are now concerned. And looking at earth might not a critic say of your republic—indeed many have said it—that it is a stereotyped herd, where no individual is pursuing any real Good, whether philosophy, or science, or art, or love, or even happiness, since the excellence it has is not that of any class or member, but consists entirely in the performance by each part of its own function, in order that the Whole may maintain and perpetuate itself.
- PL. That Whole, I argued, would be both beautiful and good.
- PH. Yes. But to and for whom or what?
- PL. I cannot tell you that, so long as you insist that we shall confine our survey to your earth.
- PH. Let us nevertheless so confine it, as long as we can. So confined, you would perhaps agree that the Goods you held to be absolute, though they are shown for a moment to your philosophers, are shown only to be renounced in the cause of duty.
- PL. I agree.
- PH. I have a reason for pressing the point. For, in my own time, there has come into vogue a kind of parody of your view. The Whole men say—meaning what we call the State—is the end and the only end. To it individuals, generation after generation, for ever and ever, should be subordinated. They have no purpose or function other than Its.
- PL. And Its? What is that?
- PH. Itself! Its continued existence and growth in power and extent. To It are attributed qualities often ascribed to Deity. It is jealous; It is revengeful; It is merciless; It is violent; It is, or at least should be, Almighty. To It belong, without reservation, the wealth, the labour, the lives of

Its citizens. It is the god, they the perpetual sacrifice; and their rulers are Its priests.

PL. Is that what men have made of the doctrine that the community is supreme! What close bed-fellows are truth and falsehood! But you do not, I hope, accuse me of teaching so preposterous?"

**That Members of Plato's Guardian Class are Alone Individuals.** The doctrines to which Philaethes refers in his last speech will be developed at greater length on a later page.<sup>1</sup> His criticism I believe to be in essence sound and, as Lowes Dickinson insists, it has a peculiar topical significance. It is, however, only fair to point out that the charge of subordinating the individual to the State is not one which can be substantiated in regard to Plato's Guardian class. At any rate it is inapplicable to what may be called the non-civic periods in the lives of the members of this class. The Good which as philosophers they cultivate is an individual good albeit, as Lowes Dickinson points out, it is pursued only intermittently in the intervals of civic duty; and the attainment of the vision of reality which is the object of their lives owes nothing but the training and leisure which make it possible to the State.

This is true enough, and provided that we can accept what amounts to a division of human beings into two species, each with its own specific good, it affords an adequate answer to the criticism. For the philosophic activity—and the word "philosophic" may in this connection be interpreted to include the spiritual, the intellectual, the aesthetic, the scientific, indeed all those forms of activity whose disinterested pursuit is at once the distinction and the glory of the human species—of the highest class is, in Plato's State, dependent upon the contented performance of their social functions by the lower classes. This contented performance of social function being the sole good of which the lower classes are con-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters XV, pp. 593-602 and XVI, pp. 645-652.

ceived to be capable, it is no hardship that their achievement of that good should be made to contribute to the realization of a superior and more individual good by the highest class.

The only comment seems to be that most people to-day would, I think, find themselves unable to subscribe to Plato's initial division of the species into two classes.

**Is Plato's State Realisable?** It may be asked whether Plato intended that his State should be realized. Many commentators have written as if Plato's *Republic* is an academic essay in the principles of political theory. To this interpretation the apparently static character of Plato's Utopia, to which attention has already been drawn, lends countenance. Plato certainly writes as if his State would, once established, function indefinitely without change, and he gives the same impression when he treats of the way of life of its citizens. Yet how, it may well be asked, could Plato suppose that any association of human beings could continue indefinitely without progressing or retrogressing.

The question is a pertinent one; nevertheless, it may, I think, be taken as reasonably certain that Plato really hoped, even if he did not expect, that his State might one day actually come into existence upon earth; that he conceived himself, in other words, to be putting forward proposals which it was not inconceivable that mankind might one day be brought to accept. To quote from Professor Taylor: "We do Plato the greatest of wrongs if we forget that the *Republic* is no mere collection of theoretical discussions about government and no mere exercise in the creation of an impossible Utopia, but a serious project of practical reform put forward by an Athenian patriot, set on fire, like Shelley, with a 'passion for reforming the world'." It is his passion for reform which gives to Plato's writings their peculiar sense of urgency. Whether we agree with Plato's proposals or not, it is impossible to read the *Republic* without being stirred and moved. As a recent writer who certainly does not display



an undue partiality for Plato has confessed: "I still find the *Republic* the greatest book on political philosophy which I have read. The more I read it, the more I hate it; and yet I cannot help returning to it time after time."<sup>1</sup>

Of very few of the political and ethical treatises with which we shall subsequently be concerned can the same be said.

### *Books*

✕The *Republic* of Plato. Books II-V and Books VIII and IX (for editions of the *Republic* see Bibliography to Chapter I, page 41).

NETTLESHIP, R. L. Lectures on the *Republic* of Plato, Chapters V-VIII.

BARKER, Ernest. The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle.  
GRUBE, G. M. A. Plato's Thought, Chapters VII and VIII.

R. H. S. Crossman's, *Plato To-day*, contains a good account and criticism of Plato's political theory from the standpoint of modern democratic thought.

✕LOWES DICKINSON, G. *After Two Thousand Years*, a dialogue in the Platonic manner in which Plato, returned from the Shades, surveys and discusses the political problems of the contemporary world.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Mr. R. H. S. Crossman's book, *Plato To-day*.

## CHAPTER IV: THE MORAL AND POLITICAL THEORY OF ARISTOTLE<sup>1</sup>

**Introductory.** It is not easy to summarize Aristotle's contribution to moral and political theory. Not only are some of his conclusions inconsistent, at times even contradictory, but the salient features of his proposals are closely modelled on those of Plato, and it is difficult to do them justice without running the risk of repetition.

Aristotle has a habit of starting, and starting avowedly, from positions which are the antitheses of those of Plato, yet ending in conclusions which are scarcely, if at all, distinguishable from those of his predecessor. The statement just made would seem to impute a charge of inconsistency. The charge must on occasion be admitted. For example, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, usually known simply as the *Ethics*, which, many would hold, is Aristotle's most important work on philosophy, seems at first sight to contain two fundamentally different accounts of the nature of the good life for the individual. The charge, however, in so far as it can be substantiated, is a purely formal one. Aristotle never revised the *Ethics*, and loose ends have been left which revision would almost certainly have tidied. It is difficult to believe that the founder of logic, had he had time or occasion to revise his own work, would have failed to notice the inconsistencies upon which readers have been so quick to seize.

As to the apparent lack of originality, it is never more than apparent. Although Aristotle's main conclusions, both in regard to ethics and politics, differ little from those of Plato, he gives them a different emphasis, uses different

<sup>1</sup> 384-322 B.C.

arguments in their support, and in reaching them contrives to let drop a number of observations about the conduct of human life, which are as original as they are profound.

Aristotle's outstanding characteristics are wisdom and common sense. The *Ethics*, with which we are in this Chapter primarily concerned, exemplifies these qualities in a very marked degree. The book consists largely of lecture notes and has, therefore, little form and no polish, while the fact that it culminates in no formal doctrine purporting to cover the whole field of ethics, makes it difficult to say what Aristotle's general ethical theory is. Nevertheless, it is impossible to read the *Ethics* without realizing that one is making contact with a great mind engaged in the process of writing, or, it may be, talking, memorably about human life. Indeed, there is no other work on ethics with which I am acquainted which contains so much incidental wisdom, and is so consistently informed by common sense, an uncommon possession, especially among philosophers.

**Ethics not an Exact Study.** The absence of formal doctrine Aristotle would be the first to admit, but I doubt if he would feel disposed to apologise. At the outset of his *Ethics* he draws a distinction between theoretical and practical science. Theoretical science deals with matters which cannot be otherwise: two sides of a triangle, for example, must be greater than the third: two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen must constitute water; they cannot help themselves. Geometry and chemistry belong, therefore, to the realm of theoretical science. But the motives which lead men to act, no less than the consequences of their acts, are complex and variable, nor is it possible accurately to determine the one, or confidently to predict the other. Ethics, then, deals with matters which "may be otherwise", and the student is, accordingly, explicitly warned against expecting too much; against expecting, for example, a general recipe for good conduct which will apply to all men in all cir-

cumstances. We do not, after all, expect a medical recipe which will cure the diseases of all bodies in all circumstances, and men's minds are certainly no less complex than their bodies. In the last resort, indeed, every individual constitutes what may be called a special case.

Aristotle's doctrines on the subjects of ethics and politics are not, then, he warns us, to be applied too rigidly or pushed too far. They apply in most cases and as a general rule, but not in all cases and not as an absolute rule. One could wish that every writer on the subject had been equally modest.

As I have already hinted, Aristotle's doctrines are remarkable less for the originality of their conception than for the wisdom of their exposition. In the end he is found to have done little more than dot the i's and cross the t's of the positions already reached by Plato. I propose to illustrate this contention by selecting four of his general conclusions which, while they are of first-rate importance in themselves, follow very closely the lines of those already enunciated by Plato. In the course of reaching them, however, Aristotle has contrived to invest them with an amplitude of scope, a richness of content, and a wealth of detail which give them a new significance.

## I. THAT MAN IS BY NATURE A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BEING

The first of these general conclusions to which I wish to draw attention is an endorsement of Plato's view that man is by nature a political being; it contains, therefore, by implication a repudiation of the Social Contract theory advanced by Glaucon and Adeimantus in the second book of Plato's *Republic*.<sup>1</sup> In his work on political theory known as the *Politics*, Aristotle insists that it is only in association with his fellows that man can grow. In isolation he becomes "the tribeless, lawless, hearthless" being of whom Homer wrote, and is likened to an unprotected piece in a game

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 19-21.

of draughts. As a matter of fact, Aristotle proceeds, man has always lived in some sort of community, whether family, village community, or City State. The motives which lead to the extension of the human community from family to City State are the need for security from violence, and the attraction of the more adequate provision for material wants which a civic community holds out to its citizens. Even the most primitive form of community, the family, contains, Aristotle points out, at least three persons: a man, his wife and his servant. It thus involves not only a certain specialization of function, but some exercise in the art of social relationships which we must therefore consider to be natural to man. The teleological argument which we have already examined<sup>1</sup> is then invoked to show that human nature can develop only in a community or State and, Aristotle adds, still following Plato, it can only develop its fullest potentialities in the best State. It is only in the best State, in other words, that the good for man can be realized. Postponing for the moment the question what "the good for man" is, I propose, first, to consider what form of State Aristotle regards as the best.

**Aristotle's Ideal Community.** More clearly perhaps than Plato who, as we have seen, is apt to subordinate the good of individuals, with the exception of the minority who belong to the highest class, to that of the State, Aristotle insists that the specific good of the State is to be sought in something beyond the State, namely, in that of the individuals who compose the State. "Political societies," he says, "exist for the sake of noble actions and not merely of a common life." The end of government, in other words, is not the furthering of life as such, but the promotion of the good life. Now the forms of government which existed in Greece and have, with modifications, persisted ever since, are not, in Aristotle's view, adapted to this end. Democracy which is in theory,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 36-38.

and was in the small City States of Greece to a greater degree than it has ever been since, government by the masses, has for its object not the promotion of the good life, but the distribution of equal political rights to all men, irrespective of their virtue or capacity. Oligarchy, or the rule of the few, distributes power in the community according to men's stakes in it. A man's stake in the community depends upon the amount of his property. Oligarchy, then, is a form of government by the propertied classes. Many will hold that the so-called democracies of modern times are, in the terms of this definition, only oligarchies in disguise. Neither form of government complies with Aristotle's specification; neither, indeed, *professes* to comply with his specification for excellence in the State, that is to say, the promotion "of noble actions" by the citizens.

Aristotle's ideal State is, therefore, one in which the "best men", and the "best men" only, possess the full rights of citizenship. They may be many, or they may be few; they may or may not be under the rule of a monarch, chosen as being the "best of the best", but they must themselves be the "best." For an elucidation of the meaning of the word "best", we must once again await the conclusions of Aristotle's ethical theory.

A distinctive feature of the good State so conceived is its smallness, for, the smaller the State, the more intensively will its members, in Aristotle's view, be able to devote themselves to the cultivation of the good life. The State, therefore, must be as small as is compatible with its complete independence.

Like Plato, Aristotle attaches great importance to education. The object of education is so to train the citizen that he will revere the constitution of the State, obey its laws, and resist attempts to change them. That all its citizens should be trained to adopt this attitude is a matter of first-rate importance to the State. Hence the State must control education, which will be compulsory for all citizens.

**The Good Citizen in the Bad State.** But let us suppose that the State is a bad one; is it still the duty of the citizens to revere its constitution and obey its laws? The question is a difficult one, and we shall meet it again in the course of our study of political theory,<sup>1</sup> for one of the fundamental objections to any form of authoritarian State, to any State, that is to say, in which the mass of the people is deprived of a share in the government, is that, whatever may be its merits or demerits when it happens to be a good State, when it is a bad one, its badness is rendered worse by the difficulty of changing it. For, being an authoritarian State, it must from its very nature exact obedience and induce loyalty; and it must exact obedience and induce loyalty to those elements in it which are bad no less than to those which are good. Aristotle's answer to the question, which is logically derived from his general position, reveals one of the flaws in that position. In an ideal State the education which is required to make a man into a good citizen, that is, into one who reveres the constitution and obeys the laws, will also, he contends, make him into a good man. That this contention is justified will, I think, become clear when we have considered Aristotle's ethical theory and seen how closely it is interwoven with his political theory. But if the constitution is bad, then, Aristotle admits, the kind of education which will be required to cause a man to be loyal to it may be very far indeed from making him into a good man. Nevertheless, it should, he held, be given and it should, apparently, still be compulsory and universal. Even when the State is bad and exists for ignoble ends, it is, we are told, none the less the business of education to ensure that citizens are imbued by "the spirit of the constitution". The zeal for public service is, in other words, to be engendered even in the interests of evil purposes.<sup>2</sup> Whether this is a statement of what occurs,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 555-558.

<sup>2</sup> The question obviously has considerable contemporary interest. What, for example, according to the British Tory, is the duty of the

of what necessarily must occur, or of what Aristotle thinks ought to occur, is not clear. The point is immaterial in the present context for, whichever assumption we make, the question arises whether Aristotle's injunction does not entail treating the bulk of the citizens as political sheep, to be led without consultation into whatever pen seems good to the shepherd. And, we must further ask, since they are to be educated to like and even to revere the structure of their pen, is not the effect of Aristotle's doctrine to deprive them of freedom of mind no less than of action? The question has a certain topical interest in its bearing upon the educational systems of the contemporary Totalitarian States. Aristotle's answer, if he were pressed for one, would, I think, amount to an admission of the charge, if charge it be. He does, indeed, concede that some men may rise superior to an education which has sought to induce in them loyalty to a bad State, so that, whereas in a good State the good man and the good citizen are one and the same, in a bad State the good man may be a bad citizen. But this concession is extended only to the unrepresentative few who belong to Aristotle's equivalent of Plato's Guardian class. As regards the mass, it must be admitted that his estimate of the civic virtue and political initiative of the ordinary man is little higher than that of Plato. He is, in fact, content to treat the ordinary citizen, even of a bad State, as a political sheep.

**Philosophers and Slaves.** In the last resort Aristotle, no less than Plato, divides men into two classes, for each of which there is prescribed a different kind of good life appropriate to the different capacities of the members of each class. The higher form of good life is that of the student. The pursuit of knowledge whether in scientific research or philosophical enquiry, the production and criticism of works of art, the discipline and contemplative

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good citizen in Bolshevik Russia? What, according to the British Socialist, the duty of the good citizen in Nazi Germany?



pursuits of the mystic, these typify for Aristotle the occupations of the higher type of good life. It was, however, obvious to him that for the ordinary man they are unattainable. For one thing, the ordinary man has not the necessary capacity for their pursuit; for another, he has not the necessary leisure. To Aristotle, writing before the age of machinery, it seemed clear that there must in every State be some whose business it is to produce the necessaries of life, easy access to which is a necessary condition of the cultivated leisure of the few. In the recognition of this need is to be found Aristotle's justification for slavery. The State exists, as we have seen, for the purpose of promoting the good life, but the good life, it turns out, is only for the leisured, intellectual few. Whatever, then, is necessary in order to enable the State to function, is also necessary in order to enable the good life to be lived. Now that a State may function, many—the fact seemed obvious to political theorists living before the machine age—must be prepared to do menial work. In Greece these "many" happened to be slaves, but it must be remembered that in Greece slaves were comparatively free and comparatively well treated. Their lives were, indeed, probably superior in amenity to that of the basement servant in the average Victorian household. To-day, their work could largely be done by machines. Aristotle recognized this possibility and points out that mechanical inventions, "inanimate tools", may come to render "the animated tools" which are slaves unnecessary. If and when the economic system adapts itself to the increased productivity of physical and chemical science, so that each advance in the delegation of dull and drudging work to machines is no longer accompanied by unemployment and economic stagnation, such work will in fact be handed over to machines. But in Aristotle's Greece and, therefore, in Aristotle's ideal State, it was done by slaves. We deplore slavery; Aristotle justifies it; but before we quarrel with his justification, we must be careful to bear in mind the form which it takes. For slavery, in Aristotle's view, being essential to the

functioning of the State, is essential to the functioning of that which alone renders possible the pursuit of the good life.

**The Ordinary Citizen.** The foregoing may be taken to suggest that the members of Aristotle's State are divided into cultivated gentlemen engaged in leading the intellectual good life and slaves. This suggestion, if indeed it has been conveyed, is misleading, for the ordinary citizen, as Aristotle envisages him, is neither cultivated gentleman nor slave. Aristotle thinks of him as a business man devoting his life to his family, to the acquisition of property, and to the satisfaction of his desires. In fact, he is the ordinary sensual man all the world over. Unlike Plato whose economic proposals are, it will be remembered, communist in tendency, Aristotle does not disapprove of private property. "The possession of private property", he naively remarks, "is a source of harmless pleasure, and therefore desirable." Communist proposals, he adds, will always appeal to the many because of the glaring inequalities of the existing system which, it is believed, they will remove. But these inequalities are not, in fact, due to the system of private property, but to the nature of man. Aristotle's remarks on the subject are so characteristic of the man, that it is worth while transcribing them in a literal translation. "Such" (i.e. communist), "legislation", he writes, "has a specious appearance of benevolence. An audience accepts it with delight supposing, especially when abuses under the existing system are denounced, that under Communism everyone will miraculously become everyone else's friend. . . . But the real cause of these evils is not private property but the wickedness of human nature."

Now the good life for the ordinary citizen so conceived is very different from the good life for the intellectual few. On its political side it entails the performance of such conduct as is necessary to the maintenance and stability of the institutions of the State. But because the ordinary

citizen is not one of "the best", he is denied the full rights of citizenship and has no share in the government of the State. Moreover, he is not entitled or enabled fully to share in that good life of the spirit and the intellect which his loyal participation in the State renders possible; possible, that is to say, for others. Thus Aristotle's doctrine of the good life for the ordinary man is directed, so far as its social bearing is concerned, to securing that the ordinary man shall so conduct himself as to render possible the achievement of a different kind of good life by non-ordinary men.

**Aristotle's Political Ideal.** There is, in fact, a two-way process of mutual sustainment between the two sorts of good life and the individuals who are respectively engaged in living them. On the one hand, as we have seen, the achievement of the specific good of the citizen, which consists in loyalty to the State's institutions and willingness to abide by its laws, is necessary to the achievement of the higher good by the few; on the other, it is the business of the few in their character of statesmen so to direct the education and mould the ideals of the many, that they will be willing and able to contribute by living the lives of good and contented citizens to the achievement of the higher good by the statesmen in their capacity of cultured gentlemen. Cultured gentlemen, in other words, must, in their capacity as statesmen, produce a certain character in the citizens whom they educate and rule, as a condition of the completion of their own characters and the perfection of their own lives as cultured gentlemen. The following quotation from Professor A. E. Taylor admirably summarizes Aristotle's political ideal: "Aristotle's political ideal is that of a small but leisured and highly cultivated aristocracy, without large fortunes or any remarkable differences in material wealth, free from the spirit of adventure and enterprise, pursuing the arts and sciences quietly while its material needs are supplied by the labour of a class excluded from citizenship, kindly treated but without

prospects. Weimar, in the days when Thackeray knew it as a lad, would apparently reproduce the ideal better than any other modern state one can think of."

**Summary.** If we demand justification for what, to the modern view, seems an arbitrary exclusion of the many from the rights and privileges of full citizenship, we must find it in Aristotle's division of mankind into what are, in effect, two species. Some men are for him natural tools, some the natural users of these tools. The natural tools have the bodies of men, but lack rational souls; hence they may be appropriately employed as slaves. It is necessary, however, to remember that not all the inhabitants of Aristotle's State are either slaves or cultured gentlemen. There are also ordinary men, whom he envisages primarily as business men, who are excluded from the government but not from citizenship, although Aristotle reserves the *full* rights of citizenship for "the best".

What meaning are we to assign to the words "good", "bad", "nobler", "the best", of which in our survey of Aristotle's political philosophy we have so frequently made use? To answer this question we must turn to Aristotle's ethical theory.

**Aristotle's Ethics: Happiness and Pleasure.** Aristotle's answer to the question, "What is the good for man?" is that happiness is the good. This does not mean that happiness is the sole object of human endeavour, still less that it can be achieved by direct pursuit. Whether happiness is the sole object of human endeavour, is to be considered in connection with the examination of the hedonist philosophy to which we are already committed by the argument of a preceding Chapter.<sup>1</sup> That it can be achieved by direct pursuit is explicitly denied by Aristotle in the tenth book of the *Ethics*, which contains what is perhaps the most celebrated treatment of pleasure in the writings

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, p. 48.

of ethical philosophers. Aristotle is an advocate of what may be called the by-product theory of pleasure.<sup>1</sup> Pleasure, he avers, must not be pursued for itself; it comes unsought to grace activities undertaken for their own sake. When our best faculties, tuned up to concert pitch, are being actively employed on an appropriate subject matter which is worthy of, and suitable to, their exercise, then, Aristotle says, we shall experience pleasure. Pleasure, in short, is a sign of something else; namely, the healthy functioning of mind and body in relation to a suitable subject matter.

To say that the good for man is pleasure or happiness is, however, to say very little. We want to know what kind of life deserves to be called happy, and how that life is to be achieved. Each of these questions must be answered separately, and to each the answer, despite a certain difference of form, is essentially the answer of Plato. Aristotle's answers to these two questions will afford a second illustration of his general endorsement of the salient doctrines of Plato's ethics and politics.

## II. THAT VIRTUE IS TO BE FOUND IN ADHERENCE TO A MEAN

Our first question is, "What kind of life deserves to be called happy?" If happiness is the good for man, it will be achieved by men of good character, that is to say, by men of moral excellence. Moral excellence is expressed in activity, just as aesthetic excellence is expressed in creation. Just as we should never call an artist great who never created, so we should not call a man good who never acted. Aristotle, therefore, defines human well-being as "an active life in accord with excellence, or, if there are more forms of excellence than one, in accord with the best and completest of them". What, then, is the distinguishing mark of the acts in which a good character

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 402-409 for a development of this theory of pleasure.

expresses itself, or, more shortly, what is the nature of right acts?

Aristotle's answer is that their nature is that of a mean or balance. Now a mean or balance is a relationship between two or more things. A mean distance, for example, is reached by comparing and averaging a number of distances, some smaller and some greater; a balance of opposites implies that there are two opposed things which are temporarily held in equilibrium. Right actions, therefore, and right dispositions, if they are also "mean" actions and "mean" dispositions, cannot be determined by themselves; they can be determined only by reference to the extremes on either side of them between which they constitute the mean or balance. Just as Plato refused to find the virtue of justice in this quality or in that, but identified it (both in the soul and in the State) with a right relation between a number of different elements,<sup>1</sup> so Aristotle finds the distinguishing characteristic of rightness not in a single quality of an action, or a single element of a disposition, but in a certain relation between a number of qualities and elements. While, however, Plato postulates three elements between which the desired right relation holds, Aristotle specifies two, namely, the two opposite extremes between which "the right", whether in action or character, is a mean.

Aristotle's doctrine is based, at least in part, upon an analogy between the mind and the body. The medical science of the time, in which Aristotle's omnivorous curiosity led him to take a considerable interest, was claiming that bodily health consisted in a balance between opposite principles, the hot and the cold, the dry and the moist, and so on. To disturb this balance was to destroy health; too much food or too little, too much exercise or too little, have, it is obvious, a deleterious effect. As with the body, so with the mind. Health of mind, no less than health of body, expresses itself in a habit of acting between the two extremes of excess and deficiency. A courageous action,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters II, p. 57 and III, pp. 69, 70.

for example, is a mean between the extremes of timidity and recklessness; a generous action, between those of meanness and extravagance, while a due modesty is a mean between grovelling humility and overweening arrogance. And, since a good character is one which habitually expresses itself in right actions, Aristotle proceeds to define goodness of character as "a settled condition of the soul which wills or chooses the mean relatively to ourselves, this mean being determined by a rule or whatever we like to call that by which the wise man determines it".

**Support for the Doctrine of the Mean.** Advocacy of the doctrine of the mean as the path to virtue is by no means confined to Aristotle. Of the truth embodied in Aristotle's doctrines popular thinking has always been keenly aware. By such maxims as "Nothing too much", "Enough is as good as a feast", "Wisdom consists in knowing where to stop", it testifies its recognition of the value of the mean. The following is a typical popular statement of the doctrine from Lord Chesterfield's letters:—"The sure characteristic of a sound and strong mind, is to find in everything those certain bounds, *quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum*. These boundaries are marked out by a very fine line, which only good sense and attention can discover; it is much too fine for vulgar eyes. In manners, this line is good-breeding; beyond it, is troublesome ceremony; short of it, is unbecoming negligence and inattention. In morals, it divides ostentatious puritanism from criminal relaxation; in religion, superstition from impiety; and in short, every virtue from its kindred vice or weakness." Nor is it only the English and the Greeks who have recommended adherence to the mean. The doctrine constantly recurs in one form or another in the writings of ethical philosophers of all ages and peoples. The Chinese, for example, are a people to whom a prudent moderation in all things appears to be particularly congenial. It is, therefore, no accident that the doctrine of

the mean figures prominently in Chinese philosophy, being explicitly advocated both by Confucius and by Lao Tse. Of an ideal emperor of the T'ang dynasty, the Chinese philosopher Mencius remarked that he "held the mean", a phrase which he proceeds to develop by saying that the Emperor "used to listen to two extremes of counsel and then apply the mean to the people". Describing Chinese ideals of life, Mr. Lin Yutang<sup>1</sup> claims that to live according to the mean is "the normal and essential human way of life".

The virtues of the mean are advocated by the Chinese in thought no less than in action. Their adherence to "mean thinking" issues in a hatred of abstract theories, a disinclination to push chains of argument to their logical conclusions, and a resolute refusal to apply logic to life. The characteristic limitations of what Aristotle calls the practical sciences are, indeed, regarded by the Chinese as applying to all forms of human activity, to human thinking no less than to human feeling. For we cannot, they say, afford to be logical in thought any more than we can in life.

To the limitations of logic in relation to life Aristotle would probably subscribe. He develops his doctrine with great verve and applies it with effect to different types of characters and actions. In the course of this development he contrives to say a number of illuminating things about human nature and the weaknesses to which it is prone. It cannot, however, be said that his applications of the doctrine of the mean constitute the happiest part of his writings on ethics. The defect of the doctrine is that it savours too much of a deliberate and calculating attitude to life. The "just enough and no more" which it advocates does not, Aristotle is careful to point out, imply the same degree of indulgence in relation to every impulse and every desire. We are required in each case to find out by the method of trial and error, what is precisely the "just enough and no more" for ourselves and,

<sup>1</sup> See *My Country and My People*, by Lin Yutang, published 1935.



having done so, we are enjoined to keep it continually in mind and to act accordingly. Moreover, the "just enough" for one man may be quite different from the "just enough" for another. Every man must, therefore, find out his own "mean" for himself and, having found it, stick to it. The doctrine, in short, is a kind of spiritual valetudinarianism. We are to find out what is good for us, and then only to act in accordance with the conclusions of our findings.

**The Doctrine of the Mean and Stereotyped Behaviour.** The attitude to life recommended by the doctrine of the mean has also been criticized on the ground that it is apt to become stereotyped. Aristotle explicitly defines the disposition which expresses itself in actions that adhere to the mean, the disposition, that is to say, of moral goodness, as "a *state* of will or choice". On every moral issue that presents itself, the estimate which tells us wherein the mean in relation to that issue lies, reflects inevitably the character from which it proceeds. It is, that is to say, the expression of a certain character *state*. Aristotle goes out of his way to recommend that our estimates of the mean should become as habitual, one might almost be justified in saying as automatic, as possible. It is, in his view, all to the good that, so far as the practical affairs of daily life are concerned, we should have formed the habit of regularly acting in accordance with the mean, without having to give thought to the matter. The following example taken from Professor Burnet's writings exactly brings out Aristotle's meaning: "On a given occasion there will be a temperature which is just right for my morning bath. If the bath is hotter than this it will be too hot; if it is colder it will be too cold. But as this just right temperature varies with the condition of my body, it cannot be ascertained by simply using a thermometer. If I am in good general health I shall, however, know by the feel of the water when the temperature is right. So if I am in good moral health I shall know, without appealing

to a formal code of maxims, what is the right degree, e.g. of indignation, to show in a given case, how it should be shown and towards whom." This example will serve to illustrate the unthinking character of the judgments which, in Aristotle's view, the man who has "a settled disposition" to act in accordance with the mean habitually passes on questions of conduct. It is almost as if the mean were a rut. The assertion that behaviour in accordance with the mean tends to become stereotyped and uniform may most conveniently be illustrated by a personal example. At an early period of my life I discovered that, if I smoked as many cigarettes as were customary among my friends, I failed to derive much pleasure from smoking. Moreover, I had noticed that unlimited cigarette smoking produced a paradoxical result. Originally adopted as a source of pleasure, cigarette smoking was apt to develop into the satisfaction of a need. Whereas in the first stage of cigarette smoking one obtained pleasure from each cigarette smoked, in the second stage one experienced a feeling of discomfort whenever one was not smoking, and was, accordingly, driven to light a cigarette not in order to obtain pleasure, but in order to allay discomfort. I deduced that the cigarette smoker expended an ever-increasing quantity of time, effort and money, and obtained as a result an ever-diminishing quantity of satisfaction. It seemed to me to be important to guard against this result, and as I had no disposition to asceticism and did not wish to forgo the pleasure of smoking, I considered in what way I might control my smoking so as to derive from it the maximum satisfaction. Finding it difficult, if not impossible, to control the number of cigarettes I smoked, I took to a pipe. I now smoke four pipes a day, never less and rarely more; and generally I smoke them at the same times on each day, having one pipe after lunch, one after tea, and two after dinner. Thus each pipe is looked forward to with pleasure, and no deprivation is felt in the intervals.

The practice of regulating smoking with the sole object of deriving the maximum possible amount of pleasure

affords a good example of the doctrine of the mean in action, but it also emphasises the somewhat stereotyped attitude to life which its application entails. To stereotype one's activities in such a way as to obtain from each the greatest possible amount of satisfaction which it is capable of giving, may be good advice in the case of smoking, but I doubt whether it would be found to satisfy the requirements of the moral consciousness in cases in which self-sacrifice, courage and unselfishness are demanded. A man should not, it might be said, adopt a calculating attitude to virtue, or measure in advance the amount of good which he proposes to do in the world. Moreover, the doctrine of the mean is, as I have already observed, suitable for middle age rather than for youth. Youth is the time for experiment. A young man should, in common parlance, be ready to "taste any drink once", and there is a natural tendency to think ill of a man of twenty-one who, in his anxiety to avoid risk and maximize pleasure, keeps always in view the middle course which is appropriate to middle age.

**Who Determines the Mean.** This criticism derives support from a further consideration which relates the doctrine to Aristotle's political theory. When we ask the question, whose insight is it which lays down the rule by which the mean is to be determined, we find that it is not the insight of the individual whose activity is in question, but that of the wise legislator. The resort to the legislator to fix the mean is a necessary implication of Aristotle's political doctrine. It is the object of the wise educator so to mould the pupil, of the wise legislator so to frame the laws, that the citizen who profits from his educational training and acts habitually in accordance with the laws will lead the best sort of life of which he is capable. Now the sign of a good life is habitual action in accordance with the doctrine of the mean. Therefore, in the last resort, a life which is governed by the doctrine of the mean is one to which a citizen is habituated, not

as the result of his own conscious choice, but by training and education, and habitual obedience to law. Admittedly, it is left for him to choose to what extent the rule by which the mean is determined applies in any particular case, whether, for example, in the smoking instance given above, it is four or five or six pipes a day that the doctrine of the mean enjoins. But it is fairly clear that, the more closely the individual's behaviour is regulated by law and opinion—and in both Plato's and Aristotle's States it is regulated very closely indeed—the more invariably does his adherence to the mean, not only as a precept which lays down a general line of conduct, but as a rule which prescribes such and such particular conduct in such and such particular circumstances, proceed not from the individual's free judgment, but from the wisdom of the legislator which has received embodiment in the laws.

### III. THAT THE GOOD LIFE FOR THE CITIZEN MUST BE PRESCRIBED BY THE LEGISLATOR

Virtues of Character and Virtues of Intellect. We are now in a position to give Aristotle's answer to the second of our questions, namely, how is the happy life, that is to say, the life which is lived in accordance with the mean, to be achieved? Once again the answer is strongly reminiscent of Plato. It begins by introducing a distinction between two sorts of virtues, or excellences, namely, virtues of character and virtues of intellect. Aristotle's distinction brings us back to the discussion on an earlier page of the two problems which ethics is called upon to consider, the problem, namely, of finding out what our duty is, and the problem of doing it. In the course of that discussion I pointed out<sup>1</sup> that Socrates's doctrine that virtue is knowledge takes into account only the first of these problems, and it is with the deliberate intention of correcting Socrates's somewhat

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 46 and 51.

onesided view that Aristotle introduces his distinction. It is not enough, he insists, to know what conduct is right; we must be able to follow it; nor is it enough to follow it blindly, we must know why it is that the course of conduct we are following is right, and why it is right to follow it. The virtues of intellect depend upon such training of the practical intelligence as will enable us to know what is right, and why it is right; the virtues of character upon such training of the emotions and passions as will enable us to do what we know to be right. In Aristotle's view, the virtues of character are the first to be developed. It gradually becomes apparent, however, to the reader of the *Ethics* that, so far as the ordinary man is concerned, the virtues of character are not only those which are developed first, but the only virtues that are ever developed.

**The Formation of A Good Character.** The procedure recommended by Aristotle for the training of character is as follows:—

1. The passions and emotions are not, he points out, in themselves either good or bad; they are ethically neutral. More specifically, they are the raw material from which character is formed. For characters are good or bad according to the nature of the acts in which they express themselves. Now the nature of the acts we perform will depend upon the nature of the ends we desire and value, and the nature of the ends we desire and value will depend upon the way in which our passions and emotions have been trained.

2. The object of training is, however, not merely to make us feel rightly, desire rightly, and act rightly on a particular occasion; training must aim at inculcating *the habit* of so feeling, desiring and acting, with the consequence that it becomes as natural to us to feel, desire, and act rightly on all occasions as it is to breathe and to sleep. The educator must, for example, train a man in habits of courage, endurance and control so that he will act bravely, suffer uncomplainingly, and conduct himself with moderation without having to make up his mind,

possibly after severe moral struggle, so to do on each particular occasion. From this point of view it might almost be said that it is Aristotle's object to eliminate altogether that factor of moral conflict upon which the Christian doctrine of temptation lays stress, the conflict which arises when a man wants to do X, but feels that he ought to do Y. Some ethical philosophers, for example Kant,<sup>1</sup> have written as if duty were always opposed to desire, the implication being that we may recognize our duty by reason of the fact that it is disagreeable. But Aristotle's man of good character will not only do his duty naturally and habitually by virtue of the training which he has acquired; he will actually take pleasure in so doing. And if we ask why it is that he finds right action pleasing, the answer will again be, because that is the way in which he has been trained and educated. If, however, his training has been imperfect, then, although he may perceive what is right and good, he will nevertheless be unable to do the right and pursue the good. Thus Aristotle seeks to correct and amplify Socrates's theory that virtue is knowledge, by pointing out that unless our appetites and emotions have been trained in such a way as to cause us to *desire* what is right, the mere fact that we know what is right will not be enough to make us do it.

Virtues of the Intellect Developed only by the Few.  
 3. Who is responsible for this all-important training? The answer is one with which we are already familiar, the educator and the legislator. The educator and the legislator are, as we have seen, aware in a general way of the nature of the Good for man. They are also possessed of trained judgments by means of which they are enabled to recognize that this particular law and this particular rule of conduct are embodiments or expressions of the Good. Like Plato's Guardians, they both know the general and recognize that the particular is an example of the general. The

statesman proceeds to embody this general knowledge in his laws, the educator in his curriculum, with the result that those who have been trained to revere and to obey the laws, those whose opinions have been formed by the curriculum, are constrained to take the same views on moral questions, to hold the same opinions as to what is good and desirable, as the legislator and the educator. The general knowledge of the good which is possessed by the legislator and the educator, and the insight which enables them to recognize the presence of the good in particular cases are virtues of the intellect. They constitute what Aristotle calls practical wisdom. But there is no evidence that Aristotle, any more than Plato, considered that they were within the compass of the mental equipment of the ordinary citizen. The ordinary man in Aristotle's State, as in Plato's, does what is good as a result of his training, his reverence for the laws, and his amenability to the influence of public opinion, but he does not know in general what good is, and he does not, therefore, know in particular cases why it is that he should do this particular good thing. Aristotle's ordinary citizen, in fact, like Plato's, achieves such virtue as is appropriate to his attainments and condition, but the virtue is automatic, the result of habit, not spontaneous, the expression of insight.

**Preliminary Remarks on Free Will.** This conception of two levels or grades of virtue, of which one is in effect automatic, leads to a consideration of Aristotle's doctrine of the Will. Most of those who have written upon the subject of ethics have laid it down that, if there is to be a morality in any of the senses in which this word is normally used, there must be freedom of the will and freedom, therefore, of choice. For if, when faced with a choice between A and B, a man is not free to choose A and reject B, then there is no sense in saying that he *ought* to choose A. "Ought," in fact, as Kant pointed out,<sup>1</sup> implies "can".

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 205.

Since the notion of ought is essential to morality, the conception of free will is also essential to morality, so that if a man is not responsible for his actions, he cannot be considered a moral agent. If, therefore, Aristotle's ordinary man is not to be regarded merely as a well-trained automaton performing, as an ant performs, those actions which are necessary to the well-being of the community to which he belongs, if he is to be regarded as a moral agent able freely to choose what is right and to act in accordance with his choice, it is essential that he should be credited with free will. Now to establish the existence of free will is an exceedingly difficult undertaking, for once you begin to think about free will, you are apt to find, as I shall try later to show,<sup>1</sup> that all the arguments that occur to you on the subject are arguments against it. Freedom may be a fact and we may be convinced that it is a fact, but, if so, it is a fact which must be approached only with the greatest circumspection; that is why arguments between determinists and upholders of freedom almost invariably end in favour of the former. How various and how formidable are the arguments which may be brought against the conception of freedom I shall hope to show in Chapter VII. For the present, we are concerned only with Aristotle's treatment of the subject.

**What Constitutes an Action?** Aristotle propounds a doctrine which purports to claim freedom for the human will, and which he officially regards as establishing the claim. Aristotle, in fact, shares the plain man's conviction of freedom, but it may be doubted whether he has been any more successful in substantiating it than other philosophers who have attempted the task. Aristotle begins by pointing out that, when we judge men from the moral point of view, assigning to them moral praise or blame, it is not so much about their actions that we are judging as about the will, or intention, from which their actions spring. An action is, after all, only the displacement of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 228-245.



a piece of matter. A limb moves, or a limb causes an object to move, with the result that matter is displaced in space. Moreover, as I shall try to show,<sup>1</sup> it is impossible to say either where an action begins, or where it ends. If I may anticipate here the fuller discussion which appears on a later page, let us take as an example the action of forging a cheque. Does the action begin with the neural disturbance in the brain that initiates the movement in the motor nervous system which controls the fingers, or with the travelling of the relevant messages along the motor nervous system, or with the movements of the hand that takes up the pen, or with the movements of the fingers that make the signature? To say that the action begins with any one of these is, it is obvious, to introduce an arbitrary break into a continuous process. Similar difficulties arise when we try to assign an end to the action. Does the action conclude with the termination of the last movement of the fingers in making the signature, or with the movements entailed in blotting and taking up the cheque, or in stretching out the arm to hand the cheque over the counter? Where in fact does the action end and where do its *consequences* begin? It is no easier to answer than it is to say where it begins. Difficulties of this kind have led many philosophers to deny that actions in themselves are ever the objects of ethical judgments, and to substitute motives, intentions, consequences, or all of these.<sup>2</sup>

**Aristotle's Doctrine of the Will.** Aristotle includes both motive and intention in what he calls "choice" or "deliberate desire", and we call will. It is the condition of the will revealed by men's acts which, in his view, is the true object of ethical judgment. The will as conceived by him comprises two elements, one intellectual, the other appetitive. The appetitive element is our desire for a particular result; the intellectual element calculates

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of the object of our ethical judgments see Chapter VIII, pp. 287-295.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 287-295.

the steps by means of which this result may be obtained. We picture to ourselves the result, the steps which will bring it about, and then the steps leading to the steps which will bring it about until, as we trace back the chain of steps, we come at last to one that lies within our power. This we proceed to take, not because we desire it for its own sake, but because we desire the end-result of the chain of actions which it initiates. It is with reference to this first step that Aristotle defines the will as the deliberate or self-conscious choosing of something which it is within our power to do.

We were led to embark upon an account of Aristotle's doctrine of the will in the expectation that it might modify the somewhat automatic view of human conduct, or at least of the conduct of the ordinary man, to which his theory of the two levels of morality appeared to point. Judged from this point of view, the doctrine of the will is deficient in two respects.

**Reason as the Servant of Desire.** 1. The first is in respect of its view of reason. The relation between reason and desire in Aristotle's *Ethics* is a subject of controversy. Aristotle often writes, as if he conceived reason to be merely the servant of desire. He lays it down, for example, that "mere thinking originates no movement". This statement is usually interpreted to mean that reason does not itself initiate action, but only comes into play when the motive force of desire sets it going. The controversy is apt to be unfruitful, since our view of the matter at issue must depend upon the precise sense in which the word "reason" is being used. Aristotle is here making a distinction between the theoretical and the practical reason, and it is only of the former that he asserts that it does not motivate action. He certainly did not wish to deny the presence of a rational element in choice. Yet the whole tenor of his doctrine of the will is undoubtedly determinist. The conclusions of his determinism will be familiar to students of modern psychology. Many modern

psychologists tend to think of reason as a kind of engine, and of desire as the steam that causes it to function. It is only when a sufficient head of steam has accumulated in the boiler that the engine moves. The analogy illustrates the conception with which Aristotle has been traditionally credited of the relation between reason and desire; that is to say, between the intellectual and the appetitive elements in the will and their bearing upon conduct. This conception represents reason as being merely the servant of desire; but if reason is the servant of desire, reason is not free. What, then, is the status of desire? Desire and emotion, it will be remembered, are, in Aristotle's scheme, neither good nor bad. They only become the objects of ethical judgment when they operate in a certain way; when, in other words, they become directed to certain ends. Now the ends to which the desires of the ordinary man are directed are those to which the educator by his system of education, the legislator by the provisions of his laws, have directed them. In other words, what we, as ordinary men and women, desire is not determined by us, but for us.

**The Doctrine of Self-Determinism.** 2. Let us now consider Aristotle's doctrine of the will in its bearing upon his general theory of character formation. Character, it will be remembered, is defined as "a settled condition of the soul which wills or chooses" to act in certain ways. Character, in other words, expresses itself in actions, and the will is that aspect of character which chooses the actions. By what, then, is the will determined? Presumably by the character, for according to our character's complexion, so do we will. What, then, it is important to know, forms the character? The answer would appear to be that the character is formed by acts of will. The suggestion of circularity in this argument is important, and it is worth while pausing to develop it.

Let us suppose that I am a person continually given to good works; all my actions, we will suppose, are noble,

none ignoble. Now these good actions of mine must, it is said, have some cause. Whence, then, do they spring? Obviously from the nobility of my character. But how was this noble character of mine formed? Clearly not arbitrarily, not out of nothing. Being good is not as easy as all that. How then? By training and discipline and the habit of leading a good life. But a good life is nothing apart from the good actions in which it finds expression. By a good life we mean simply a life that expresses itself in good acts. Hence a good character is the result of the continuous performance of good acts. But whence do these good acts spring? Obviously from the possession of a noble character, for a good character—as we have seen—is one that naturally expresses itself in good acts. Hence at every stage of our career our actions are the determined results of our characters, which in their turn were formed by our preceding actions, which in their turn sprang from the good character which expressed themselves in them, and so on *ad infinitum*. At every stage, in fact, we act in such and such a way *because* we are that sort of person. Travelling backwards on these lines we come to the first actions we performed which sprang out of the initial character, or disposition for a character, with which we were born interacting with the environment in which we found ourselves placed.

Now, unless we believe in reincarnation, it seems difficult to hold that we are responsible for the initial character or disposition for a character with which we were born; more difficult still, to hold ourselves responsible for the environment in which at birth we were placed. We may conclude, therefore, that we are responsible neither for our initial character, or disposition to form a character, nor for our initial environment, from which it follows, if the argument which I have outlined is correct, that we are not responsible for our actions or our characters at any stage of our subsequent careers.

Now, it is to this doctrine, a doctrine known as Self-Determinism, that in the opinion of many philosophers

Aristotle's theory reduces itself. Aristotle tries to escape its implications by insisting that "a man is somehow responsible for his moral state; he is somehow responsible for what appears good to him". If he is not, then, Aristotle agrees, "virtue is no more voluntary than vice, each man's end being determined for him, not by choice but by nature or in some other way".

But this does not really help matters, for we want to know in what sense a man is "responsible for his moral state", since his moral state is formed by his actions.

**Modern Version of Self-Determinism.** Self-Determinism is a theory widely held at the present time. It has been developed by modern psychologists and is the basis, usually unavowed, of the conception of human nature invoked by psycho-analysis. So developed, it constitutes, as I shall try in a later chapter to show,<sup>1</sup> perhaps the most formidable body of argument that those who believe in free will have to face, and it is worth while pausing for a moment to consider what precisely in its modern form it asserts, and what are the grounds on which it bases its assertions. Let us take as typical of this school of thought the views of Freud.

Freud holds that the origin and explanation of all conscious events is to be found in the unconscious. Our conscious thoughts and desires are, therefore, the reflections more or less distorted and more or less sublimated of unconscious elements in our nature. We do not know what is going on in the unconscious; if we did it would not be unconscious, but, in respect of our knowledge of it, conscious; therefore we cannot control it.

If we do not know it and cannot control it, we are not responsible for it; therefore we are not responsible for the particular version of it that appears in consciousness. In other words, we are not responsible for our thoughts and desires. Our thoughts determine what we think, our desires what we do. If, in short, consciousness is rightly

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 237-244.

regarded as a by-product of unconscious processes, it is clearly determined by the processes which produce it. Conscious events are merely the smoke and flame given off by the workings of the subterranean psychological machinery of which we are unconscious.

At this point it may very naturally be objected that no account is being taken of the will. It is true, it may be said, that our desires and thoughts occur to a large extent without our volition; but whether we encourage them or not is a different matter; whether we indulge our thoughts and gratify our desires, depends upon our wills. It is the function of will to control thought and discipline desire, and in exercising this control will is free. Thus in using our wills to control our desires, to choose this and to refrain from that, we are really free agents. Similarly with our tastes; we cannot, admittedly, guarantee that we shall like doing this or doing that, but we can guarantee that we will do this or that, whether we like it or not. But if psycho-analysis is right, this traditional account is very far from representing the facts.

Psycho-analysis suggests that the fundamental motive forces of our natures are instinctive and impulsive in character. Now the will is either one among such forces, or it is a sublimated version of such a force. It is, that is to say, either an instinctive drive to act in a certain way, or, if it is not, it cannot be brought into operation unless there is an instinctive drive to use it in a certain way. The will, then, is helpless, except in so far as some force which is outside our control enables us to bring it into play.

**A Modern Theory of Instinct.** This attitude to the will is by no means confined to psycho-analysis. It is prevalent in the writings of many orthodox psychologists. Professor McDougall, for example, one of the best known of modern writers on psychology, holds<sup>1</sup> that the primary

<sup>1</sup> Or used to; his earlier views on instinct have been to some extent modified in his latest work.

motive forces of human nature are the instincts. We have instincts to behave in certain ways. We act in order to satisfy our instincts, and, without the prompting of an instinct seeking its satisfaction, we can neither act nor think.

"The instincts," says Professor McDougall, "are the prime movers of all human activity; by the conative or impulsive force of some instinct every train of thought, however cold and passionless it may seem, is borne along towards its end . . . all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind is but the instrument by which these impulses seek their satisfaction . . . Take away these instinctive dispositions, with their powerful mechanisms, and the organism would become incapable of activity of any kind; it would be inert and motionless, like a wonderful piece of clockwork whose mainspring had been removed."

On this view, then, the instincts play a part analogous to that of the unconscious in Freud's theory. Even if we admit that there is in our mental make-up a separate, independent something called the will, it remains inoperative, unless the urge of instinct brings it into play. Unless, therefore, we are impelled to use the will to suppress an unruly desire, we cannot in fact suppress it. Now the drive or impulsion to use the will for this purpose is, like our other drives to action, an occurrence which is fundamentally instinctive in character, and neither for this occurrence nor for its strength when it occurs, can we be held responsible.

What happens is that we are aware at the same time of two different urges or promptings to action. The first takes the form of an unruly self-regarding desire; the second is a determination to suppress the unruly desire in the interests of the good of the whole. If the desire is stronger than the determination, there will be a failure in what we call will, and we shall be said in common parlance to "give way to our desire". If the determination is stronger than the desire, we shall perform what is called an act of self-denial. This act of self-denial, however,

just as truly as the contrary act of self-indulgence, will be an expression of obedience to whatever happens to be our strongest instinctive drive to action at the moment. Hence, whatever the resultant action may be, it must be interpreted as the result of a conflict between two instinctive drives, a conflict in which the stronger will inevitably win.

The truth of this analysis has, say the psycho-analysts, been obscured by the use of ambiguous phrases such as self-control and self-denial. These phrases suggest that in controlling a desire, I am in some unexplained way acting in defiance of my nature. But it is only by drawing upon my own *natural* forces that I can defy my nature. If it were not *natural* for me to restrain my desire, I could not restrain it, so that in self-denial and self-control I am being just as truly self-indulgent as in an indiscriminate yielding to purely self-regarding desires.

Summing up, we may say that, if the view that the basis of all action is instinctive or impulsive, that, in other words, it is non-rational, is correct, the use of the will to repress desire is only a sublimated version of an instinctive drive to suppress a desire which we instinctively feel to be inimical to the good of the whole. If we desire to pass an examination, we *will* to suppress a desire to go to the cinema when we ought to be studying. But the *will* in this case is simply the expression, more or less disguised, of the desire to pass the examination, for which we are no more responsible than for the desire to go to the cinema.

**Circularity of Aristotle's Arguments.** Now it is possible that this account of the springs of human conduct may be true; reasonably certain, that it contains at least some elements of truth. That it is entirely true, I do not believe,<sup>1</sup> although I readily concede its plausibility. My present concern is to insist that, if true, it is fatal to the notion of freedom; and if fatal to the notion of freedom,

<sup>1</sup> In Chapter VII, pp. 267-271 I have suggested reasons for not accepting this view in its entirety.



fatal also to any theory of ethics. For, applied to ethics, it issues in a circular position. What, we wish to know, is a good character? Aristotle's answer is that it is one which is formed by good actions. What is a good action? It is one that is willed by a good character.

Aristotle's account of the will in its bearing upon the formation of character is not the only instance of a circular argument in his writings on moral philosophy. The reader of the *Ethics* cannot, indeed, avoid being struck by the frequency with which Aristotle's arguments lead to conclusions whose validity must be assumed, if the premises of the argument are to be accepted. I give three examples:

(a) Human beings, he points out, possess a faculty which we should to-day call temper. Temper may assume the form of a righteous indignation against wrong-doing, or a wilful impatience of restraint. Now righteous indignation, Aristotle affirms, is good, but wilful impatience is bad. How, then, do we distinguish the one from the other? Aristotle's answer apparently is that righteous indignation is that which we feel against conduct that is bad. What, then, is conduct that is bad? It is that for which the good man will feel righteous indignation.

(b) If I am in good moral health, Aristotle says, I shall know what is the rightful application of the doctrine of the mean in any given case; for example, how much or how little anger it is right to feel on a particular occasion. How, then, am I to recognize the state of being in good moral health? Answer; it is a state which expresses itself in an habitually correct application of the doctrine of the mean.

(c) What is the definition of a good citizen? He is one who willingly and contentedly obeys the laws of the good State. What, then, is a good State? One which evokes the willing co-operation of the good citizen. How does a man come to recognize that the laws of the good State are good, and such as he may justifiably support; how, in other words, does he become a good citizen? Answer; he becomes a good citizen as the result of training

asked to remember that Aristotle's writings have come down to us in an incomplete and unrevised form; nor can it be doubted that the possessor of a mind as tidily logical as Aristotle's would have been at pains, had he embarked upon the work of revision, to gather together some at least of the threads which are now left in the air. Some, but not, it would seem, all, for Aristotle's ethical position does entail at least one inconsistency which seems to me to be fundamental. To this I now turn.

**The Life According to Reason.** The doctrine which I have hitherto been engaged in expounding suggests that the best life for man is the life of willing participation in the affairs of the State. The participation is of two kinds; for the minority, the "best", it takes the form of legislating, administering and educating; for the majority, the ordinary men, it expresses itself in co-operating. But no conception of the good life higher than that of the citizen of the State has as yet been suggested.

At the end of the *Ethics*, however, we are introduced to a different conception of the good life. Aristotle's thought is dominated by the teleological conceptions of which I have given some account on an earlier page,<sup>1</sup> and it is to teleology that he turns for his profounder conception of the good life. Teleology insists that the highest good for any organism is to be found in the complete development of the nature of that organism. The complete development of the nature of the organism is the realization of all its capacities and, Aristotle adds, it is the realization of its most distinctive capacity. What, then, is the capacity which distinguishes man? Aristotle answers that it is his reason. Plants and animals live, animals feel, but only man reasons. It is, therefore, in the last resort in the life guided by reason that the end of man must be sought. But reason, he points out, is of two kinds; practical and theoretical. These two kinds of reason are distinguished by reference to their subject matter, the practical reason being concerned

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30, 31.

with things which might have been otherwise, the theoretical with universal and unalterable truths. Now ethics and politics belong, as we have seen, to the realm of things which might have been otherwise. In the course of the preceding exposition the more important of the pronouncements of practical reason in the spheres of ethics and politics have been enumerated. Thus the function of the practical reason in ethics has been shown to consist in the direction of conduct by a rule, the rule, namely, of the mean; and this, Aristotle is careful to point out, is an end peculiar to human beings, since only human beings are capable of living by rule. The practical reason in politics prescribes co-operation with one's fellow-citizens in promoting the welfare of the State. Man, it will be remembered, has been defined by Aristotle as a social and political being. What is more, he is the only being who, in Aristotle's view, can be so defined. Animals, it is true, herd, but they do not herd consciously or in pursuit of a deliberate purpose. Civic co-operation, then, is a distinctive capacity of human beings. In the exercise of this distinctive capacity the practical reason performs its appropriate function in the political sphere, and the distinctively political end of man is achieved.

**The Activity of Contemplation as the Highest Good.** The theoretical reason is, however, still unprovided for. The subject matter of the theoretical reason is, as we have seen, to be found in the realm of truths which are universal and unalterable; that is to say, it is to be found in the realms of philosophy and science. Since the activity of the theoretical reason is at once the most distinctive and the highest activity of man, it is in its exercise that the highest kind of good life is to be found.

Aristotle goes further and affirms that the theoretical reason is an expression of the divine in man, for the activity of God is defined in his metaphysical writings as the unbroken and continuous contemplation of those very realities which we pursue in science and philosophy and

succeed at times, albeit intermittently, in perceiving. Thus in exercising the theoretical reason in contemplative pursuits, we engage in an activity which is not other than that of God himself.

And since the exercise of our highest faculties is also the source of our greatest pleasure, the life of intellectual contemplation and research is also the pleasantest life. It is thus an end to which all other forms of activity are in the last resort means. Men engage, or should do, in business or affairs, in order that they may obtain leisure for intellectual contemplation. The ultimate object or purpose of politics is not different. Men regulate the affairs of the State, not merely in order that the State may be well run, but in order that, because it is well run, they may be in a position to afford themselves leisure for intellectual activity; and just as it is the mark of a good headmaster or of a successful business director that his intervention should never be required, so in a well-governed State the best rulers are those who have little or no occasion for the exercise of their authority. Success in statecraft consists, in other words, in diminishing the occasions for the exercise of statecraft and thus providing time and leisure for the exercise of a faculty which is higher than that of the statesman.

Such in summary is the teaching of Aristotle's *Politics*; the conclusion of the *Ethics* is not different. At the end of the *Ethics* we are told that the best life for man is not that of the citizen, although the excellence of the citizen must first be acquired before the best life can be lived. Now the excellence of the citizen depends upon the observance of the rule of the mean. The virtues which we have already described, the virtue of the practical intellect which consists in the recognition of the mean, the settled habit of acting in accordance with the mean, the "virtues of character" which enable us to act rightly without having to pause on each occasion to consider whether what we are doing is, in fact, right—all these, which are integral parts of the good life of the ordinary

man, are also integral parts of the good life of Aristotle's leisured sage. But while for the ordinary man they are ends, for the leisured sage they are only means. The end itself is for him the exercise of the activity of the theoretical intellect. Thus the good life is in the last resort the life of the mind in the widest sense of the word, whether it is devoted to creation in art, to the quest of knowledge in scientific research, or to that contemplation of the essential nature of things which some men have called philosophy, others mysticism.

## COMMENT AND CRITICISM

It is not my intention to criticize Aristotle's ethical and political theories in any detail. One important criticism of the *Ethics*, that many of its doctrines appear to be circular, has already been indicated on a preceding page. The good life of the student and the sage admittedly breaks through this circle, but this kind of good life is reserved only for the few.

That its benefits are reserved only for the few, is an objection which many would wish to bring against Aristotle's conception of the State. Aristotle is careful at the outset to guard himself against the criticism to which Plato's State is exposed, the criticism, namely, that the welfare of the individual is too obviously subordinated to that of the State. That this is, indeed, a fault in a political community most writers on political theory are agreed. As Dante says in his work on politics, *De Monarchia*, "The aim of such rightful Commonwealths is liberty, to wit that men may live for their own sake. For citizens are not for the sake of the Consuls, nor a nation for the King; but contrariwise the Consuls are for the sake of the citizens, the King for the sake of the nation."

To embody this ideal in practice was no doubt Aristotle's intention. Yet it is only in regard to the few that it is fulfilled. For the great mass of citizens he provides only "virtues of character", and these, which are produced by

# INTRODUCTION TO PARTS II AND III

## THE SPLIT

**Ethics and Politics Separately Pursued.** The distinguishing characteristic of Greek thought is, as we have seen, the interlocking of ethics and politics. The good for man and the good for the State were for the Greeks interdependent; the good life could only be lived in the State, while the excellence of the State was to be judged by reference to its ability to promote the good life. With the end of the classical era this reciprocal interdependence ceases. It does not cease absolutely and at once; but from the beginning of the Christian era the two studies gradually fall apart, and it becomes more convenient to treat them separately.

Plato and Aristotle are both political and ethical philosophers. Their ethical theories cannot be understood independently of their political, or their political theories independently of their ethical. Of the writers with whose views we shall now be concerned, this is not true. They can, as a general rule, be classed either as ethical or political philosophers and even when, as in the case of Hobbes or Kant they are both, their ethics are so subordinate to their politics, or their politics so much less distinctive than their ethics, that the expositor, whose purpose is to give a survey of ethical and political thought as a whole, can afford to ignore their subordinate and less distinctive contributions. My purpose being to write not a history of ethical and political theory but a guide to ethical and political ideas, I am concerned only to present these ideas in their clearest and most distinctive form without

referring, except incidentally, to the writers who may happen to have advanced them.

At the point which we have now reached convenience of exposition will be best served by treating these two branches of thought separately. Indeed, during a period of several hundred years they were largely pursued separately. The separation continues until well on into the nineteenth century. It is only in our own times that the two have again been brought together, and doctrines such as Communism and Fascism appear, which conceive of the nature of the good life for man in terms which involve a necessary reference to the nature of the State, or the position of a class. It is only in certain kinds of society, these theories maintain, that the good life is possible, if only because an essential part of the good life consists in service to society.

The reasons for the split between ethics and politics are various and interesting, and in this Introduction to the ensuing two Parts I shall try to give some account of them.

**The Effect of Christianity.** Among the most important is the effect of Christianity. Christianity places man's true life not in this world, but in the next. While the next world is wholly good, this world is conceived to be at least to some extent evil; while the next life is eternal, life on earth is transitory. For man's life hereafter this, his present existence, is to be regarded as a preparation and a training, and its excellence consists in the thoroughness and efficiency with which the training is carried out. Nothing on this earth is wholly and absolutely good, and such goods as earthly life contains are good only as a means to the greater goods which are promised hereafter.

An important corollary bears upon our present enquiry. The good for man is not, as the Greeks thought, bound up with the good of the State, but with the salvation of his soul; it is to be realized not in a civic, but in a heavenly society. Now in the preparation of his soul for later admission to this heavenly society, the State plays no

necessary or obvious part. Indeed, except for the perfunctory recognition of its existence implied by the injunction to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", the State tends to drop out of the Christian scheme of things altogether, to drop out, that is, in theory. In practice the State is a factor very much to be reckoned with, making claims upon the individual's attention and demanding for itself an allegiance which is apt to conflict with that which he owes to God. Now the allegiance which a man owed to God was in the Middle Ages for all practical purposes indistinguishable from the allegiance which he owed to the Church. Hence, the political theory of the Middle Ages is concerned very largely with the attempt to reconcile the conflicting claims of State and Church. Theorists endeavoured to effect a division of the individual into two halves; there was the spiritual half, which was responsible to God and the Church, and there was the temporal half whose loyalty was claimed by the State. Controversy arose over the question, where was the division to be made? Both the spiritual power, represented by the Pope, and the temporal power represented by the ruler of the State, were continually trying to encroach upon the half of the individual which was claimed by the other as his especial province. It will be worth while to take a passing glance at this controversy in the form in which it intrudes itself into the works of two of the most celebrated writers of the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274). St. Thomas's writings on politics will be found in Volumes II and III of his comprehensive work, *Summa Theologica*. St. Thomas's philosophy being based upon a Christian foundation, his ethical views are such as would necessarily follow from Christian doctrines, and do not here call for special comment. It is his political views with which we are concerned. St. Thomas was writing at a time when Christendom was a whole, owning a unified culture and



looking to a single spiritual head. That man was a spiritual being was generally agreed, and the belief in his future life was universally accepted. For this future life, earthly existence was a preparation, and it was with reference to it that earthly duties were defined. What was the place of politics in such a scheme? The injunction to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's had the highest authority, and should no doubt be followed. But what, in fact, did it entail? The question was one by which St. Thomas was considerably exercised. If men's souls are immortal, in what sense can they belong to the State? If men's duty and allegiance are owed to a heavenly ruler, to do His will and keep His commandments, how can they be under the command of an earthly one? What, in short, should be the limits of a necessary temporal power over essentially spiritual beings?

St. Thomas's conclusions may be stated briefly as follows. First, man has two natures, a natural<sup>1</sup> and a supernatural, and he can live upon the plane of either. Secondly, the salvation of the individual soul lies not in this life, but in the hereafter. The salvation of man's soul will, therefore, be achieved not by his natural but by his supernatural nature. Thirdly, the object of the State is the promotion of the good of the individuals who compose it, that is to say, in the last resort the preparation of their souls for salvation. So far, no particular difficulty has presented itself, but at this point a problem arises. The State must, St. Thomas agrees, possess authority, if only to enable it to perform its function of promoting the good of its citizens. Yet God is the ultimate authority in all things, and his power extends no less over man's natural, than over his supernatural, self. Over man's supernatural self God's authority is unchallenged and supreme, but over man's natural self, so far as it functions

<sup>1</sup> The word "natural" is not here used in its Greek meaning to denote the fullest development of a man's potentialities. St. Thomas uses it in a sense which approximates more closely to its modern meaning, to denote man's primitive, and, on St. Thomas's premises, regenerate, self.

in the political sphere, the State, too, has authority. What, then, is the relation of God's authority to the State's? St. Thomas's answer is that the State's authority must, in the last resort, be regarded as the delegated authority of God. In the first place, God invests with his authority the people as a whole. It is in the people that, as later writers would have put it, sovereignty resides. The people then delegate this authority to whatever form of representative circumstances suggest as being the most suitable, either to a monarch, or to a talented few, or even—St. Thomas does not exclude the possibility—to representatives of the people as a whole, chosen by the people as a whole. But whether the resultant government is a monarchy, an aristocracy or a democracy, its authority derives from God via the people.

But now arises another difficulty. Man, as we have seen, is not only a natural, but a supernatural being and he functions upon the supernatural plane even while he is still on earth. Over man's supernatural nature God's authority extends, and in this sphere no less than in the temporal sphere, God's authority is vested in earthly representatives. Whereas, however, in the temporal sphere God's authority is distributed among the people who are many, in the spiritual sphere He has a single representative, namely, the Pope. The Pope, in fact, is the intermediary between God and mankind. Thus two authorities, the political and the papal, each deriving its authority from God, confront each other. How are their respective claims to be adjusted? St. Thomas solves the difficulty by saying that in all cases of dispute the last word rests with the Pope. The Pope, in other words, is pre-eminent over any earthly ruler. This solution was not, however, one that the political authorities were always prepared to accept, for though in theory the opposition was between man's natural and his supernatural natures, it expressed itself in practice in a struggle between two all-too-human authorities. As Darrell Figgis puts it in his *Churches in the Modern State*, "When" (in mediæval times) "conflict is spoken

of between Church and State it is a conflict between two bodies of officials, the civil and the ecclesiastical." The wars between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, although in theory the matter at issue was the division of power between the temporal and the spiritual authorities, were in fact a conflict between these "two bodies of officials".

**Views of Dante (1265-1321).** The problem of the relation between the temporal and the spiritual power is also discussed in Dante's famous work *De Monarchia*, which appeared in 1310. While St. Thomas maintained that the temporal ruler was in the last resort subordinate to the spiritual, Dante sought to effect a complete separation between the two spheres, a separation which would leave each authority paramount in its own. Dante shares the general pre-suppositions of St. Thomas's thought. Man, he would agree, has his being upon two planes, the natural and the supernatural, and his ultimate salvation is to be found upon the latter. He also held that it is to the next world rather than to this one that we must look for the fulfilment of man's spiritual being. "Providence," he wrote, "has set two things before man to be aimed at by him: the blessedness of this life which consists in the exercise of his proper power and is represented by the Earthly Paradise; and the blessedness of eternal life, which consists in the fruition of the sight of God, to which his proper power cannot ascend unless assisted by the divine light. . . . Now to these two ends man must attain by different means."

So far as the means to the "Earthly Paradise" are concerned, Dante was prepared to follow the Greeks, defining man, as Plato and Aristotle defined him, as a social being whose end is the realization of all his potentialities and, more particularly, of the potentialities of the intellect. The achievement of this end entailed co-operation with his fellows in society; for, Dante maintained, "no man was able to obtain felicity himself without

the aid of many, inasmuch as he needs many things which no one is able to provide alone". The State, then, and man's life in the State, is important in and for itself. Thus, while Dante conceded the primacy of God's appointed representative, the Pope, over man's spiritual life, he demurred to St. Thomas's assertion of the competence of the spiritual authority on the temporal plane. The two planes, the spiritual and the social, were, he maintained, distinct. Hence Dante repudiated the Pope's claim to temporal authority, affirming that man's earthly affairs and, in particular, his civic duties, were the concern not of the Pope, but of the State. Now the State, Dante held, must be under the control of a single monarch, since otherwise the existence of factions will make it impossible to preserve peace, and in all matters pertaining to man's welfare here on earth the temporal monarch should, Dante insists, be free from interference by the Pope. But the greater the power with which in the interests of peace it is necessary to endow the monarch, the more important is it that he should be wise and benevolent. For his possession of wisdom and benevolence we can only trust to God's goodness.

**Dante on the World Ruler and the World State.** Not content with making his earthly monarch absolute in the sphere of the State, Dante sought to extend the scope of his authority beyond the limits of the State. Writing as a member of a society torn by factions, in a world which had yet to escape from the welter of perpetual fighting which was the Middle Ages, Dante insists again and again that the primary need of mankind is peace. Peace is, indeed, for him the pre-eminent political good of man's earthly life, if only because it is the indispensable condition of the acquirement and the enjoyment of all other goods. The activity of the speculative intellect, for example, which, following Aristotle, Dante valued above all other earthly activities, can be exercised only in a secure environment. The mystic cannot meditate,

the philosopher speculate, the artist create, or the scientist pursue research, if his tranquillity is threatened by the bandit who may at any moment slit his throat, or assault his wife. Peace, then, Dante saw, is the condition of all other goods, and peace can best be secured by the inclusion of all mankind in a single World State. The nearest approach to such a World State that Dante knew was the Holy Roman Empire. Aware as he must have been of its deficiencies, he nevertheless looked to it as the germ from which the World State might develop. Dante's hopes in this direction depended, or so he thought, for their fulfilment upon the absolute supremacy of the monarch in the temporal sphere. If the monarch was to become a world monarch, he must, from the first, be an absolute monarch.

To the obvious objection that this is to entrust a single individual with dangerous powers, Dante replies that a universal monarch would be exempt from most of the temptations to misrule that beset a national one. Having no rival to fear, for he would be the world's sole ruler, and no ambition to pursue, for there could be no earthly condition higher than his, he would have no incentive to rule otherwise than in accordance with the deliverances of wisdom and the dictates of justice. Dante's universal monarch, in fact, resembles one of Plato's Guardians transferred from the stage of the Greek City State to that of the world. Under such an one, Dante maintains, man's true freedom can alone be achieved; but as a condition of its achievement, his dominion must be universal and his power absolute.

Holding these views, it was inevitable that in the struggle between the Empire and the Papacy Dante should range himself on the side of the former. Although credit must be given to Dante for being one of the first to envisage the idea of world government as the ultimate solution of the quarrels that divide and the wars that devastate mankind, he does not develop his proposals for world government in any detail. It remains for him at best a shadowy ideal, the sole way of escape from the perpetual strife

between warring States, just as his notion of a single absolute ruler blessed by God is conceived by him as the only way of overcoming the perpetual strife of warring factions within the State.

**Lack of Political Theory in the Middle Ages.** Dante's visions of an ideal World State and an ideal World Ruler in no sense constitute a political theory. Indeed, it cannot be said that the Middle Ages produced any coherent body of thought worthy to be dignified by that title. Apart from the controversy which continued for over a hundred years over the delimitation of the spheres of the spiritual and temporal powers, a controversy which sprang inevitably from the universal acceptance of the conception of man's dual nature, the Middle Ages have little to show in the way of political wisdom save rules for the government of men and instructions for the expedient conduct of affairs of State.

**Machiavelli (1469-1527).** How far removed are these rules from any theory of the nature of the State, its origin, purpose and underlying principles, can be seen from a glance at the political thought of Machiavelli. Machiavelli's work on politics, *De Principatibus*, is thus described by the author:—

"I have made," he says, "a treatise, *De Principatibus*, where I go to the depth of my ability into the consideration of this matter, discussing what is the nature of sovereignty, what kinds of it there are, how they are acquired, how maintained, and for what causes lost." He describes his treatise, that is to say, as an enquiry into natural history. What, he wants to know, are the methods by which despotic rulers, such as then abounded in Italy, may successfully consolidate their power.

The description accurately fits the work. It is, in fact, a handbook of statecraft, a guide for those who would maintain and extend their power. Thus, if power has been gained by certain means, it must, Machiavelli holds,

be maintained by similar means. The assumption throughout is that the holder of power is not required to take account of morals, expediency bring his sole guide to conduct. Given that he has certain ends, security for his person and unquestioned dominion over his subjects, by what means, Machiavelli asks, may these ends be most effectively realized?

But although the sole motive recognized throughout Machiavelli's treatment of politics is that of self-interest, it is not strictly correct to say that morals are left out of the writer's purview. Machiavelli does treat of morals and also of religion, but only as instruments to be used to his advantage by the intelligent ruler. The foundations of morals and religion are not objective principles or factors in the universe existing independently of man and recognized by him; there are, indeed, no such principles and man cannot, therefore, recognize them, or guide his conduct by reference to them. Morals being excluded from the scheme of things, there can be no guide to conduct except self-interest. Nevertheless morals, though they possess no objective basis, may be usefully invoked by rulers to induce in the common people reverence and obedience. Morals have, in fact, as we should say to-day, good publicity and propaganda value. All this, it is clear, is neither ethics nor politics. It may, of course, be the case that both these branches of study are in fact will-o'-the-wisps; that there are no principles of right and wrong which should govern human conduct, no principles of justice which should guide the ruler of the State. But if it be the case that ethics and politics own some basis of principle other than that of pure expediency, then it cannot be said that Machiavelli contributes to their study. His work is, as he himself suggests, properly to be regarded as a contribution to our knowledge of natural, that is of human, history.

**The Split Widens.** It is, I think, sufficiently clear from the foregoing examples of political thought in the Middle

Agas, that ethics and politics have already fallen apart. Whereas in Plato's and in Aristotle's thought civic duty constituted an integral part of the good life for man, whether as ruler or as citizen, in the thought of St. Thomas civic duty is merely an incidental adjunct to man's true welfare which is moral and spiritual, while in Dante's view the virtues of the good citizen, albeit desirable in themselves, belong to man's earthly and not to his spiritual self. St. Thomas holds that man's spiritual life is bound up with the development of his soul, while morals derive their sanction from the next world. Dante admittedly writes of the full development of man's intellectual faculties as an end in itself, and of the State as a necessary means to that end, but for him, too, the true home of the spirit is elsewhere. Speaking generally, we may say that for the Middle Ages our existence in this world and, therefore, in the State, is looked upon as a rather discreditable episode in the career of beings who are intended for higher things. The fact of earthly existence is regrettable, but only temporary. The object of politics is, therefore, to organize the collective affairs of mankind in such a way that our time here may be spent with as little temporal preoccupation and as little spiritual danger as can be contrived. Some may be inclined to protest that this is to over-emphasize the neglect of political issues by the thinkers of the Middle Ages. Yet it is impossible to read the Schoolmen without deriving the impression that they think of the State and of everything connected with the State as a nuisance, necessary no doubt, but unimportant; unimportant, that is to say, relatively to the real business of the individual soul which is to prepare itself for salvation. With the coming of the Reformation, the split widened. Man's life in the Middle Ages was at least a whole. Christendom offered to those who were members of it—and they were practically all those who belonged to what we should now call Western Civilization—the doctrines of a single Church. These were accepted as part of a revelation which all acknowledged, while, in the sphere



of conduct, men's lives were guided by a universal code whose authority none thought of questioning. Ethics, therefore, no longer presented a series of problems to be pondered; it announced a series of truths which were revealed, the revelation being of God's will as interpreted by the Catholic Church. By following the rules of revealed ethics, by accepting the teachings of inspired authority, the individual lived aright in this world and achieved salvation in the next.

But with the advent of Protestantism salvation becomes a goal which can be achieved without the help of organisations, while the mode of life necessary for its achievement is one to be determined by the insight of his individual conscience.

In Protestant countries men no longer looked to the Church to prescribe their way of life; they consulted the Bible or listened to the voice of conscience, preferring private inspiration to official instruction. Thus the importance of the individual increased, as that of the Church diminished.

**The Effect of Protestantism.** One of the greatest of the additions which Christianity had made to men's moral outlook was a sense of the value of the individual soul or person. Jesus had insisted that men should be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to ends beyond themselves. It would, indeed, have been impossible for any writer on ethics who accepted Christ's teaching to relegate the vast mass of citizens to the status which they tend to occupy in the writing of Plato and Aristotle, the status, that is to say, of instruments of a good which lay outside and beyond themselves in the achievement of intellectual perfectibility by the cultivated few.

Except in the Western democracies, the modern conception of the individual approximates in some respects to that of Plato and Aristotle. He is treated as a means to the welfare of the social organism of which he is a part. His *raison d'être*, that is to say, consists in promoting

the excellence of something other than himself, albeit of something which, according to idealist theory, is immanent in himself.<sup>1</sup> These modern conceptions would have seemed impious to those who were animated by the spirit of Christ's teaching, for the essential fact about the individual, as Christ represented him, was that he was a soul to be saved. To compass the salvation that Christ's sacrifice had rendered possible for him, was from the Protestant standpoint an end transcending in importance all other ends which the State might set before him, or which he might set before himself. His duty, in fact, was wholeheartedly to do God's will, and God's will resides neither in the laws of the State, nor in the edicts of a Church, but in the hearts of men. To discover this will it is necessary to listen to the inner voice of conscience.

In thus substituting an ideal realizable by individual effort for one which could be achieved only by co-operation with one's fellow-men in the civic life, Protestant Christianity tended to leave the State outside its scheme of things. The ethical theories which it inspired came, therefore, to treat of conduct independently of politics, the art of science or politics being left meanwhile to look after itself.

**Other Factors Assisting the Split.** Left to look after itself, the doctrine which it adopted was that of the Social Contract. A pre-social state of nature was postulated which was ended by a compact or contract to form society. Social Contract theories, as we shall see in a later chapter,<sup>2</sup> dominated the political thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and essentially they re-affirmed the attitude to society adopted by Glaucon and Adeimantus.<sup>3</sup> The tendency to regard society as an artificial rather than a natural growth is not only compatible with, it is encouraged by, the Christian view of human nature and of the appropriate end of human endeavour, indicated to above.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, pp. 590, 591 and 597, 598. <sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIII.  
<sup>3</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 19-24.

For if the essential nature of man is to be a soul or spirit, if his specific end is the salvation of his soul and the development of his spirit, it is no longer possible to maintain the Greek view of man's nature as something which finds its fulfilment only in the State.

So long as it was thought that the true end of man could be realized only in society, society could be plausibly represented not only as an indispensable condition, but as an integral part of his development. When, however, the realization of man's true end was postponed to the next world, the case for regarding the State as both natural and indispensable to him lost its force. Hence theories arose which represented society not as a natural, but as an artificial growth, developing not as an integral part of man's nature, but as a device to suit his convenience. Once again the cable was cut between society and morals; and politics, as a result, could be pursued independently of ethics.

**Influence of View of Man as a Reasonable Being.** A further influence arising from a different source operated in the same direction. The eighteenth century has often been called the Age of Reason. In contradistinction to the Christian view that man's real nature was that of a soul to be saved, or a spirit to be developed, men like Voltaire, Hume, Godwin, Paine and Adam Smith, insisted that it was that of a reasonable and reasoning being. The operations of reason might, they held, be warped by prejudice, obscured by passion, distorted by emotional bias. Reason could, however, on occasion win free from these influences. To the extent that it did so, to the extent that man became reasonable in his disposition, objective and impartial in his judgment and serene in his outlook, to that extent he realized his true nature. In so far as man achieves this condition of being reasonable, he stands in no need of external rules or regulations; for he has only to consult his reason and it will tell him what is best. Moreover, since it is reasonable to do what is best, he will act as his

reason advises. From the point of view of the reasonable man, then, the State in its coercive aspect is superfluous. There is no need to make laws for those who are exempt from the necessity for regulation; there is no need to dispense justice for those who can determine and follow what is just for themselves; there is no need for the State to compel those whom reason controls.

Even the eighteenth century recognized that it might be a long time before man achieved such a condition of reasonableness as would enable him to dispense with the State, but, though the unregulated society lay far away in the future, approximations to it could be made in the present; could be made, and should be encouraged. The effect of this line of thought is seen in a somewhat negligent, even contemptuous attitude to politics. The State in its coercive aspect, with its apparatus of law and police force to back the law, is no doubt necessary in man's unregenerate, that is to say, imperfectly reasonable, condition, but, as man develops, and as, therefore, he approximates ever more closely to his proper nature, which is to be a perfectly reasonable being, the State will become increasingly superfluous. Utopia is thus conceived as a society of perfectly reasonable men who, acting always in accordance with the dictates of their natures, will have no need of external restraints to regulate their relations. Godwin (1756-1836), who pushed this attitude to its logical end, was an anarchist, but throughout the writings of the rationalists of the eighteenth century, the tendency to treat the good life for man as something that can be realized independently of the State in the achievement of that reasonableness which is natural to human beings, is apparent. As a consequence, ethical questions are discussed independently of political.

The various considerations at which I have briefly glanced, the Christian insistence on the salvation of the individual soul as the true end of man, the resultant attitude to the State as an artificial growth owning no

counterpart in and deriving no roots from man's *real* nature, and the eighteenth-century view of man as an essentially reasonable being, contribute to produce what I have called the split between ethics and politics. They must serve as my excuse for treating ethics and politics in Parts II and III as two distinct branches of enquiry. In Part IV the two strands which have been separated again come together, and in the twentieth century we shall again pursue what are in effect two aspects of a single enquiry.



**PART II**  
**ETHICS**





## CHAPTER V: THE SCOPE OF ETHICS

**Subject Matter of Ethics.** Ethics is a branch of study which is difficult to define, for, if we put the question, "What are the subjects with which ethics deals, what, in fact, is ethics about?" the answer is largely determined by the nature of the ethical views which we adopt. This is true not only of the boundaries of the subject, but also of its core, a writer's view of both being dependent upon and largely determined by the adoption of a particular ethical position.

Some of the questions which have been considered by different writers to be the central questions of ethics are:—

(1) What thing is ultimately good, or, if there is more than one thing which is ultimately good, what things are ultimately good?

(2) What is the basis of moral obligation? If we take the view that the word "ought" does mean something, that, in other words, there may be a distinction, and a valid one, between what we ought to do and what we would like to do, it may be asked, "Why 'ought' we to do what we ought to do?" The correct answer to this question, if it could be given, would tell us what moral obligation is.

(3) By means of what faculty do we recognize our moral obligation? Is it reason or feeling, or a mixture of the two, or a unique faculty sometimes known as the moral sense, sometimes as conscience, which tells us our duty as immediately, if not as unerringly, as our sense of taste tells us what tastes sweet and what sour, and our sense of smell which odours are pleasant, which repulsive?

(4) What do we mean by a right action? Is it, for example, the same as the action which we think we ought

to do, or the same as the action which we ought to do, whether we think we ought to or not? Can we, in other words, be mistaken in our judgment, when we think we ought to do a particular action, so that, although we may have thought quite sincerely that we ought to do X, what we *really* ought to have done was Y, because Y was right and X was not? When in such cases we speak of what we really ought to have done, using such an expression as "it was right to do Y although, having regard to the information available at the time, you could not have acted otherwise than you did, when you chose to do X," what is the meaning of the word "right"? Is a "right" action one which is right independently of what the agent, or any person, or any body of persons, thinks or think about it? Or is "right" only the name we give to the sort of action of which a particular society, or a particular civilization, or mankind in general, happens to approve?

(5) How are we to distinguish a right action from a wrong one? Is it, for example, by reference to some intrinsic characteristic which right actions possess, but which wrong ones do not, or by reference to the consequences of the actions? If the latter, since the consequences of any action are various and illimitable, which consequences ought we to take into account? Is it, for example, by reference to its happiness-promoting properties that the rightness of an action is to be judged? If so, whose happiness ought we to take into account in passing our judgment? That of the agent, of certain particular persons, or of all persons? Should we, that is to say, regard the happiness of certain persons, namely, those standing in a close relation to the agent, as being of special relevance when we are considering the consequences of a right action? Or is the happiness of every person entitled to be considered as of equal importance?

The above are only some of the questions with which writers on ethics concern themselves.

**Difficulty of Ethical Questions.** They are, it is obvious, exceedingly difficult to answer; so difficult, that it seems improbable that they will ever be answered in a manner which commands universal assent. It is certainly the case that up to the present no agreed answers have been propounded. If they had, human life would be a simpler affair than it is.

A number of obvious difficulties immediately suggest themselves.

(1) THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PROVE ETHICAL PROPOSITIONS. There is the difficulty of giving any answer to an ethical question which can be proved to be true to those who challenge it. In this respect ethics is at a disadvantage as compared with mathematics or with science. A mathematical statement which is true can be proved to be so to anyone who has sufficient intelligence to grasp the proof. Thus, if I assert that any two sides of a triangle are greater than a third, or that  $a^2 - b^2 = (a+b)(a-b)$ , I should expect to be able to show that my assertion was true, and also why it was true, to anyone who possessed normal intelligence. If, supposing that my demonstration were both clear and correct, I found at the end that I had failed to convince him, I should judge that his intelligence was not such as is proper to, or customary among, adult human beings. It is, of course, true that my demonstration would entail the acceptance of certain undemonstrable principles. It would entail, for example, acceptance of the laws of logic and of the processes of inference and deduction, the truth and legitimacy of which are intuitively perceived.<sup>1</sup> But the acceptance of these laws, the performance of these processes, are common to all normally intelligent human beings. Similarly with science; if I wish to show that  $H_2O$  is the chemical formula for water, I have only to associate two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen, to demonstrate to anybody who cares to

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter V, for an account of undemonstrable logical laws.

question it the truth of the formula. In other words, I can verify a scientific assertion by experiment. But the answers to ethical questions can neither be logically demonstrated nor experimentally verified.

In the absence of both proof and verification, it is always possible to represent any answer that may be given to ethical questions as the expression of a purely personal taste.

(2) THAT ETHICAL QUESTIONS OVERLAP. From an examination of the questions mentioned above it will be seen that they overlap, in the sense that the answer to any one of them would entail answers to at least some of the others. If, for example, we answer the question, "what is it that makes an action right?" by saying "its consequences", we shall by implication have excluded the answer that by a right action we mean one that wins the approval of the moral sense. For an action whose consequences are good is often disapproved of by the moral sense, at any rate at the time, and vice versa.

If, again, we hold that there is one ultimate good and only one, and we identify this one ultimate good with happiness, we shall by implication have answered the question, "what is the basis of moral obligation?", for we should surely be morally obliged to promote what is good, and if good is happiness and only happiness, it becomes our duty, it becomes, indeed, our sole duty, to promote happiness. Thus we shall have derived the notion of moral obligation from the notion of good. Alternatively, we may say that the only thing that is ultimately good is to do our duty, in which case the notion of good will be derivable from that of moral obligation.

From these examples it will be seen that the overlap between ethical questions is considerable; so considerable that, if we could agree as to the central problem of ethics and suggest an answer to that, it would probably be found that it brought with it answers to all the other problems in its train. But it is precisely upon this question, the

question of the central problem of ethics, that philosophers differ most. Whereas the Greeks, for example, held that the basic notion of ethics was good, or the Good, and deduced, therefore, that the main problem of ethics was to discover the Good, Kant and other eighteenth century writers held that the basic notion of ethics was that of moral obligation, and that the main problem of ethics was to discover its ground or source.

(3) **THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO KEEP ETHICAL QUESTIONS DISTINCT.** In spite of overlapping, the expositor is bound, so far as he can, in the interests of clarity to treat the various questions which I have mentioned as if they were distinct. He cannot, it is obvious, write about everything at once, and even if in the end it is found that all the questions which I have cited are different aspects or forms of the same question, it is necessary to begin by treating them as though they were separate questions. The necessity will be apparent, if we take two ethical questions which seem at first sight to be closely allied—the question of the meaning of a right action, and the question of the standard to which we should refer when we want to know whether a particular action is right. That the question, “what do we mean by calling an action right?” is different from the question, “how do we come to know or recognize that an action is right?”, that the question of meaning is, in other words, different from that of standard or criterion, can be shown by the following example: Let us consider the proposition “the train leaves King’s Cross at 10 a.m. for Edinburgh,” which proposition we will assume to be true. Then the meaning of the proposition is that there is a complex, physical fact which the sentence used in the enunciation of the proposition expresses. The complex, physical fact is one that we may loosely describe by saying that a railway engine with carriages attached to it begins at a certain point of time to alter its position in space, although the *complete* description of *all* that we mean when we enunciate this proposition

would fill several volumes. But I am led to believe that the proposition is true as the result of looking up the train in a time-table, and I come to *know* that it is true by being at King's Cross and seeing the Edinburgh train leave the platform at 10 a.m. In other words, what I *mean* by saying of a thing that it is of a certain sort, by saying, for example, of an action that it is right, is one thing; the way in which I come to know that the thing is of that sort, is another. Clearly, then, the answer to the question, "what do I mean by saying that an action is right?" is wholly different from the answer to the question, "how am I led to recognize that the action is right?" And the answer to the question, "how am I led to recognize that an action is right?", is again different from the answer to the question, "to what standard ought I to appeal in order to establish the fact of its rightness?"

By similar methods it could, I think, be shown that all the groups of questions which I enunciated above are, at least *prima facie*, distinct groups. At any rate, when the subject matter is as complex and confusing as that of ethics, everything is to be gained by treating them as if they were distinct. Yet so to treat them is in practice exceedingly difficult. Setting out to discuss the criterion or standard of rightness, the philosopher is disconcerted to find that he is in fact discussing the meaning of a right action, while enquiries into the nature of moral virtue are apt to transform themselves into speculations upon the nature of all kinds of good, aesthetic and intellectual as well as moral. If we are to think clearly it is essential that we should know precisely what it is that we are trying to think about, and this tendency on the part of the object of one's thought to turn into some allied, but slightly different, object, makes thinking clearly on the subject of ethics certainly no less difficult than thinking clearly in any other sphere.

(4) THAT THE MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED TO WORDS USED IN ETHICAL DISCUSSION OFTEN BEG THE QUESTIONS DISCUSSED. The requirement of clear thinking also demands

that, when there is a discussion about ethics, both parties to the discussion should be concerned to find answers to the same questions. If they are not the same questions, the fact that they are different should be recognized. Members of opposed schools of ethical theory will, in other words, do well to make certain that they are actually, as they believe themselves to be, giving different answers to the same questions and are not in fact answering different questions. I emphasize the point because ethical controversialists have frequently been concerned with different questions without being aware of the fact. To take an example, the controversy between utilitarians and intuitionists appears to be a controversy as to the answers which ought to be given to such questions as "what is the meaning of ought?" and "what is the criterion of morality?" In fact, however, it is not difficult to show that on a number of matters at issue between the two schools, the questions which the utilitarians were seeking to answer were different from those which concerned the intuitionists. Thus the controversy was one which could not, in the nature of things, be settled, since the two parties were making assertions and passing judgments about different things, were, as a logician would say, applying predicates to different subjects, without being aware of the fact.

Clear thinking further demands that the words which the thinker uses to express his thought should be used always in the same sense, and further that he who seeks to understand the thought should know what that sense is. The requirement seems obvious enough, yet there is none in ethics with which it is more difficult to comply. For this difficulty there is a good reason. The reader will have noticed that I have frequently in the foregoing discussion made use of such words as "good", "right" and "moral obligation". These words are obviously of fundamental importance, and it is obvious, too, that they must continually recur in any discussion of ethical questions. Nevertheless, I have made no attempt to define them. Is not this, it may be asked, a culpable oversight on the

part of the writer? It is certainly not an oversight, and I doubt whether it is culpable; for it is extremely difficult to see how it is to be avoided.

There are two reasons why words such as those which I have just cited cannot be defined, at any rate at the beginning of an enquiry. Of these the first will be given here; the second falls into place more conveniently in a later discussion.<sup>1</sup> The first reason is that the meaning that one assigns to such general terms as "good" and "right" is determined, as is one's view as to what are the central questions of ethics, by one's general ethical position. If, for example, one is a utilitarian, one holds that a right action is one that has the best possible consequences; if an intuitionist, that it is one of which a special and unique faculty, sometimes known as conscience, sometimes as the moral sense, approves. If one takes an objectivist view of ethics, one holds that the word "good" stands for an ultimate principle which is a real and independent factor in the universe, recognized but not created by the mind of man; if a subjectivist, that "good" is merely the name with which human beings seek to dignify the things and institutions of which they happen to approve, and to encourage the performance of actions which are to their advantage. The difficulty is, then, that, while the meanings of the terms used in ethical discussion vary with the conclusions reached by the discussion, the terms must be used in order that the conclusions may be reached. Even, then, when the two parties to a controversy about ethics are not concerned with different subjects, and are not, without being aware of the fact, giving answers to different questions, it is exceedingly difficult for them to employ words in senses which do not beg the questions which the words are being used to discuss. For the meaning which a word such as "right" or "good" is used in ethical discussion to express, can only be its legitimate meaning, if the conclusions of the discussion are valid. Similarly, the conclusions of the discussion are only valid, if the terms

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 166-171.



used in reaching them have been employed in a legitimate sense. Thus, ethical arguments tend to be circular because their conclusions can only be reached if words are used in a certain way, while it is only if the conclusions are true that the words may be legitimately used in the sense required to reach them.

These circles can, in the writer's opinion, only be broken, if we are prepared to concede that discussions on ethics must in the last resort pass into realms where results, not being reached by reason, cannot be rationally demonstrated. In other words, the ultimate basis of ethics is, in my view, intuitional and not rational. The life of man is very various, and reason, though it is our surest guide, is not our only one. Man imagines as well as experiences; guesses as well as knows; intuits as well as reasons. It may well be the case that judgments of ultimate valuation, which seek to prescribe what is beautiful, what is good and what is right, are made by a faculty that operates above the humdrum pedestrian levels upon which reason functions. This view, which is in part a personal one, will be developed in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup>

(5) THE DIFFICULTY OF DELIMITATION. ETHICS AND PSYCHOLOGY. A fifth difficulty is that of delimiting the boundaries of ethics. That ethics is, or can be, closely interlocked with politics we have already seen. This interlocking is, I think, inevitable, and will remain so, until some form of political Utopia has been achieved in which the State can be relegated to the background of men's lives as an organization which, necessary for the maintenance of the minimum conditions of order and security, which alone render possible the pursuit of the good life, lies outside the range of their conscious interests. Until that consummation is reached, politics must remain indissolubly bound up with ethics. But it is not politics alone which encroach upon the sphere of ethics; there is also psychology. The subject matter of ethics clearly includes

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 436-438.

human consciousness. Some writers hold that nothing is either good or bad except states of consciousness, and that a world without consciousness would be a world without ethics. However this may be, it is clear that the moral judgments passed by individuals, their valuations of good and bad, the temptations to which they are exposed, and the moral conflicts through which they pass, are facts with which ethics is intimately concerned. All these facts are mental facts; they are events which take place in human minds. Now psychology is the science which takes for its province the human mind. To the psychologist all mental events are of interest. They constitute, indeed, his especial and peculiar concern and among them, therefore, are included those events which also form part of the subject matter of ethics. How, then, is ethics to be distinguished from psychology?

The line of demarcation which is usually drawn is as follows. The purpose of psychology, it is said, is to examine and to classify all mental events without seeking to assess their value. It is enough for a psychologist that a mental event should occur; he is not concerned to ask whether it *ought* to occur or whether, when either of two mental events might have occurred, it is better that one should have done so than the other. Now it is precisely with the issues raised by the words "ought" and "better" that ethics is concerned. Ethics does not, in other words, merely register and explore states of consciousness; it assesses them, affirming as a result of its assessment that some are more desirable than others; that some ought to occur, and that others ought not to occur. Ethics is thus committed, as psychology is not, to the task of trying to give some meaning to such words as "ought" and "desirable".

An analogy may help to elucidate the point. There are at least two ways in which we can give an account of a picture; there is the way of the scientist, and the way of the art critic. The scientist will analyse the matter of which the picture is composed, resolving its paint and canvas into their chemical compounds and elements,

and, if he is a physicist, enumerating the atomic constituents of the elements. In so far as the word "good" can from his point of view be said to have any meaning at all, one picture is as "good" as another. The art critic, however, concerning himself with the æsthetic qualities of the picture, will pronounce one picture to be better than another in point of æsthetic merit. Thus the art critic measures and assigns marks for merit, whereas the scientist merely investigates and analyses. But what the ethical philosopher is judging about when he assesses states of consciousness from the point of view of their goodness or badness, is different from the object of the psychologist's enquiry, when he analyses states of consciousness.

The ethical philosopher approaches actions and states of consciousness in the way in which the art critic approaches pictures, while the psychologist's approach is that of the scientist. Ethics and æsthetics are for this reason sometimes called "normative", that is to say, measuring studies.

**METAPHYSICS AND THEOLOGY.** Metaphysics and theology are two branches of study, or if, in the case of the latter, the term knowledge be preferred, of knowledge, which also encroach upon the sphere of ethics. Metaphysics is concerned with the nature of the universe as a whole. Is there, the metaphysician asks, a world of reality which underlies the familiar, everyday world known to us by means of our senses, and is the familiar, everyday world an aspect of this reality? If, as many metaphysicians have thought, this is in fact the case, then the familiar world will derive the features which we discern in it from the real world which underlies and informs it. Another question which metaphysics discusses is that of cosmic purpose. Can the universe as a whole be said to have a purpose? If so, what part, if any, have we to play in its promotion? Further, in what terms is the purpose to be conceived? As a greater moral perfection? A higher degree of consciousness? Or a more intimate communion with God? It is clear that the answers which we give

to these and similar questions will have a profound effect upon our ethical views. If, for example, we hold that there is a reality underlying the familiar world, that the familiar world expresses this reality and that this reality is in some important sense good, then it will follow that the features which even the familiar world exhibits must be ethically admirable, and that evil is in some sense illusory. It will also follow that men should try to penetrate beneath the surface world of appearance to the reality which underlies it; it will be their duty, in other words, to try to know what the Greeks called the Good. From this duty all others will be derivable. If, again, we hold that the universe is not only changing but evolving, and that its evolution is inspired by a principle which is also a purpose, or which is imbued by a purpose, it will follow that our conduct should be such as to promote that purpose.

Theology gives point and precision to the duties which metaphysics leaves vague. If we may assume that there is a God, that He is the creator of the familiar, everyday world, that He is all-good and all-powerful, and that He has bestowed upon us the gift of freewill, then an obligation to use that gift in a particular way will clearly arise. For it will be our duty, given the theological assumption, to act in such a way as to please God, and it will be our duty also to try to know Him and to try to love Him. From these primary duties certain derivative duties touching our conduct towards our neighbours will follow.

It is not too much to say that, granted assumptions of this kind, the whole conduct of a man's life is, or at any rate should be, determined by the corollaries that follow from them. What, in the last resort, we ought to do and the reason why we ought to do it can on this assumption only be determined by reference to another plane of existence and the Divine Being who dwells upon it. As the philosophers put it, ethics derives both its content (what we ought to do) and its authority (why we ought to do it) from theology. Many ethical writers have, indeed, maintained that in the absence of theological assumptions

enlightened selfishness would be the only intelligible rule of conduct, and that the conception of ethics as a normative study concerned to assess the rightness and wrongness of actions and to show why we should do our duty would be inadmissible.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the overlap between ethics and other branches of enquiry, notably psychology, metaphysics and theology, is extensive. As a result, it is difficult to obtain agreement as to where the boundaries of ethics should be drawn. The fact that the sphere of ethics is without either an agreed centre or an agreed circumference does not conduce to ease of exposition. All that I can hope to do is to give some account of the main problems which ethical writers have in fact discussed, and to indicate some of the conclusions which they have reached in regard to them.

**Framework of Ensuing Exposition.** The problems of ethics are so numerous, the methods of treatment so various, and the overlap between the various problems of ethics and between these problems and cognate problems which lie outside the sphere of ethics proper so extensive, that the question of arrangement presents more than usual difficulty. The form of arrangement which I have decided to adopt is as follows. I propose to divide ethical theories into four main categories.

(1) **INTUITIONIST AND UTILITARIAN THEORIES.** To the first two categories I have assigned what are called intuitionist and utilitarian theories. These two groups of theories differ primarily in regard to the answer they give to the question, what is the meaning of the word "right", when it is applied to actions, characters and institutions. A right action may be defined as one which possesses certain intrinsic characteristics, in virtue of which it evokes or should evoke in a person contemplating the action a certain psychological condition, a condition which we may describe as that of moral approval. When I speak of the intrinsic

characteristics of actions, I mean those which they possess in their own right independently of their relations to any other thing or action, or to all other things or actions. An intrinsic characteristic is, in short, that which the action possesses in virtue of the fact that it is itself, lacking which it would not be itself. I do not wish to suggest by this definition that actions do have intrinsic characteristics. My purpose is only to indicate what would be meant by the expression "intrinsic characteristics" if, indeed, there were such things. Just as the characteristic of being right may be intrinsic, so also may that of being wrong. Thus the act of telling a lie may be regarded as one which possesses the intrinsic characteristic of being wrong; since it is wrong it ought, the writer who maintains that actions possess intrinsic characteristics would say, to evoke in a properly constituted mind a reaction of moral disapproval. We do not, he might add, need to ask ourselves why lying is wrong; we know immediately and intuitively that it is so, just as we know immediately and intuitively that a particular smell is bad. Thus the definition of a right action as one which possesses certain intrinsic characteristics, and the definition of it as one which provokes a certain reaction in a properly constituted mind, namely, a feeling of approval by the moral sense, tend to result in the same kind of ethical theory, a theory to which we shall give the name of intuitionist.

Utilitarianism defines the rightness of actions by reference to the consequences which they produce. The criterion of a right action is for a utilitarian to be found not in any intrinsic characteristic of the action, nor in any sentiment of moral approval evoked by it in any person or body of persons, but in certain facts, namely, those facts which are the actual results which follow from the action; if the results are the best possible in the circumstances, the action is right. The utilitarian is thus committed to a discussion of the meaning of the words "good" and "best". The chief difference between these two groups of theories is that while Intuitionism conceives "right" as an ultimate

notion, Utilitarianism defines "right" with reference to something else, namely, its ability to promote "good". This, then, is our first distinction, the distinction between Intuitionism and Utilitarianism.

(2) **SUBJECTIVIST AND OBJECTIVIST THEORIES.** There is a second distinction which cuts across the first, a distinction between objectivist and subjectivist ethical theories. The words "objective" and "subjective", which constantly occur in philosophical discussion, are used in so many and in such ambiguous senses that it is worth while to pause for a moment in order to try to make clear the senses in which they may be used with some degree of precision. A subjective judgment we will define as a judgment to the effect that the experience of the person making the judgment is being modified in a certain way—in other words, that something is happening in or to "the subject". An objective judgment we will define as a judgment to the effect that the world external to the person judging is characterized by a certain quality. Whether there can be objective judgments in the sense defined may be a matter of controversy. But, if there are such judgments, we shall understand them to assert that the world is being, has been, or will be characterized by such and such a quality.

**Examples of Subjective Judgments.** Now most people would be inclined to say that *prima facie* some judgments are subjective, some objective. If X judges "these gooseberries are sour", while Y judges "these gooseberries are sweet", most people would say that what X and Y are in fact judging about is not some quality which is characterizing or is possessed by the gooseberries, but the effects produced by the gooseberries on their respective palates. The palates being different, the effects produced are different, and, as a consequence, the qualities of the experiences of X and Y are different. Hence the judgment "these gooseberries are sour" does not contradict the

judgment "these gooseberries are sweet", since each of the two judgments is *about* something different. The two judgments are, therefore, according to the definition given above, subjective judgments. Again, most people would say, although not perhaps with the same degree of conviction, that the two judgments "the colour of the sea is now blue" and "the colour of the sea is now green" are subjective, since what they refer to is not some quality, namely, blueness or greenness, which is characterizing the sea, but the effects produced by the sea (or, to be scientifically precise, by the light waves proceeding from the place where the sea is) upon the respective retinas of the two persons making the judgments. These effects are complex effects, to which the conditions of light, the respective positions of observation, and the different characteristics of the retinas and general visual apparatus of the persons in question all contribute. For example, one of the two persons might be colour-blind, so that the colour of the sea would appear differently to him and to a person of of normal vision. Because these complex physical and physiological conditions are different, so too, it might be said, are the experiences of the persons judging.

I say that the degree of conviction in this case would probably be less than in the case of experiences originating in the palate, for the reason that there is a general pre-supposition to the effect that the colour of things really belongs to them in some sense in which their tastes, for example, whether they are sweet or whether they are sour, do not. Many of those who have some acquaintance with idealist arguments<sup>1</sup> would, however, be inclined to deny that things *really* possess colour, and would, therefore, class the judgments "the sea is now blue" and "the sea is now green" as subjective in fact, if not in form. They would, that is to say, maintain that the only statements involving colour that we are *really* entitled to make are such statements as, "the sea *looks blue to me*", or "the

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapters I and II, for an account of these.



sea gives me an experience of blueness", and "the sea looks green to me" or "the sea gives me an experience of greenness", statements which are subjective in form as well as in fact.

**Examples of Objective Judgments.** At the other end of the scale we may, as examples of *prima facie* objective judgments, instance mathematical judgments. When somebody judges that  $3 + 2 = 5$ , or that  $7 \times 7 = 49$ , he is purporting to make an assertion about the relations that hold between numbers. He would not ordinarily be taken to mean, "I am so constituted that I happen to think that  $3 + 2 = 5$ , but somebody differently constituted is perfectly entitled to assert that  $3 + 2 = 6$ ". He means, and would be normally understood to mean, that anybody who thinks that  $3 + 2 = 6$  is simply wrong, and that this is what he means any schoolboy who took advantage of the undeniable subjectivity of many judgments to assert his inalienable right to maintain that  $3 + 2$  does equal 6, would very quickly discover to his cost.

Another example of a *prima facie* objective judgment would be a judgment about the temperature of a room. If I say "the temperature of this room is  $75^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit", most people would hold that my judgment admits of being either right or wrong in a sense in which the judgment "this room seems to me to be unduly hot", or alternatively "unduly cold", does not admit of being either right or wrong. The first judgment, in other words, purports to say something about the conditions prevailing in the room, the second about my personal reactions to these conditions. It may, of course, be the case—it almost always is the case—that psychological or physiological conditions prevailing in me determine what judgment I shall pass about the temperature of the room. If, for example, I have recently emerged from a hothouse, I shall probably judge it to be lower than I should, if I entered it from a refrigerator. But, although subjective conditions may determine the precise judgment that I actually do pass, they do not prevent the judgment from being at least in

intention an objective one, of being, that is to say, a judgment which purports to assert something about certain conditions which are existing in the world independently both of me and of the judgment, and most people would say that, since the temperature of the room can be measured by a thermometer, there is a perfectly precise sense in which a judgment to the effect that it is so and so would be objective and right, while another judgment to the effect that it is something else would be objective and wrong. Moreover, one judgment would also be said to be more nearly right than another, if it was nearer to the thermometer reading.

In some cases a *prima facie* objective judgment would appear to shade into a *prima facie* subjective judgment and *vice versa*. If I am standing on a railway bridge and looking down at the railway lines immediately below me, I shall judge "these rails are parallel". If I look as far as I can along the track, I shall notice that the lines *appear* to converge. Now this apparent convergence I believe to be what I call an optical illusion. Hence, while I should describe the judgment "these railway lines are parallel" as an objective judgment, I should regard the judgment "these railway lines converge at a certain distance along the track" as subjective. Yet the lines to which the two judgments purport to refer are the same lines, and there must, presumably, be a point somewhere along the track at which the objective judgment ceases to be made and is superseded by the subjective judgment.

**Subjectivity and Objectivity in Ethics.** Now the sort of question which ethics discusses raises at once this issue between subjectivity and objectivity. Let us suppose that I make some such assertion as "this action is right", "that man's character is good", "to save the child at the risk of his own life was clearly his duty", then, the question immediately arises, do such judgments refer to and make statements about some intrinsic quality possessed by the action or character or duty under judgment, or do they

merely report the subjective opinions of myself, the judge. On the first assumption, actions, characters and duties will possess a quality which we will provisionally call their rightness, just as truly as a chessboard possesses the quality of squareness. On the second assumption, there will be no difference in point of meaning between the judgments "this is a right action" and "this is an action of which I happen to approve", since though the first is objective in form, both are subjective in fact. The two judgments are, in fact, on the subjectivist view, merely saying the same thing in different ways. On this view, then, the opinion on moral issues of the criminal or the madman is entitled to as much respect as that of the saint whose goodness the world universally recognizes. For neither the criminal nor the saint has really succeeded in telling us anything about the moral quality of the action or character or duty which he purports to be judging; each has only reported his own personal experience.

Subjective schools of thought are very common in ethics. In ancient Athens there were already sceptics who denied that there were any standards which prescribed what was good or right for everybody, and insisted that the terms "good" and "right" had no meaning in themselves. There were only, they maintained, the opinions of individual men and women as to what they in fact judged it best to value and to pursue. It is a matter of common observation to-day that most people accept the subjective view, at any rate so long as it conduces to their advantage, although if it is turned against them by others, they are apt to fall back upon the assumption of absolute standards and to declare their opponents to be wrong or immoral by these standards.

**Naturalistic Theories.** A view which is ethically subjectivist in type is one which has been popularized by anthropology. According to this view, it is not the opinion of any particular individual, for example, the agent who performs the action, which determines its rightness or

wrongness, but that of the society to which he belongs; or, it may be of the primitive society from which the society to which he belongs has developed. Things which were found to be expedient by our ancestors were called good by them because they were expedient. Thus a tradition arose that certain things were good merely because over a considerable period people had agreed to call them so. This tradition became in course of time so ingrained in the consciousness of the race that presently it began to appear as an inherited instinct. This inherited instinct we call conscience. Thus, when conscience functions telling us that action X is right or action Y wrong, character X good or character Y bad, what it really means is that X-like actions and characters were found to be to the advantage, Y-like actions and characters to the disadvantage, of the societies from which our own has developed. On this view, then, X and Y do not possess any objective ethical characteristics of their own. Hence, in judging them to be right and wrong, we are judging only that certain persons or classes of persons entertain or once entertained certain feelings of approval and disapproval in regard to them.<sup>1</sup>

**A Fourfold Division.** Let us now apply this distinction between subjective and objective theories to our first grouping of ethical theories into intuitionist and utilitarian. The subjective-objective distinction is clearly applicable to theories belonging to both groups. Intuitionist theories which affirm that actions are right and things are good apart from their consequences may mean that they are right and good in themselves, independently of what any person or body of persons thinks, or has once thought about them, or that they are right and good only because people think or have thought them to be so. In the first case, actions will be approved because they are seen to be moral; in the second, to say of them that they are moral will mean merely that they are

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 373-376 for a development of this view.

approved. Theories of the first type may be called objective-intuitionist theories; of the second, subjective-intuitionist theories. Similarly with utilitarian theories. A right action, says the utilitarian, is one which has the best consequences; but "best" may be interpreted objectively, to mean that what is "best" is what it is independently of any opinion that any person or body of persons may entertain in regard to it, or "best" may be interpreted subjectively to mean that what is "best" is "best" only because and in so far as people desire or approve of it. To say of consequences that they are the "best" will mean, on this latter view, merely that they have obtained more approval or gratified more desires in all or most of a particular class of people than the consequences which would have followed any alternative action that was open to the agent.

In the succeeding Chapters, I shall briefly outline some of the representative theories in each of these four groups, namely, objective-intuitionist, objective-utilitarian, subjective utilitarian and subjective-intuitionist in the order named.

**A Preliminary Doubt.** Before, however, I can embark on the task of exposition, there is a preliminary doubt to be disposed of, or rather, since it cannot be disposed of at any rate in this book, to be acknowledged. There is a point of view which insists that writing and discussion about ethics is usually, if not always meaningless, and cannot, therefore, be fruitful. If this point of view could be successfully maintained, a great part of what follows would not need to be written.

This point of view is in essence as follows. Our views about ethical matters may be valid, but they are strictly incommunicable, for, although we may know what is right and good, we cannot define or give an account of our knowledge. The subject matter of ethics in fact is not to be talked or written about; it is rather in the nature of an experience, unique and incommunicable, to be enjoyed.

**Ethical Nihilism.** It is important to distinguish this view from the purely sceptical attitude to ethics which underlies the group of theories that I have termed subjective intuitionist. This attitude is one which in the last resort denies validity to ethical notions, and may thus be called ethical Nihilism. There is nothing good or evil in the world, it urges, but thinking makes it so, while the words right and wrong are merely the names with which men choose to dignify the things they happen to like or dislike. It follows that those conceptions with which ethics deals, the conceptions of right and duty and moral obligation and good, have no basis in the nature of things, nor do they own any counterpart in the universe outside men's minds. They are merely concepts which men have generated and projected for their comfort and assurance upon the canvas of an ethically meaningless universe. For the universe itself, the ethical nihilist might continue, is ethically neutral: it contains no principles to guide our conduct, no Being to watch over our endeavours, no goals to reward our efforts. It is merely the hurrying of material endlessly, meaninglessly. This nihilistic attitude which underlies the theories to be considered in Chapter X has the effect, as I have already hinted, of robbing ethics of all validity and meaning; for, if the terms right and wrong have no meaning in themselves, it is meaningless to say that we *ought* to do the one and refrain from the other; if good and evil are not factors in the universe which exist independently of us, it is meaningless to say that we ought to pursue the one and avoid the other.

**Ethical Silence.** But the view which I now wish to consider is not ethical Nihilism. This view, which I propose to label "ethical Silence", admits that ethical expressions have a meaning. It agrees, too, that it is not impossible that we may come to know what that meaning is; but we cannot, it asserts, communicate it. The reason for this conclusion, a conclusion which is sometimes known as ethical Positivism, may be stated briefly as follows. All

ethical judgments are judgments of value. They are, in other words, judgments to the effect that so and so is desirable, or that so and so ought to be done; desirable, that is to say, for its own sake, obligatory just because there is moral obligation. To say that a thing is desirable for its own sake, or to say that it is obligatory just because there is moral obligation, is to imply that no reason can be given for regarding it as desirable or as obligatory. Words commonly used to express the property of incommunicability which belongs to a truth of which we are convinced but our conviction of which we cannot communicate, which is a property of a fact that we know but our knowledge of which we cannot demonstrate, are "absolute", "ultimate" and "unique". Now judgments to the effect that something is absolute, ultimate and unique are, it is said, entailed every time we make a statement involving an ethical term, and they are entailed because the statement implies in the last resort the existence of this something. Let us suppose that we make a statement containing an ethical term, the statement that so and so is good. Now the word "good" is usually employed in an instrumental sense; a thing called "good" is, that is to say, usually so called because it is "good" *for* something. Thus poison gas is "good" for keeping enemy infants permanently quiet; jemmies are "good" for burglarious enterprises; bad men in hell are "good" for keeping good men out of hell; Guinness is "good" for you, and so on. Let us consider what is entailed by any one such statement, quinine, we will say, is "good". Good for what? Good for fever. Quinine helps, in other words, to reduce fever; but why reduce fever? Because fever is a disease. But why not be diseased? Because health is better than disease. Why is health better than disease? At this point we may refuse to answer; we just see, we may say, that health is better than disease, and that is all there is to say about it. But in saying "we just see" health to be better than disease, we are absolving ourselves from the necessity of saying *why* we see it to be so.

We are denying, in other words, that we can give reasons for what "we just see". Or, we may try to give reasons; health, we may say, is better than disease because health makes for happiness, and disease for pain and misery. But why prefer happiness to pain and misery? With this question we have reached the same point as before. We can either say that "we just see" happiness to be preferable—and most people would be prepared to make this judgment—or we may take the argument a step further and try to give reasons for preferring happiness. But if we do this, we shall, sooner or later, reach the same point at which we have already twice tried to stop, the point at which we cease to give reasons and fall back upon the assertion "we just see". Now it is at this point that we are passing a judgment of absolute, ultimate, and unique value; it is unique in the sense that no reasons can be given in defence of it; it is ultimate in the sense that no end of value is affirmed beyond what it is judged to be valuable, and it is absolute in the sense that it cannot be resolved into, or derived from any other judgment.

**Nature of Absolute Judgments.** An analogy may here be of service. Let us suppose that I make the judgment, this curtain is red. This judgment, too, is absolute, ultimate and unique in the sense in which I have just claimed that moral judgments are absolute, ultimate and unique; for if I am asked why I judge the curtain to be red, or what reason I have for judging it to be red, I can again give no answer. I can only say that I just see it to be so. No doubt it is true that I have been taught to give the name of red to colours of the particular kind which I am now seeing—or, more correctly, to colours which give me the particular visual sensations which I am now experiencing—but for my implied judgment that this kind of colour which I am now seeing—or which gives me the visual sensations which I am now experiencing—belongs to the class which I have been taught to call red, I can give no reasons at all. And since the reasons which we are accustomed to



give in support of any judgment usually take the form of saying how or why we came to make it (for example, if I make a judgment, that there will be a European war sometime during the next twenty years, and somebody asks me to defend the judgment, I shall adduce reasons for my judgment derived from a study of recent history, or an analysis of the contemporary international situation) there is very little that I can say about my judgment, this curtain is red. I cannot say why I think the curtain red, how I came to make the judgment, or what are my reasons for thinking it to be true.

We are, it is said, in a similar case in regard to the ultimate judgments of value which underlie any statement of an ethical character. Are such statements, then, and are the judgments which underlie them untrue? It does not follow that they are; for in the case of many things which we know to be true, we can give no reasons for our knowledge. As I have just pointed out, we can know that the proposition "this curtain is red" is true, without being able to give reasons for it, and in just the same way it may be the case that when we know that the proposition "cruelty is evil" is true, we cannot give reasons for our knowledge. But because the reasons for such judgments are non-existent, or, if they exist, incommunicable, it does not follow that the judgments are meaningless, or that their meaning is not understood. Whether it is understood or not, depends upon whether the person to whom the judgment is addressed has at any time shared the experience which induced the person judging to make it.

Let me cite another analogy: we will suppose that I have the toothache, but that you have never had it. What will be the effect upon you of my communication, "I have the toothache"? You will no doubt understand with your reason that I am suffering some kind of pain, although, if you had never experienced pain of any kind, even the thought, "he is suffering pain", would for you be largely devoid of meaning. But if, although you had had some pain you had never had the toothache, then the meaning

of my statement, "I have the toothache", would be largely unintelligible, for there would be no bell, so to speak, in your consciousness upon which my words would strike and awaken answering echoes of sympathetic experience. For our statements to one another are only intelligible to the extent that they are based upon a fund of experience common to the person making the statement and to the person to whom the statement is made, and in this case which I am now imagining, the case in which the pain of the toothache which I am experiencing refers to something which is outside the range of your experience, the statement "I have the toothache" would be unintelligible to you. It would be unintelligible, not because you failed to understand the meaning of the words I was using, but because you had never had an experience and consequently, therefore, had no memory of an experience, which would enable you to realize imaginatively what kind of sensations I was having.

**That There Cannot be a Science of Ethics.** Now moral judgments would, it is said by the ethical positivists, be similarly meaningless, were it not that the person to whom they are addressed had himself participated in moral experience. In fact, however, all human beings, just because they are human, do possess a moral sense and do, therefore, have moral experience. They are all, to take a particular case, sensible of the difference between the statements "I ought to do this" and "I would like to do this", or "it would be expedient for me to do this". If they were not sensible of this difference, they would not be fully human, just as a man lacking a rational intelligence would not be fully human.

Therefore, it is argued, moral judgments do mean something to us, because they are based upon experiences which are common to all mankind. These experiences are, however, unique; there is, that is to say, no feeling which is in any way comparable to our feeling of "oughtness", just as there is no feeling which is in any way comparable to our feeling of toothache. And, because they are unique,

we cannot say anything about them, for to say something about them would be to describe them in terms of something else, and to the extent that they are unique such a description would be a falsification. Not only are moral judgments unique; they are, the ethical positivist would assert, indefensible. We cannot, that is to say, in the last resort give reasons why we ought to do what we ought to do; we just see that we ought to do it. Moral judgments cannot, therefore, be validly deduced from some premise which is more ultimate than the judgment, since they are themselves ultimate, and, therefore, indefensible. Nor can we specify any end for the sake of which an action which we seek to justify by the bestowal of moral approval ought to be done. For, if the judgment of moral approval is an ultimate judgment, to say that an act ought to be done, is to say that the act is its own sufficient justification. Therefore, although we both know the meaning of ethical judgments and can communicate this meaning to those who have had some ethical experience, there cannot, it is said, be a science of ethics. We cannot, in other words, answer such questions as, "What is the origin of moral judgments? How is their authenticity to be recognized? In what is their justification to be found?" We can, of course, say what a moral judgment is *not*, distinguishing it from judgments of expediency, or judgments which are rationalizations of individual likings and dislikings, but what it actually is in itself, we can say no more than we can say what colour is. Now the purpose of ethics as traditionally pursued has often, as I pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, been conceived to consist in giving an account of moral judgments. What, ethical philosophers have asked, is their origin? What is their justification? By reference to what standard is their correctness or otherwise to be assessed? If the ethical positivists are right, these are questions which cannot be answered. The conclusion is that although morality really is morality, and although we know what it is, a science or philosophy of morality is something which should not be sought, for the reason that it can never be found.

**Professor Pritchard's Views.** Views of this kind were first put forward in modern times by Mr. H. A. Pritchard in a paper, which appeared in 1905, entitled *Is Moral Philosophy Based on a Mistake?* Taking it for granted that some form of Intuitionism<sup>1</sup> is correct, and pointing out that all ethical assertions involve some judgment of value, Pritchard proceeds to argue on behalf of conclusions not dissimilar from those which I have just indicated. It should be added that Pritchard's conclusions form an integral part of a general position, a position in regard to the nature of knowledge. His ethical views may, however, fairly be considered on their own merits. If they are right, most of what has been said on the subject of ethics, though it may possess considerable psychological interest as indicating what particular people have held to be desirable or obligatory, contributes little or nothing to the questions with which ethics has purported officially to deal. When philosophers speculate at large about the nature of the Good, or the basis of moral obligation, the results of their speculations tell us, if Pritchard's view is right, a good deal about the philosophers but very little about the Good or about moral obligation.

**The Author's Position.** For my part, I am inclined to believe that this position is, if not true, at least reasonably near the truth. I hold, that is to say, that the judgments upon which ethics is based are immediate, in the sense that they are not based upon other judgments, and ultimate in the sense that they are not inferred or deduced from premises which are more fundamental than themselves. I do not, therefore, wish to imply, as the exponents of the view which I have denominated ethical Silence seem to suggest, that there is nothing we can meaningfully say about ethics, or that, as they put it, there cannot be a science of ethics. Ethics, admittedly, does not, like logic, consist of propositions which can be validly deduced from self-evident premises. We cannot, that is to say,

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 157, 158 and Chapter VI for an account of this view.

regard a particular situation in which we have to act as a premise, and then proceed to deduce from it the conclusion, "this is what I ought to do", in the way in which we can deduce a conclusion in logic from premises which we take to be true. Nor, like science, does ethics consist of a body of general laws which are inferred from the behaviour of particular instances. We cannot, that is to say, regard a course of conduct which is right on a particular occasion, as a ground for inferring some general law to the effect that such a course of conduct is *always* right. There is, nevertheless, scope for reasoning in ethics. We can, for example, use reasoning to discover whether the intuitions which we are prepared to accept as valid are consistent. We can also use reasoning to discover what particular judgments can be truly asserted on the basis of these intuitions. This does not, it must be admitted, constitute a very ambitious programme for the ethical philosopher. Its modesty has, however, the advantage of rendering it easy for the present writer to resist the temptation to include in the chapters that follow an extended personal contribution. Confining myself so far as possible to the exposition of the views of others, I shall not, except in one chapter, attempt to intrude my own. In Chapter XI I seek to assess, from a standpoint not very different from the one just indicated, some of the results which have been reached by the ethical philosophers whose work has been surveyed. On the basis of this assessment, I have ventured in Chapter XII to present a positive view of some of the questions discussed. I shall here permit myself one observation only on the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, the question of the proper subject matter of ethics.

**The Proper Subject Matter of Ethics.** I mentioned at the outset that a number of different problems have been propounded by different philosophers, for each of which it has been claimed by some philosopher or other that it constituted the central problem of ethics. Having

enumerated them, I pointed out that one's view as to which of them was, in fact, central depended upon one's general ethical position. For my part, I doubt whether any of these questions should in fact be given a central position, partly because I doubt whether any of them are in fact answerable. I should, therefore, be inclined to assign to ethics as its main business the task not of obtaining new knowledge, but of clarifying knowledge that we already possess. If I am right, we all of us have certain moral intuitions, intuitions in regard to good and evil, right and wrong. It is not the study of ethics that provides us with these intuitions; it is not, that is to say, ethical speculation or reasoning, that tells us what is good, or informs us as to the difference between right and wrong; it is our own moral faculty. In so far as we lacked such a faculty, in so far as it failed to provide us with moral intuitions, we should be lacking in respect of our full humanity.

But though we all have ethical intuitions, they are, in most of us, vague and unco-ordinated. In savages they assume curious forms; even among civilized persons they are often inconsistent, so that, if what X holds to be right in one connection really is right; it is impossible that what he holds to be right in another connection should also be really right. There is scope, then, for a study which will clarify and co-ordinate the knowledge which, if I am right, we already possess, so that we may come to realize more clearly than we do now what are the nature and content of our moral consciousness. This task I conceive to be the main purpose of ethics.

### *Books*

Chapters relating to the scope and subject matter of Ethics will be found in any treatise on the subject. Good general books are:

- SIDGWICK, HENRY. *Outlines of the History of Ethics.*
- MUIRHEAD, J. H. *Elements of Ethics.*
- MACKENZIE, J. S. *A Manual of Ethics.*
- FIELD, G. C. *Moral Theory.*

# CHAPTER VI: OBJECTIVE INTUITIONISM. BUTLER AND KANT

## I The Moral Sense School

**Place of Conscience in Ethics.** We shall be concerned in this chapter with that group of ethical theories which I have called objective-intuitionist. The distinctive contentions of Objective-Intuitionism are that certain things are good, others bad, whether we personally like them or not; certain things right, others wrong, whether we think them to be so or not. Most objective intuitionists would maintain that we are endowed with a special faculty, conscience, or, as it is sometimes called, the moral sense, which, if we have been reasonably well trained and have reasonably good characters, tells us what things are good, what bad, what right and what wrong. I have deliberately stated the doctrine in its popular form because it is of all ethical doctrines the one which wins the widest popular acceptance. It is probable, indeed, that it represents the view which the plain man is instinctively inclined to adopt in regard to ethical questions, more often than any other ethical theory. The people who tell you that right is right and wrong wrong, and that all the arguing and cleverness in the world will not make them any different are objective-intuitionists. Christianity, too, lends its support to this view. Postulating the existence of a faculty called conscience, sometimes identified with the voice of God, Christianity holds that it is by means of this faculty that the absolute and unanalysable judgments of right and wrong, in whose validity Objective Intuitionism believes, are made. Conscience, it is agreed, may

be trained and educated, and the developed moral judgment of the civilized man is, it would be conceded, more trustworthy in its deliverances than the primitive moral insight of the savage. But however civilized the person, however developed his conscience, its deliverances will, it is said, still take the form of immediate, absolute, and unique judgments of right and wrong, the adjectives immediate, absolute and unique being used in the special senses described in the last chapter.<sup>1</sup>

**Popular Support for Objective Intuitionism.** Conscience functions in the popular view, which is also the Christian view, rather like a sixth sense, a sense which is set over the realm of morals, as the sense of hearing is set over the realm of sound, and the sense of smell over that of odours; and just as, to revert to an illustration already used, a man's nose tells him which smells are pleasant and which unpleasant, so his conscience, or moral sense, tells him which actions are right, which wrong. And just as against the deliverances of the nose there is no appeal, just as for them there is no rational justification—for we cannot say why a smell that we pronounce to be bad, is bad—so there is neither appeal against, nor, in the last resort, rational justification for, the deliverances of conscience.

Those who take this view are accustomed to point to the fact that children and uneducated persons frequently and unhesitatingly pass moral judgments. Now it is, they say, absurd to suppose that the peasant woman who reproves the licence of the town, and the maid who condemns the promiscuity of her mistress, do so because they have reflected upon the probable social effects of sexual laxity, should it become widespread; that they have judged these effects to be undesirable and, having done so, proceed to censure such individual cases of laxity as come under their notice as being liable to set an example which, if widely followed, would tend to produce the effects

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 167, 168.



in question. No such elaborate chain of reasoning is, it is argued, involved; all that has happened is that the moral sense of the peasant and the maid have instinctively and immediately reacted with judgments of disapprobation to behaviour which an act of insight has revealed as wrong. Similarly, the child who reproves the action of another child in pulling the wings off flies, has not necessarily at his disposal a stock of maxims of the "kindness is better than cruelty" type, with which to back his reproof; he intuitively feels that it is wrong to make living things needlessly suffer. Some—I am in this argument still following popular usage—push this line of thought even further, and claim for the uninstructed moral senses of country people, or of the very young, a degree of immediate insight which has, they say, been lost by those who have become bemused by the sophistications of the intellect, or obscured in those who have succumbed to the artificialities of civilized life. The moral sense, it is often said, comes to us from a supernatural source; it is only to be expected, therefore, that it should function with the greatest freedom and directness in the young, and in those who have not allowed themselves to be corrupted by the sophistries of this world. These latter reflections belong, it is true, rather to the realm of moralizing than to that of popular morals; nor, intuitionists would admit, can the same degree of authority be claimed for them as for the popular tradition which testifies to the authority of conscience. This tradition which affirms that there is a moral sense, that it is unique, that its deliverances are absolute, and that they are our sole guide to morality, prescribing to us what things are right and what wrong, does, it is urged, represent centuries of popular thinking about morals; it constitutes, in fact, a distillation of the common moral experience of mankind. It is not, in any event, to be lightly dismissed, and the doctrine which treats the existence and authority of the moral sense as the keystone of the structure of ethics—the doctrine, namely, of Objective-Intuitionism—has, in spite of the various

difficulties to which it is exposed, great claims upon our consideration. I will now try to give some account of this doctrine.

**The English Intuitionists.** In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a number of English writers advanced ethical theories which, assuming the validity of the moral consciousness, sought to do justice to its deliverances. Bishop Butler (1692-1752), Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Cumberland (1692-1719), Cudworth (1617-1688), Clarke, (1675-1729), Wollaston (1659-1724), Hutcheson (1694-1747), all embraced, in one form or another, Objective-Intuitionism. Of these writers, Bishop Butler is considerably the most important. I propose, therefore, after a brief preliminary treatment of some of the writers just mentioned, to give some account of Butler's philosophy, and to follow this with an outline of the moral theory of Kant which, in spite of its difficulty, is perhaps the most celebrated theory in the history of moral philosophy. The English objective-intuitionists mentioned above differ from one another chiefly in their views of the nature of the faculty by means of which moral differences are recognized and moral judgments passed. The general importance of this question and in particular its bearing upon the problem of free-will, I shall try to show in later chapters.<sup>1</sup> For the moment I am concerned only with that form of Objective-Intuitionism which postulating a unique faculty, not specifically identified with reason, will, emotion or any other faculty, and usually known as "the moral sense", regards it as the sole and undisputed source of our moral judgments.

**Writers of the Moral Sense School.** The term "moral sense" was actually first used by the ethical writer Hutcheson (1694-1747) in his *System of Moral Philosophy*. How, he asked, do we come to have our notions of morality, and answered, in effect, very much as we come to have

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 267-271; and Chapter VIII, pp. 287-289 and 311-313.

our notions of colour. We form the general idea of red, he maintained, from seeing particular instances of red objects, and then abstracting from them their common quality. Similarly, we form our general notion of right and wrong from perceiving particular situations which exhibit ethical qualities, whether good or bad, and then abstracting the ethical qualities from the particular cases which happen to have exhibited them. And just as, in the case of red, a particular faculty, namely, the faculty of vision, sees what is red, so that, lacking the faculty, we should be without the notion of red, so, in the case of morals, a particular faculty, the faculty known as the moral sense, discerns the moral qualities which the world of men and things exhibits, so that, lacking that faculty, we should be without moral conceptions. The faculty is defined as "the moral sense of beauty in actions and affections, by which we perceive virtue or vice in ourselves or others". It is implied that actions and situations are right or wrong in themselves, that persons and characters are virtuous and vicious, and that the moral sense tells us in regard to each particular one of them whether it is right or wrong.

Thomas Clarke (1675-1729) took the same line, regarding our judgments of right and wrong and the moral obligation which they lay upon us to do the right and refrain from the wrong, as arising from and being related to essential differences in the nature of things. In developing this notion of essential differences Clarke made use of an analogy based on physics and mathematics. There is in the physical world what he called a "mutual consistency" among things, that is to say, they "consist" together in such a way as to exhibit the workings of law. If everything in the universe behaved purely individually and showed no likeness to the behaviour of anything else, the formulation of physical laws would, it is obvious, be impossible. But such purely individual behaviour is not found. Not only does ice which has been subjected to a certain

temperature melt, given the same conditions, it always melts at the same temperature, one example in the physical world thus behaving conformably with the behaviour of another like example. It is, therefore, Clarke pointed out, a characteristic of things to behave lawfully. Mathematics, in fact, applies to them. Similarly in the moral sphere; some things, he maintained, are conformable with, or are fitted to, our will in a way in which others are not. This does not mean simply that some things obey our wills and others thwart them. What it does mean is that some things are such as our wills naturally prescribe to us; they are, in other words, such as we ought to do. These actions which our will naturally prescribes to us possess what Clarke called a certain fitness, and this fitness God has given to them in just the same way as He has given laws to nature. The laws of nature are immutable; so is moral fitness, whereby certain kinds of action are conformable with our wills. Now it is by means of the moral sense that we recognize in regard to actions that they are conformable and such as it is fitting for us to will.

## II. BUTLER

**Butler's Psychology.** Statements such as those of Hutcheson and Clarke are, so far as concerns their form of presentation, little better than dogmatisms. Such and such, these philosophers say, is the case; and, broadly speaking, they leave it at that. It is possible that they are right; it is also possible that, as I hinted in the last chapter, judgments to the effect that so and so is ultimately valuable, or that so and so ought to be done, cannot in the long run be defended. Nevertheless, there is considerably more to be said from the objective intuitionist point of view than has so far been suggested. For a more developed statement I turn to Bishop Butler (1692-1752).

Butler's avowed object is to make an inventory of the contents of the human mind. His point of view is in part ethical; he not only tells us what the various elements

in human psychology are, he also tells us what *ought to be* the relation between them. Nevertheless, the main trend of his work is psychological. Butler is an exceedingly acute thinker who states, as clearly perhaps as anybody has ever done, the moral principles which govern the actions of decent people. In this respect his ethical philosophy fulfils what I have suggested on a previous page to be the main purpose of ethics,<sup>1</sup> namely, that of analysing and clarifying our common moral experience.

Butler divides human psychology into three main elements, just as Plato divides the soul into three parts. There is, first, a set of passions or affections; examples of these, which we should now call impulses, are anger, sexual desire, hunger, envy and malice. Each passion or impulse is concerned solely to obtain satisfaction for itself, irrespective of the needs of the rest of our natures. Secondly, there are two general principles or motives to action which Butler calls respectively Benevolence and Self-love. Benevolence is a tendency which exists in all or most men to seek the greatest happiness of all without respect of persons; Self-love, which Butler often calls cool Self-love to emphasize its deliberative character, is a tendency to seek the greatest happiness of ourselves. Thirdly, there is Conscience, a supreme principle set in authority over the rest, whose function it is to determine to what extent the particular impulses may be indulged and the two general principles, Self-love and Benevolence, followed.

**Analogy Between Human Nature and a Watch.** Like Plato, Butler identifies moral excellence not with any one of these faculties or propensities, but with a certain relation between them. Each of our faculties is, in itself good; how, indeed, could it be otherwise since God implanted them in us? But evil may arise through a wrong relationship between them; any one of them may function excessively or insufficiently or in the wrong way.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, p. 174.

In particular, one of the particular impulses may take the bit between its teeth and run away with the rest of our nature. Hence, it is not enough for the right understanding of human nature to know of what faculties and propensities it is composed, any more than it is enough for the right understanding of a watch to know that its works are composed of spring, cogs and wheels. To understand the watch, we must know what are the appropriate functions of the spring, the cogs and the wheels; we must know, in other words, that it is the spring's business to turn the cogs and the wheels. Similarly, the person who wishes to understand human nature must know what are the proper functions of each of its faculties, and what its right relation to the others. Butler proceeds to define the right relation between the particular passions or impulses, the two principles of Benevolence and Self-love, and Conscience as follows. The particular impulses should, he held, be subordinated to Benevolence and Self-love, Benevolence and Self-love to Conscience. When the different principles which compose a man's nature are so disposed, he is said to be acting in accordance with nature. Thus for Butler, as for the Greeks, "natural" conduct is ideal conduct; for him, as for Plato, a man who realizes the highest or best of which he is capable realizes also his own nature.

**The Impulses.** It will be worth while to devote a little space to the working out of Butler's scheme of psychology, not only because of its intrinsic interest, but also because in the course of its elaboration he directs a ~~damaging~~ criticism against the hedonist contention that the object of all human action is to obtain pleasure for the agent.<sup>1</sup> I shall restate and criticize this important theory in Chapter XI. I include Butler's arguments here as an example of a model piece of psychological analysis rather than as an exhaustive treatment of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 46-48 and Chapter XI, pp. 396-415. for an account of Hedonism.

subject. The validity of Butler's criticism of Hedonism depends upon his distinction between the particular impulses and Self-love. It is the purpose of Self-love, he agrees, to obtain the maximum pleasure for its owner. But it is by no means true that we always act from the motive of Self-love; we quite frequently act as the result of the promptings of one of the particular impulses, and the object of such action is not pleasure for the Self, but gratification for the impulse in question. Thus the object of hunger is food; of revenge, the injury of another; of compassion, the relief of another's distress. Now the gratification of the impulses may conflict with Self-love. Consider, for example, the impulse to boast: the object of boasting, when boasting has an object and is not, like singing in one's bath, a motiveless blowing off of psychological steam, is to make oneself appear glorious in the eyes of others and so to obtain their admiration, or, at least, their respect. More precisely, it is to produce a change in another's estimate of oneself. In fact, however, boasting usually produces precisely the reverse of the result intended, the flagrant boaster being generally regarded with amused contempt. The impulse to boast is primitive and strong, and most small boys accordingly boast unashamedly. When they go to school, however, they discover that the effects of their boasting are not such as are wished, and the process for which public schools are celebrated of "knocking the corners off" transforms them, in the course of a few years, into the ostensibly modest individuals who enter conventional society. Thereafter, the impulse to boast is usually suppressed, except when a man is "in his cups", when the inhibitions which experience has built up are temporarily weakened, and the native impulse reasserts unashamed its claim to gratification. Butler would have put this by saying that, since the gratification of the individual's impulse to boast is normally opposed to the dictates of Self-love, the impulse is in a properly functioning personality subordinated to the control of Self-love. Moral virtue,

in other words, entails a subordination of the particular impulses to the principle of cool Self-love.

**Statement of Psychological Egoism.** Butler's position entails that some of our actions may be undertaken with an object other than that of increasing our own happiness; it entails, that is to say, a denial of Psychological Hedonism.<sup>1</sup> Some impulses, such as the impulse to sing in the bath, have no object at all; in the case of others, such as the impulse to boast, the object of the impulse is the gratification peculiar to itself. Such gratification may be inimical, it may even be consciously inimical, to happiness.

Butler develops this point with special reference to the ethical doctrines of the philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, whose views are summarised in Chapter X. Ethically Hobbes was what is known as an egoist. Egoism may be defined as the view that all our actions have as their recognized object the production of some change in the state of the agent, and that all our sentiments resolve themselves on analysis into a concern for the well-being of the person feeling the sentiments. There is, in other words, if the egoist is right, no such thing as a disinterested action, or a disinterested feeling. The arguments by which this view is supported are not in essence different from those which I have briefly summarised in Chapter II<sup>2</sup> in defence of Hedonism, and which will be elaborated later in greater detail in Chapter XI. Psychological Hedonism is indeed, a special case of Psychological Egoism. While Egoism maintains that all actions are designed to produce some change in the state of the agent, Hedonism asserts that all actions have as their object that particular kind of change which consists in an increase of the agent's pleasure. It is obvious that the change in a man's condition which, if the egoist is right, a man's action is designed to promote, will in ninety-nine cases out of a

<sup>1</sup> For a definition of Psychological as opposed to Ethical Hedonism, see Chapter XI, p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 46-48.



hundred be a pleasant one, and most egoists have, in fact, been hedonists. An example of the way in which an egoistical view can be applied to an apparently disinterested sentiment is Hobbes's account of pity. Pity, he defines, as "fear felt for oneself at the sight of another's distress". The distress of another person, in other words, only moves us in so far as it causes us to picture ourselves in a similar situation. It is, in fact, not the other person that we pity at all, but an imagined condition of ourselves.

**Butler's Criticism of the Egoistic Account of Pity and Sympathy.** Butler's criticism is instructive and may be taken as a model reproof for those who, in the interests of a delusive simplicity, seek to reduce to a single motivating factor pure and simple the complex elements that compose even the most single-minded of human sentiments, or inspire even the most straightforward of human actions. "The truth," as Algernon says in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, "is rarely pure and never simple." Butler begins by pointing out the difficulties in Hobbes's account. If, he says, it were true, then the most sympathetic people would also be the most nervous since, on Hobbes's showing, they would be the people who were most apprehensively concerned for their own safety. This, however, is demonstrably not the case. Moreover, while we admire those who are sympathetic, we are apt to despise those who are over-anxious about their own safety, the inference being that since sympathy and nervousness promote different reactions in other people, they must be recognizably different states of consciousness in the person feeling them. A third objection is founded on the admitted fact that we are apt to feel more sympathy for the misfortunes of our friends than for those of strangers. If Hobbes is right, we must conclude that the distress of a friend makes us more anxious about ourselves than the distress of a stranger. This, Butler contends, is not the case; and although this contention of his might plausibly be questioned, it must, I think, be conceded that, although

to see my friend run over in the street gives me more concern than I would feel if I saw the same accident happening to a stranger, it is not true to say that my additional distress is felt because the fact that it is my friend who is being run over makes me more anxious about myself, than I should have been if it were a stranger.

Having disposed of the over-simplified egoist theory, Butler develops his own analysis of the sentiment of pity. The pity we feel for a fellow-being in distress is, he holds, compounded of, or perhaps I should say is accompanied by, three states of mind. There is, first, thankfulness at the contrast presented by his condition and our own; there is, secondly, anxiety about our own condition—so far Butler subscribes to Hobbes's egoistical analysis—and there is, thirdly, what Butler calls genuine sympathy. This last element is distinguishable from the others and is not resolvable into them. It is, in other words, a unique aspect of human experience.

Butler proceeds to make some interesting strictures upon the state of mind responsible for such a theory as that of Hobbes. Hobbes is an exceedingly able man; what is more, theories which belong to the same type as Hobbes's theory, in that they seek to reduce the complexity of human motives and the variety of human states of consciousness to a single motive, namely, the motive of concern for the well-being of the agent, have from time to time been advanced by a number of exceedingly able men. Hedonism, as we shall see,<sup>1</sup> is the outstanding example of such a theory, and Hedonism has been argued with force and subtlety by a long line of distinguished thinkers. Yet both Egoism and Hedonism are plainly at variance with the dictates of common sense, so much so that, as Butler slyly remarks, nobody but a philosopher could have dreamed of maintaining anything quite so foolish. Butler, a man of sound common sense, would, one imagines, have cordially subscribed to the definition of a "silly" theory suggested by a contemporary

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

English philosopher, Professor C. D. Broad, as one which could only have been put forward inside a philosophical class-room.

Confusion between the Ownership of an Impulse and its Object. The mistake which Hobbes makes and, Butler would add, the mistake which all egoists and hedonists make, is in Butler's terminology to reduce the particular impulses and passions to different expressions of Self-love. How does this mistaken reduction so frequently come to be made? It arises, Butler holds, from two confusions. The first is a confusion between the ownership of an impulse and its object. Now all impulses are owned by the self, but they do not all have for their object some change in the state of the self. Some do; others do not. Hunger, for example, is an impulse which has for its object some change in the state of the self. Butler, in point of fact, says that the object of hunger is food; but this is surely wrong. The object of the housewife who is going to shop is food. The object of hunger is to *eat* food and, by so doing, to produce an alteration in the sensations experienced by the self, an alteration which will substitute for the unpleasant sensations connected with hunger the pleasant sensations of eating and the pleasant sensation of repletion.

In fact, as Professor Broad has pointed out, the object of an impulse is never a person or thing, but is always, in so far as it has an object, to produce a change in the state of a person or a thing. This correction does not affect Butler's argument, which is that only *some* of our impulses are self-regarding in the sense that they have as their object some change in the self. Hunger is one such impulse, but sympathy is not, since sympathy has as its object the production of some change in the state of the person sympathized with. When we sympathize, we want to relieve the distress of the person who is the object of our sympathy. Now Butler's argument against Egoism is briefly this: the fact that all my impulses are

owned by me, that they are, in other words, *my* impulses, does not entitle me to draw the conclusion that they all have for their object some change in my condition; some do and some do not. It is precisely this conclusion that is falsely drawn by Egoism.

The second confusion arises from the fact that the satisfaction of any of my impulses gives pleasure, and that the pleasure is *my* pleasure. Now this is true both of those impulses that have for their object some change in me, and of those that have for their object some change in other people or in things. If, for example, I am moved by the impulse of hunger or of lust, pleasure attends the satisfaction of my impulse and the pleasure in question is the ultimate object of my impulse. But if I am moved by sympathy or malice, while it is still true that pleasure attends the satisfaction of the impulse that moves me, the attainment of this pleasure is not its object. The object of sympathy is, as we have seen, the relief of another's distress, of malice the production of another's misery. It is admitted that the satisfaction of these impulses brings pleasure to their owner, but to say that the enjoyment of this pleasure is his *object* in satisfying the impulse is to put the cart before the horse; for the pleasure cannot, it is obvious, occur unless the impulse is satisfied, and the satisfaction of the impulse depends on the achievement of its object. Where impulses such as those of sympathy and malice are concerned, the object of the impulse is *ex hypothesi* something other than and prior to the pleasure which is dependent on the achievement of the object.

**The Fallacy of Egoism.** The mistake which Egoism makes is, then, in Butler's view, to confuse the pleasure which attends the gratification of the impulse with the object upon the attainment of which the pleasure depends. Butler might have added that there are many impulses, such as the impulse to sing in one's bath, or to step out briskly on a frosty morning, or even to swear when annoyed, which, as I have already suggested, proceed from no

*conscious* motive and have, therefore, no *conscious* object. If they have no *conscious* object, they do not have for their object the enjoyment of pleasure by the self, as Hedonism asserts, or the production of some change in the self, as Egoism asserts.

The general conclusion of Butler's discussion is that no impulse has for its object the production of happiness for the self. The production of happiness, for the self, is the object of the principle of cool Self-love. The pleasure which the satisfaction of impulses entails is thus a factor in the total happiness at which cool Self-love aims, but it is not, therefore, the object aimed at by the impulses. The relation of the impulses to cool Self-love is, in fact, that of a means to an end. The impulses provide, as it were, the raw material of which the happiness aimed at by cool Self-love is the finished product.

**Cool Self-love and Benevolence.** These, as we have seen, are regarded by Butler as principles which in a properly regulated personality, override the impulses. They are concerned to maximize happiness, Self-love that of the self, Benevolence that of other people. As I am not proposing to summarize the whole of Butler's ethical theory, but only to emphasize those parts of it which have played an important part in the development of ethical philosophy, I shall limit my treatment of these two principles to an account of what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Butler's ethics, namely, his attempted establishment of the identity of actions proceeding from the two principles.

Now cool Self-love and Benevolence are, Butler insists, different principles. If a man satisfies any impulse, if, for example, he gives way to any tendency to action, he will, as we have just seen, enjoy some pleasure. By satisfying any impulse, therefore, we increase our own happiness and so minister to cool Self-love. But there is no reason to suppose that by so doing we necessarily increase the happiness of others. We do not, in other words, by satisfying our impulses necessarily further the dictates of Benevolence.

Thus while no voluntary action of mine can be *completely* inimical to cool Self-love, however disastrous its ultimate effects may be, many of my actions may be hostile to Benevolence. Thus, if I lose my temper and punch in the jaw the person responsible for my annoyance, cool Self-love will enjoy a certain amount of satisfaction, even if I am knocked down or sent to prison afterwards. But there is no ground for supposing that anybody else *necessarily* derives any benefit from my action. The principles being admittedly different, it might be supposed that the actions dictated by cool Self-love are different from, are, indeed, usually opposed to, those proceeding from Benevolence. Butler is at pains to show that this is not the case. If we scrupulously take into account all the foreseeable consequences of an action we shall, he says, discover that those actions which benefit other people are also those which produce the best results for ourselves, while those which harm other people are nearly all such as will harm the self.

**That Actions which Harm Others Always (or nearly Always) Harm the Self.** The contrary belief is, Butler thinks, due to another confusion, a confusion between means and ends. Owing to the dominating part played by money in our civilization, we are apt to forget that money is not a good in itself, but is only a means to the attainment to other goods. Money, for example, is not life, although it is the counter which enables life to be distributed socially: money is not happiness, although when used in certain ways it may produce happiness, and it is very difficult to enjoy happiness without some money. The confusion between means and ends seems in the case of money to be obvious enough; yet we are all guilty of making it on occasion, and some of us—misers, for example—are guilty of making it almost all the time. Now it is perfectly true that, if I have a sum of money, the more of it I spend on myself, the less will I have to spend on other people. So far, then, as money is concerned the dictates of Self-love and Benevolence do appear to

conflict, but it does not follow that they conflict when applied to the goods to which money is a means. If, for example, I spend four-fifths of a sum of money on myself, I shall probably obtain more happiness by spending the remaining one-fifth upon other people than by spending this too upon myself. Hence it is not the case that the dictates of Self-love and Benevolence necessarily conflict in regard to the goods obtained by money, although they do conflict in regard to money itself, which is the means to the attainment of such goods.

Butler adduces other arguments to show that the results of acting benevolently are nearly always such as are consonant with the dictates of Self-love, and that, *vice versa*, when we act in such a way as to harm other people, we usually harm ourselves. He cites the case of revenge. In all ages poets and moralists have descanted on the disappointing results of vengeance. Apart from the feelings of remorse which usually follow a successful act of vengeance, the revengeful person often exposes himself to retaliation from the friends or relations of his victim. Again, the man who is habitually malicious, by making himself generally unpopular diminishes his own happiness by reason of the dislike in which he comes to be held. In general, Butler argues, it is a shortsighted policy to injure other people. Such injury often appears to conduce to our immediate advantage, but in the long run it will be found to injure ourselves as well as others.

**Comment on Alleged Identity Between Conduct Dictated by Self-love and Benevolence.** Butler probably exaggerates the degree of coincidence between conduct respectively inspired by Self-love and Benevolence, for it is not difficult to imagine cases in which the two principles would be opposed. If, for example, I am shipwrecked on a desert island with three companions and know (a) where there is a store of food sufficient to keep one person, but only one, alive for a week, and (b) that a ship will rescue me in a week, cool Self-love presumably

demands that I should not reveal the whereabouts of the store of food to my companions, while Benevolence would, I imagine, dictate the contrary course. Indeed, it may be said that, since to reveal the store of food would mean the death of all of us, the amount being inadequate to maintain four persons, while its secret consumption by myself would preserve my own life, the obligation which I am under to promote the greatest amount of happiness on the whole, an obligation which the utilitarians were subsequently to invoke,<sup>1</sup> demands that I should keep the knowledge of the food to myself for, in addition to surviving, I may quite possibly live happily ever after.

It may be doubted, moreover, whether in a society of persons completely devoid of Benevolence, Benevolence would ever pay, for Benevolence by A only leads to the gratification of A's Self-love because and in so far as it tends to provoke a return in kind from its objects. As the mystics would put it, the way to make people lovable is to love them.

But, as Butler points out, the motives of most people are mixed; acting neither from pure Self-love nor from pure Benevolence, they can usually be relied upon to repay benevolent conduct in others by benevolent conduct on their own part. Thus it is a good general rule that in a normal society a benevolent action conduces to the advantage of the agent.

**That Happiness and Virtue often Coincide.** Two deductions of interest may be drawn. The first is that, if people would act benevolently more often than they do, the world would be a happier place; happier not only because of the benefits conferred by Benevolence upon its objects, but also because of the benefits which benevolent conduct brings to its agent. People, in other words, would have a better time, if they would only consent to be more virtuous. As with individuals, so with nations. Many nations in pursuit of what they believe to be self-interest

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 332-336.



act malevolently towards their neighbours. The policy pursued by France towards Germany in the years immediately succeeding the war owed its inspiration in almost equal degrees to malevolence and the desire for vengeance. The results show how much better it would have been for the French to have been guided by cool Self-love. Germany, maddened by the rejection of all her overtures for a sympathetic understanding, and outraged by the continual breaking on the part of others of pledges which she had been compelled to observe, presently developed a militant intransigence which the French do right to fear. In general, there is much to be said for Butler's view that those actions which are the most hurtful to others, are never those which a man who aimed at the maximum happiness for himself would perform. The contrary is also true. If men acted rationally, that is to say, in the way which was most likely to bring about the ends they desire, Utopia might well be realized. But most men are actuated by impulses and passions which cloud their judgment and persuade them that, by injuring those whom they fear or dislike, they will advantage themselves. It is one of the paradoxes of human conduct that men do not, as a general rule, act in a way which is calculated to advance their own interest from rational motives, although self-interest is one of the objects of rational desire. It is only when they are actuated by generous motives which are as a rule indifferent to their own interest, that they in fact advance it. The paradox arises from the fact that those actions which are likely to promote the maximum happiness of the self are usually identical with those which will be likely to benefit others; or, as Butler would say, actions respectively dictated by the promptings of cool Self-love and Benevolence tend to be identical.

The second deduction, one which Butler himself draws, is that, because of the close coincidence between the actions prompted by cool Self-love and Benevolence, it is often very difficult to say with certainty from which of the two principles a particular action does in fact proceed.

Motives, as I remarked above, are usually mixed, and the prompting of many actions probably owes something to both principles. What is more, it is often difficult to distinguish actions dictated by one or other of the two principles from those prompted by the particular impulses. The practical corollary of this difficulty of determining the nature of motives is, presumably, tolerance, for, where the motives by which people are actuated remain doubtful, it is charitable to give them the benefit of the doubt.

**Conscience.** The original purpose of this account of Butler's philosophy was, it will be remembered, to provide an illustration of the type of ethical theory known as Objective-Intuitionism. It is by reason of his treatment of conscience that Butler qualifies as an objective-intuitionist. Conscience is, for Butler, the supreme faculty which, in a properly regulated nature, is in control of all the others. Just as Self-love and Benevolence are in authority over the particular impulses and determine to what extent they may be gratified, so Conscience is in authority over both Self-love and Benevolence. Butler treats Conscience under two aspects, the cognitive, or knowing, and the authoritative or prescribing. The cognitive aspect of Conscience expresses itself in reflecting and judging. Conscience, that is to say, reflects upon and judges the characters and motives of human beings, but its reflections and judgments are informed by a particular kind of interest. It is interested in characters, actions and motives not for themselves, but only in so far as they can appropriately be made the objects of moral judgment; in so far, in other words, as they are capable of being judged to be right or wrong. Many actions, for example the action of extracting from a full box of matches the match which is next but three from the lefthand side of the box in the top row, are, Butler would agree, ethically neutral and in them Conscience has no interest.

What are the grounds for postulating the existence of such a faculty? Butler's main ground is that we do

habitually use such words as "right" and "duty", and that these words have a meaning for us. Moreover, we are enabled by reflection to distinguish the meaning of these words from that of words whose meaning is allied but different. For example, we distinguish between a right action and an expedient action; between a wrong action and one which was well-intentioned, but whose consequences turned out to be unfortunate; between injuring a person intentionally and unintentionally. There must, then, says Butler, be a faculty which recognizes these meanings and distinguishes these differences, just as there must be a faculty—that of vision—which distinguishes red from blue.

**The Notion of Merit or Desert.** Conscience, as Butler describes it, is far removed from the blind, instinctive faculty whose uncontrolled operations are responsible for so much blame, remorse and mortification in ordinary life. One knows only too well the people who are ready to invoke the dictates of their "consciences," whenever they want an excuse for being disagreeable. . . . Butler's Conscience is a highly reasonable and reflective faculty; it is prepared to make allowances and to take account of circumstances. For example, when making its judgment upon the moral worth of actions, Conscience takes account of merit or desert. Let us suppose, for instance, that we see A hurting B. Lacking information as to the reason of A's action, Conscience cannot but feel an instinctive disapproval, but before passing a final verdict an enlightened conscience would insist on all the information relevant to a judgment of disapproval being available. Suppose, for example, that B had committed a serious and unprovoked offence against A; then it might be thought that B's present sufferings constituted a well-merited punishment for his unprovoked offence. Because, in other words, Conscience judges a particular punishment to be merited, it may approve of an action of which in other circumstances it would disapprove.

The notion of merit or desert which requires us when judging actions, especially those of a retributive type, to take into account the past relations between the person acting and the person who suffers, or benefits from, the action, figures prominently in writings on ethics. We must, it is obvious, when passing moral judgment, take *all* the circumstances into account, a fact which makes it extremely difficult to say precisely what it is that, in the case of a moral judgment, is to be regarded as the object of the judgment. I shall develop this point on a later page.<sup>1</sup>

Conscience, again, must, Butler insists, when passing judgment upon actions, take into account the character and disposition of the agent. You would naturally expect different behaviour from a lunatic and from a sane man, from a savage and a civilized man, from a child and an adult. In judging, therefore, whether the action is such as the agent ought to have done, Conscience must consider what may reasonably be expected of him. Conscience must, in other words, judge by the standard appropriate to the behaviour of the person whose actions are in question. The notion of standard entails that of ideal. Butler's suggestion is, then, that we shall have in our minds, when judging, some ideal conception of the savage, the civilised man, the child and the adult, and then consider how far the conduct under judgment approximates to it.

**The Authority of Conscience.** More important than the cognitive is the authoritative aspect of Conscience. In the account of Aristotle's ethics<sup>2</sup> I included a discussion of the parts played by reason and feeling respectively in the motivation of action, mentioning in particular Aristotle's general view that it is desire that sets the ends of our actions, while reason plans the steps for their attainment. The question, what part of our natures is it that is responsible for our actions, is highly important for ethical theory, if only because, as I shall try to show in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 287-292.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 110-116.

the next chapter,<sup>1</sup> the possibility of free will turns upon the answer that we give to it. It is plausible to suppose that we are not responsible for our feelings, and if feeling alone can motivate action, we are not, it would seem, responsible for our actions. In endowing Conscience with authority over action, Butler is thus taking sides on an important controversial issue, for what, in effect, he is saying is that Conscience has not merely the cognitive property of recognizing what is right and what wrong, but also what may be called an "inclining" property, the property, that is to say, of being able strongly to incline or motivate us to do what is recognized to be right. I say "strongly to incline or motivate", since if we were absolutely *obliged* to do what Conscience prescribed, there would be no freedom and, therefore, no such thing as moral worth.

Conscience, Self-love, Benevolence—all these pronounce upon the desirability or otherwise of certain courses of action, approving or disapproving according to their lights; but while Self-love disapproves on the ground that a particular action is imprudent, and Benevolence on the ground that it is inimical to the happiness of others, Conscience alone disapproves because it is wrong.

**Butler's Hierarchy of Faculties.** Butler arranges his three principles in a hierarchy. Conscience is, as we have seen, the supreme principle; whether, therefore, it does or does not control the other two, it always ought to do so, and in an ideal personality it always would do so. If Self-love and Benevolence conflict, there is nothing in the nature of either to give it authority over the other, but Conscience is endowed with an over-riding authority, and, if we will to invoke it, it will always answer our call. We can, that is to say, by means of Conscience, always check over-indulgence in either cool Self-love or in Benevolence; in cool Self-love on the ground that over-indulgence is selfish, in Benevolence on the ground that we are being tempted to neglect our own health and happiness, or even

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 267-271.

the obligation which we have to develop our own personalities, enlarge our intellects and develop our tastes, because of our absorption in work for the welfare of others. For, as Butler points out, even Benevolence can be overdone, though its excess is neither so frequent nor so blameworthy as that of Self-love. It is not so frequent, because there is a general tendency to love oneself more than to love others; it is not so blameworthy, because in a society in which too few are benevolent, that is to say in every society that has ever existed, an excess of Benevolence on the part of some does in fact conduce to the welfare of most. Excess of Benevolence is, nevertheless, blameworthy as tending to destroy the right relation between the different elements in human nature upon which Butler has insisted as the foundation of virtue. It is the business of Conscience, the over-riding principle, to maintain this right relation.

**Contemporary Neglect of Conscience.** Conscience has tended to fall into neglect in the twentieth century, partly because it was overworked in the nineteenth. In the nineteenth century, elder persons habitually invoked Conscience to justify their natural dislike of seeing their juniors participating in enjoyments which age or lack of charm denied to themselves. In the twentieth century they tend to explain it away altogether, and, instigated thereto by psycho-analysis, profess to find its origins in feelings of guilt born of inhibitions and renunciations in early childhood. "Conscience," Freud defines as "the result of instinctual renunciation, or," he continues, "Renunciation (externally imposed) gives rise to conscience, which then demands further renunciations." Subjective-Intuitionism, as we shall see in Chapter X<sup>1</sup> regards Conscience as a form of inherited instinct which prompts the individual to perform those actions which will conduce to the advantage of the society to which he belongs, or rather—for there is often a time lag before the dictates of Conscience conform to the new needs of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 373-378.

a changing society—of the society to which his ancestors belonged. Conscience is in fact, on this view, society's spy planted in the individual's soul.

Such theories deny that Conscience is a unique faculty, and analyse it into simpler and more primitive elements. Just as it might be said that there are by nature no such things as omelettes in the world, but only their constituent eggs and butter, so psycho-analysts, subjective-intuitionists and many modern psychologists are inclined to say that there is by nature no such thing as Conscience in the human make-up, but only instincts, renunciations of instincts and feelings of guilt arising from such renunciations. These views are at once the prop and the mirror of the tendency of the times, which is to deny the existence of innate moral faculties invested with unique and absolute authority. To those who are steeped in contemporary psychological views, Butler's doctrines cannot but appear to be unduly naïve and simple. There are, however, two elucidatory comments to be made which, by qualifying the apparent simplicity of Butler's doctrine on the subject of Conscience, may have the effect of rendering it more acceptable.

**The Economical Use of Conscience.** First, Butler does not maintain that every detail of our lives ought to be regulated by Conscience; on the contrary, he suggests that, the more Conscience is kept in the background, the better. It is a commonplace upon whose significance I shall touch later,<sup>1</sup> that the best way to obtain happiness is not deliberately to seek it. Similarly with moral virtue; the best way to achieve it is not to keep its importance constantly in mind; that way priggishness lies. It is bad for our temperaments to be continually taking our moral temperatures.

Butler is fully alive to these dangers. His ideal is not that our actions should be constantly "vetted" by Conscience, but that they should be such as Conscience would

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 402-409.

approve, if it "vetted" them. We should, that is to say, habitually act from Self-love or from Benevolence or from one of the particular impulses, but, Butler adds, in a properly regulated nature such action would be in accordance with the dictates of Conscience, should it be called upon to judge them. A brief presentation of Butler's scheme would, therefore, run as follows. The particular impulses supply the raw materials of good and evil; these raw materials are in the first instance organized into what we know as character by cool Self-love and Benevolence, and cool Self-love and Benevolence are themselves supervised and regulated by Conscience. The good man is not one who is constantly taking stock of his actions and submitting them to the bar of moral enquiry, with a view to determining whether the approved relation between the impulses, the two principles and Conscience has in fact been observed; he is one who habitually does what is right, without stopping to think whether it is right or not. Conscience is, indeed, in him like the good headmaster or business manager, who can absent himself from his school or business in the reasonable assurance that everything will go on in just the same way as it would have done had he been present. Thus Butler would agree with Aristotle that goodness of character is "a settled condition of the soul",<sup>1</sup> which naturally and habitually expresses itself in actions of a certain sort, these being the actions of which Conscience would approve, even though it is not actually called upon to deliver judgment.

In the second place, Butler does not, of course, maintain that Conscience always is in control; all that he says is that in a properly regulated nature it ought to be in control, and that in any nature, however debased, it is always possible for it to assume control. Butler maintains, in other words, that we are free, free, that is to say, to go wrong, but also free, however much we may have gone wrong, to recover our ground and begin to go right. He sees in fact that morality depends upon the freedom of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 99.



the will, for if we *could* only do what is right, morality, as we know it, would not exist. But equally it would not exist if, having done wrong, and done wrong habitually, we could not repent and reform, for the conception of moral obligation implies that, if we *ought* to do a thing, we always *can* do it. This conception we must now consider in the form in which it was developed by its most forthright exponent, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), whom many would consider to be the most important, not only of the objective-intuitionists, but of all writers upon the subject of ethics. The question of the possibility of human freedom will be discussed in the next chapter.

### III. KANT

**Metaphysical Significance of Kant's Moral Theory.** Kant's moral philosophy is intimately bound up with his metaphysics, nor can it be adequately understood apart from his theory of the nature of the universe as a whole. Those who wish to obtain a general understanding of this theory, will find an outline of it in Chapter XIV of my *Guide to Philosophy*. For the purpose of the present discussion, the reader must be content with the bald statement that Kant divides the universe into two parts or worlds. There is, he holds, the world of things as they are in themselves, and there is the world of things as they appear to us. The second world is necessarily and always different from the first, since in knowing things the human mind changes them, imposing upon them a framework of qualities and relations which they do not possess in themselves. Just as a man who was born with a pair of blue spectacles permanently affixed to his nose would assert that everything was blue, and just as the blueness would, nevertheless, not belong to the things which he saw but would be a quality imposed upon them by the conditions under which he saw them—that he should see them to be blue would, in fact, be a condition of his seeing them at all—so, Kant held, everything we know possesses

properties derived from the human mind. These properties the human mind has imposed upon it in the process of knowing it. Examples of such properties are those of quality and quantity, the property of being the cause of something and the effect of something else, and the properties of being in space and in time. As a consequence, we never know anything as it really is; we only know it as it appears.

To this extent everybody is enclosed within the horizon of an environment which his own mind has at least partially constructed. Outside this environment, he can know nothing, since in the very act of trying to know it he would impose upon it the categories of his mind, and so bring within the circle of his self-made world that which he was trying to know. The word "know" is, however, in this connection, to be interpreted in a limited sense as denoting what philosophers call more technically cognition, that is, to say, knowledge of things, ideas and truths. It stands for the activity of the mind's strictly intellectual faculties, but it by no means covers all its faculties. In particular, it does not cover the moral faculty. Now moral experience, Kant maintains, is itself a kind of knowledge, for we know in moral experience, and know quite indubitably, what we *ought* to do whether we in fact do it or not, and, in so far as we have this moral knowledge, we make contact, in Kant's view, with the world of things as they really are. Moral experience is, therefore, for Kant, of the greatest metaphysical significance, since it and it alone provides for human consciousness a way out of the limiting circle of the world of things as they appear to us, and into the world of things as they really are.

**Kant's Psychological Theory.** Kant's reasons for attributing to the moral faculty this peculiar significance are briefly as follows. He divides man's psychological faculties into three main groups, the senses, the intellect, and the will. The senses and the intellect are, as I have said, precluded from a direct knowledge of reality by their

introduction of a mental element into the raw material of experience, an element which is contributed by the mind and is present from the first. Thus, sensuous experience and intellectual knowledge both give information about a world which we have partly constructed. But, when we *will* something, we obtain, Kant held, a kind of knowledge which is neither sensuous nor intellectual. We are not in willing making contact with a world of things as they appear to us, upon which we have imposed the properties of our own minds, nor do our moral experiences reach us through the forms of space and time. The exercise of the will is a free activity in virtue of which we can use our sensuous and intellectual knowledge as we please. It brings also a sense of emancipation from the law of cause and effect which dominates the world of things as they appear to us, no less than from the laws of logical necessity which constrain the operations of the reason.

**The Self from the Standpoint of the Sciences.** In so far as we act in accordance with desire, Kant held that we are not free. He pointed out that, if we consider our actions from the points of view of biology, of anthropology, or of psychology, it is very difficult to resist the conclusion that they are determined. The biologist sees a man as a member of a particular species which happens to have evolved, endowed with a general inheritance of impulse, faculty, and desire, which is characteristic of his species. The anthropologist sees him as a member of a particular race which has reached a certain stage of development, possessing the intellectual and emotional equipment appropriate to that race at that stage of development. The psychologist applies to the individual a mode of treatment similar to that which the biologist applies to the species and the anthropologist to the race. He treats him as a being endowed initially with a certain psychological and physiological make-up. He is scheduled as having such and such congenital tendencies which develop in such and such an environment, and he is pictured, as a

result, as growing up into an adult person possessing such and such a nature with such and such tastes, prepossessions, prejudices, desires, and thoughts. These, taken in sum, determine both the contents of his consciousness and the actions in which they express themselves. An analysis of the individual along these lines has already been suggested in a preceding chapter; and, inevitably, its outcome is the philosophical doctrine of self-determinism sketched in Chapter IV.<sup>1</sup> To these analyses of the self by the methods of the various special sciences Kant was prepared to subscribe. In so far as human beings are considered from the point of view of biology, anthropology and psychology, in so far, that is to say, as they are considered from the standpoint of the special sciences, there can, he held, be no doubt of their complete subjection to the law of cause and effect. They are, therefore, completely determined. "Man," Kant wrote, "is one of the phenomena of the sense world, and he, too, is in so far one of the nature causes whose causality must stand under empirical laws. As such, he must have an empirical nature. . . ." A man's every-day personality is, in other words, itself a member of the world of things as they appear and is, therefore, to this extent not entirely real. But there is, Kant held, another self, which Kant called the "transcendental self," by virtue of which man participates in the world of things as they are.

**Introduction of the Conception of Ought.** Now it is the transcendental self which is the source of moral experience. As such, it is sharply distinguished from what Kant called the "empirical self," which is the self of every-day experience, and is a chaos of wishes and desires. As creatures of desire we belong to the world of things as they appear, and our feelings and actions are as completely determined as the movements of matter in the physical world. But when we act in accordance with the law which our moral will prescribes, we escape from the world of appearance and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 111-116.

establish contact with reality. In so far, in fact, as a man wills freely in accordance with the laws of his own nature, he is a member of the world of things as they are; that is to say, he wills as a member of reality.

For, Kant points out, the feeling of moral obligation is something which cannot be accounted for by an examination of the world of things as they appear. Psychology can tell us what we are and what we want to do; it cannot tell us what we ought to be and what it is our duty to do. Thus the conception of "ought" is on an entirely different plane from the conception of "is". It presupposes that when we have finished with our analysis of a man's antecedents and character, the analysis which tells us what he is, and how, in virtue of the fact that he is what he is, he is naturally disposed to act, we can still assume that it is in his power to act differently. We can still say, 'Yes, I agree that, given his heredity and constitution, he had a strong instinctive disposition to act in this way and every justification for obeying his natural disposition; nevertheless, I still maintain that he ought to have acted in *that way*', and in saying that 'he ought to have acted in *that way*', we are also implying that he was free to act 'in *that way*', since it is nonsense to say that a man ought to do what he cannot do. The consciousness of moral obligation is thus "inextricably bound up with the consciousness of the freedom" of the self that wills, which is the transcendental self. One knows, Kant insisted, "that one *can* act because one is conscious that one ought, and thus one knows in oneself the freedom which—without the moral law—had remained unknown." It is for this reason that Kant, in speaking of the obligation to do one's duty, employs the phrase "the categorical imperative". Whereas most of our actions are conditioned by an "if"—*if* we want so and so, we must act in such and such a way—and so are "hypothetically determined", the obligation to do our duty is governed by no such condition. We *ought*, we feel, to do it, whether we want to do it or not, and we shall continue to feel this, even if we habitually fail to do it.

**Uniqueness of the Concept of "Ought."** Now this consciousness of "ought" is a unique fact, a fact of a kind which is not anywhere to be found in the world of things as they appear. "Obligation," Kant says, "expresses a sort of necessity . . . which occurs nowhere else in nature. It is impossible that anything in nature *ought to be* other than in fact it is. In truth, obligation—if one has before one's eyes only the succession in nature—has simply and solely no meaning. We can as little ask what ought to happen in nature as what attributes a circle ought to have." It is because it recognizes the validity of "ought", that Kant gives a unique position to what he calls the good will, which is the source of moral action. "There is," he maintains, "nothing in the world—nay, even beyond the world, nothing conceivable, which can be regarded as good without qualification, saving alone a good will." The moral will is thus, by virtue of the obligation that it recognizes, placed outside the causal sequence which operates universally in the world of things as they appear. Nor can its content, that is to say, the course of action which it prescribes, be derived from reflection upon things as they appear. The very fact that it takes no account of likes and dislikes, that it is indifferent to circumstances, suggests that it is not the reflection of likes and dislikes or the product of circumstances. Whence, then, is it derived? Kant answers, from the nature of man regarded as a moral being. Hence man as a moral being is not an inhabitant of the world of things as they appear, but is a member of the world of things as they are. For this reason, when he obeys the moral law, he is spoken of as obeying a law that comes from himself—from himself, that is to say, considered as a real and rational being and not as a member of the world of causes and effects. This obedience to the moral law, which is also moral freedom, is something which cannot be explained. For explanation is the work of understanding, and whatever the understanding understands, assumes, just because it is understood, the status of a member of the world of things

as they appear, and is *ex hypothesi* therefore, something other than moral obligation and the moral law which obligation recognizes.

Nevertheless, the sense of moral obligation is a fact, a fact which, Kant has tried to show, derives its authority from the real world, the corollary being that, in virtue of our ability to recognize its promptings and obey its commands, we, in respect of our moral selves, own membership of that world.

Such, in outline, is Kant's theory of morals. Its strength lies in the distinction which we do undoubtedly make between is and ought; between what is the case and what ought to be. In the world that we know by means of the senses and the intellect we can only, Kant asserts, find fact. Such a world cannot, then, contain a basis for the notion of ought; yet we do undoubtedly recognize "oughts". Therefore, the source of these "oughts" must lie in some world other than that revealed to the senses and known by the intellect, and it must be by means of a unique faculty that we recognize them. This faculty, which Kant calls "the moral will," not only recognizes, but feels an obligation to act in accordance with the dictates of the "ought" which it recognizes. The obligation, however, though it is always open to us to give heed to it, is never compulsory; for not only is the moral will free in respect of its deliverances, but we are free to obey it or not as we please.

**What the Moral Will Prescribes.** So far, we have learnt only that we ought to act in the way which the moral will prescribes. Can we give any indication of what it does prescribe? Kant held that we could. What the moral will prescribes is that we should act in every case upon general principles which are intuitively recognized to be morally binding. These general principles are of the kind which every man acknowledges irrespective of his needs and circumstances; for example, that lying is wrong, that promises should be kept, that kindness is better than cruelty, honesty better than deceit, and so forth.

Nor are they in any way opposed to reason. On the contrary, if we investigate the deliverances of our moral wills by means of reason, we realize that the general principles which the will prescribes are the only ones which are *not* self-contradictory. There is, for example, no contradiction inherent in the precept that everybody should tell the truth; but if everybody were to lie, nobody would believe anybody else, and there would be no point, therefore, in lying. This is what Kant means by saying that wrong conduct is self-contradictory; it cannot be universalized without stultifying itself. Hence Kant's famous precept: "Act only according to that maxim which you can at the same time will to be a universal law."

**Evil Parasitic upon Good.** Kant is here emphasizing an important truth. All wrong action, as I have had occasion to point out in another connection,<sup>1</sup> is parasitic, parasitic, that is to say, upon right action. Consider, for example, the above-mentioned case of lying. Lying, I pointed out in the earlier discussion, is only profitable to some people because most people tell the truth. For the object of the liar is to get credence for his statement; the extent to which he will succeed in doing this depends upon the amount of credence which people habitually give to the statements made to them, and this in its turn will depend upon the general amount of truth-telling in the community. Thus the more frequently most people tell the truth, the more profitable does lying become for the few who do not. Similarly with honesty: if everybody were dishonest, nobody would trust anybody else and dishonesty, which depends for its success upon people's willingness to trust their fellows, would cease to pay. Dishonesty, in short, only pays the few, when it does pay them, because the many are habitually honest. The case of theft illustrates the same truth. If everybody were a burglar, there would be nothing to steal, and the occupation of burgling would therefore, cease to be profitable. It is only because most

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in Chapter I, pp. 39, 40.



people are prepared to accumulate property by lawful methods, that it is worth while for some people to try and disembarass them of it by unlawful ones.

The fact that evil is in this sense parasitic upon good, that it is, in other words, the prevalence of good conduct among the many that makes bad conduct attractive to some, has a political significance, to which I shall have occasion to refer to in a later chapter relating to the coercive function of the State.<sup>1</sup>

Its present relevance is to serve as an illustration of Kant's general principle, that moral conduct can be universalized without contradiction, while immoral conduct cannot. Hence, he says, we should always act in a way such that we can will everybody else to act in the same way without producing conflict or contradiction.

**Not Making Exceptions in the Self's Favour.** Kant's maxim has a further significance. A great part of what we call wrong action consists in doing in one's own person something that one would reprobate in another. Everybody recognizes certain duties, even if it is only the duty to promote his own maximum self-development. When one acts in a way which one believes to be wrong, preferring the indulgence of one's own desires to following the dictates of the moral imperative, one is condoning in oneself a deviation from moral rules which one would censure in another. One is, that is to say, making an exception in one's own favour. But if everybody habitually made exceptions in his own favour, ordered society would rapidly become impossible. For example, I may permit myself to travel on a special occasion without a railway ticket because, let us say, I have no money, or because I want to spend whatever money I have on something else; but if everybody habitually indulged himself in this way at the expense of the railway company, the company would go bankrupt and railway travel would cease. Kant, therefore, makes the point that it is characteristic of moral

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 778-781.

rules, that they should apply equally to everybody. We are all, in short, equal before the moral law. It is no excuse, he holds, for breaking it, to say that one is "specially circumstanced" or "peculiarly tempted". One has to ask oneself, what would be the effect if everybody were to make similar excuses on his own behalf? Thus it is a sign of moral conduct that it can be universalized, that is, observed by everybody without producing an impossible situation; it is a sign of immoral conduct that it cannot.

**That People should be treated as Ends, never merely as Means.** A further maxim which Kant deduces from the nature of the moral law is the following: "Act so that you treat humanity, in your own person and in the person of everyone else, always as an end as well as a means, never merely as a means." In virtue of their possession of a moral faculty, human beings are, as we have seen, participators in reality; they are, that is to say, from Kant's point of view, "ends in themselves". It follows that we are never justified in treating them as if they were *merely* means to ends beyond themselves, as stepping-stones, for example, in a career prompted by ambition, as instruments for the satisfaction of sexual desire, or as objects for the gratification of sadistic instincts. To take vengeance on a person for one's own satisfaction, or to waste a person's life in ministering to one's own comfort, is to use that person as a means to an end beyond himself. But, Kant insists, there is no end which can justify such a subordination, for there is no end that is ultimately and absolutely valuable save moral worth, and it is moral worth which is impaired when a person is treated otherwise than as an end. The State, then, is never justified in treating a citizen solely as the instrument of its purposes.<sup>1</sup>

**Strength of Kant's Position.** Kant's insistence on the absolute character of the moral imperative is apt to sound

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 803-806, for an expansion of this statement.

a little strangely to modern ears. Nevertheless, his position has considerable force. This is due to its undoubted success in providing an understandable account of the significance of the word "ought", and a reasonable explanation of the feeling of moral obligation for which the word "ought" stands. "I want to do this"; "I have a strong temptation to do this"; "I shall grow rich, powerful or popular by doing this"; "I shall be happy if I do this"; "I shall 'get away with it' if I do this"—none of these statements needs to be explained to us before we can understand its significance. But when we proceed to add, "Nevertheless, I *ought* to do that", the position is different. Some explanation of the word "ought" is, it is obvious, required. Nor is it readily forthcoming. Examine the world around us, explore physical nature, analyse and describe human society, and you will accumulate information about what is; you will, in short, ascertain *facts*. But you will not discover what should be; the information that you obtain will not include "*oughts*". The most elaborate examination of fact will not be found to yield a single "ought". Whence, then, do "oughts" derive? Kant's explanation is that they arise, or rather that the recognition of them arises in a part of our being by virtue of which we participate in a world other than the world of fact, in the everyday sense of the word "fact". The notion of moral obligation comes to us, in other words, from reality, and in and through it alone do we make contact with reality. This explanation covers very satisfactorily the moral experience of simple and uninstructed persons. For this, as I pointed out above,<sup>1</sup> often expresses itself in judgments which possess a directness and authority lacking in those of more sophisticated people. The moral experience which leads them to pass these judgments is, it is obvious, fresh and vivid. Since we are unable to trace the source of these judgments to reflection upon the principles of conduct, or estimates of social consequences, it seems reasonable to regard the experience which gives rise to them and the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 176, 177.

faculty which makes them as innate and essential parts of the nature of the person judging. Kant's account, which ascribes the origin of moral judgments, to a part of our natures whereby we participate in reality, makes admirable provision for this characteristic of directness and immediacy.

**Wrong Action Never an End in Itself.** The theory derives another source of strength from the sharp distinction which it draws between what are termed categorical and hypothetical imperatives. The imperatives of desire are, it affirms, hypothetical in the sense that they all depend upon an 'if'. 'Do this,' they say, 'if you want so and so.' What they do not say is, 'Do this for its own sake and for no other reason at all.' Yet this precisely is what, according to Kant, the moral imperative does say. It is a characteristic of moral action, in other words, that we are willing to regard it as an end in itself. That this distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives does correspond to an admitted fact of experience is, I think, clear. Actions of the kind which are usually termed immoral are always prompted by some motive other than the motive to perform the action. They are always, in other words, means to an end beyond themselves. We tell a lie *because* we want to deceive somebody. We forge a cheque *because* we want to obtain money to which we are not lawfully entitled. We do somebody a bad turn *because* we want to pay off a grudge. But moral action serves no particular purpose beyond the action. While we require an incentive to tell a lie, we require none to tell the truth; it is, we feel, the normal and natural thing to do. Similarly, we tend to act honestly, *unless* we have a particular reason for being dishonest. We help a person who is in distress, *unless* there is some factor of personal inconvenience or danger to deter us. Other things being equal, in short, we do what we ought to do, because doing what we ought to do is intuitively recognized by us to be an end in itself. The fact that other things rarely are equal should

not blind us to the existence of this natural tendency to pursue what Socrates would have called the Good.

The truth that wrong conduct requires an incentive, right conduct none, illustrates and reinforces Kant's distinction between the categorical and the hypothetical imperatives. The moral law, as he would say, takes no account of consequences; it is obeyed, when it is obeyed, for its own sake, whereas action prompted by desire always has in view the achievement of some end beyond the action.

### Criticism of Kant's Moral Theory.

(1) THAT KANT GIVES NO GUIDE TO DUTY. A general criticism of the doctrines which objective-intuitionists hold in common will be found in Chapter VIII. The views of Kant are, however, so distinctive that they are entitled to consideration in their own right, apart from the general doctrines which they exemplify. Of the many serious objections to which Kant's moral theory is exposed, the majority are in the nature of criticisms of his general metaphysical position, with its sharp separation between the world of things as they are and the world of things as they appear, rather than of his ethical doctrines proper. These it is beyond the scope of the present book to discuss,<sup>1</sup> yet, since the ethical theory entails the metaphysical, they are in truth criticisms of the one no less than of the other.

Other criticisms, however, apply specifically to the ethical doctrine. Three of these may be mentioned.

In an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> I urged that the problem of ethics is a double one; there is the problem of how to do your duty, and the problem of how to find out what your duty is. In the discussion referred to, I criticized Socrates's doctrine that virtue is knowledge on the ground that, while it made ample provision for the recognition of the Good, it did not deal with the problem of our frequent failure to pursue the Good that we recognize; that, in

<sup>1</sup> Some account of them will be found in my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XIV.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter II, pp. 42-46.

wrong in themselves, irrespective either of inclination or consequences; that their rightness consists in their being prescribed to us by the moral consciousness; and that the dictates of the moral consciousness are immediately recognizable and of binding authority. For what need, it may be asked, has a doctrine such as this to concern itself with the question whether the actions which the moral will prescribes can be universalized or not? The moral law does not need a sign, and its authority does not depend upon consequences.

*And Unacceptable.*

(b) In the second place, it may be doubted whether the "universalization" formula is always applicable. Moral problems are exceedingly various, and not the least difficult is that which presents itself in the form of a choice between two alternatives, to both of which Kant's universalization formula applies. There is, for example, the familiar problem, whether it is morally justifiable to tell a lie to save a life. Most people would say that it is; but both the two principles involved, "we ought to tell the truth" and "we ought to save life whenever we can" are universalizable. In fact, it was reflection upon the consideration that universal lying is self-contradictory in its results that, in the foregoing discussion,<sup>1</sup> suggested the conclusion that truth-telling was what the moral law prescribed. Thus in a case of this kind Kant's formula gives us no help in determining where our duty lies.

*And Partial in their Application.*

(c) Apart from cases of doubt, there are others in which the course of action to which the formula of universalization points would appear to be definitely wrong. There is, for example, the class of case which is covered by the notion of vocation. Some people, it has been held, may be called upon to live a certain kind of life, which is unsuitable for others. The kind of life in question may be

<sup>1</sup> See above p. 208.

morally more praiseworthy than that of ordinary men; yet it would not generally be maintained that the ordinary man is under any moral obligation to live it. An extreme example is afforded by the case of a celibate priesthood. Celibacy is enjoined upon its priesthood by one of the most widely adopted religions in the world; yet celibacy, though morally enjoined, cannot, it is obvious, be universalized, if only because, if it were, there would be nobody left to be celibate. Cases such as these cannot, it is clear, be decided by the application of general formulae however all-embracing the formulae are made. Each case must be judged on its merits, and the obligation to judge on merits implies the admission that in some cases judgment may be difficult. We reach, therefore, the same conclusion as before; it is not enough to will to do our duty; we require also to find out wherein our duty lies, and it is in respect of this latter requirement that Kant's theory affords little or no assistance. Now it is a significant fact that in practically every case in which we endeavour to judge on merits two difficult moral alternatives, our judgment is determined by an appeal to results. What, we ask ourselves, will be the consequences, if I perform action X, and what, if action Y? Yet the appeal to consequences is precisely what Kant's strict form of Objective-Intuitionism excludes.

(3) THAT IT IS NOT THE CASE, AS KANT SUGGESTS, THAT OUR DUTY MUST BE ALWAYS DISAGREEABLE. Perhaps the most important objection to Kant's theory is the sharp distinction which it introduces between the real world and the world of appearance. This distinction, which runs right through man's nature bifurcating his personality, as it were, into two parts, has particularly unfortunate results in the sphere of ethics. The moral self, we are told, belongs to the real world; the everyday self that desires, perceives and thinks, to the familiar world, which is the world of things as they appear. To the everyday self, which in Kant's philosophy is called the empirical or phenomenal

self, belong our impulses and desires; to the real or moral self, the recognition of our duty and of the obligation to perform it. Our desires, in other words, tell us what we want to do; the will of the moral self tells what we ought to do.

Now the account which Kant gives of the everyday, empirical self, the self which is animated by desire, is purely hedonistic. He represents the individual's empirical self, that is to say, as motivated solely by desire for pleasure and aversion from pain. How, then, does the moral will affirm itself? It affirms itself, we are told, in opposition to desire, by insisting on duty as distinct from inclination. But since what the empirical self desires, since that to which inclination inclines us, is, according to Kant's account, pleasure, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the moral will chiefly affirms itself as an agency for inhibiting pleasure, and that its unwelcome voice chiefly makes itself heard in telling us not to do what we want to do. Thus, without actually intending to do so, Kant reaches the position that we can recognize our duty by virtue of the fact that it is disagreeable. For, if it is agreeable, it will be such as we desire; it will, therefore, according to the general Kantian position, be the course of action prescribed by the empirical or everyday self, and it will not, therefore, be our duty. The view that the moral will only prescribes what is disagreeable is conceivably true, but it is a gloomy view and it is pessimistic in regard to human nature. If we never *want* to do what is right, if our duty is *always* unpleasant to us, we must be very bad indeed. Some theologians, unable to forget the Fall and obsessed by its gloomier implications, have in fact taken this view of human nature. Man, they insist, is born in sin and his heart is "desperately wicked". Consequently, most of the things which he instinctively wants to do are wrong, and it is only by the sternest self-discipline and the grace of God that he can be prevented from doing them. Upon this theological basis there has arisen a school of forbidding moralists who, content to consign the great majority of



human souls to everlasting damnation, justify their consignment by refusing to call a pleasure a pleasure, if they can call it a sin, and then proceed to point out that most human beings do in fact desire pleasure. This view, which was popular in the last century, has lost favour in the present. There are two comments which may appropriately be made on it.

*Distressing Theological Implications of Kant's Puritanical View of Duty.*

First, from the point of view of theology, it is only an extreme view which would be prepared to credit human beings with so much natural wickedness and the Almighty with such equivocal intentions towards His erring creatures. It may of course be the case that our employment of the gift of free will is such that most of us deserve the eternal torment which, on this view, awaits us. But, if it is the case, then the Almighty who is omniscient must know that it is. He must have known, too, that it would be the case when He created us and endowed His creatures with free will; He must have known, that is to say, that most of those whom He created would use His gift in such a way as to justify Him in consigning them to eternal torment. It is difficult to subscribe to the implications of this view of the Deity.

A more reasonable theological view is that there are implanted in human beings from the first the seeds of good as well as of evil. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, since God created us? If we are by nature at least *partially* good, to act in accordance with our natural desires cannot *always* be to act otherwise than in accordance with our duty; to do what we want to do cannot *always* be tantamount to applying for a passport to hell.

*That the Good Man's Goodness is often Unthinking and Enjoyable.*

Secondly, from the point of view of morals, it seems difficult to accept the view that the good man is one whose virtue is

always disagreeable to him. A good man is one who acts as he ought to do; he does his duty. Must he *always* dislike it? And if he does always dislike it, can he be really good? These questions are exceedingly awkward for supporters of Kant's theory. Goodness cannot always be easy to us, and he who never experiences the temptation to do what he thinks he ought not to do, or, to put the point the other way round, never thinks that he ought not to do what he wants to do, is, I imagine, either more or less than a man; more, because to be above temptation is to participate in the Divine, less, inasmuch as, his moral sense being inadequately developed, he falls short of the full human stature. Animals, presumably, rarely, if ever, experience the conflict between duty and desire, not because they are without desire, but because they are without the sense of duty.

But to admit that our duty must sometimes run counter to our inclinations, is not to say that it must always do so; and, in criticism of Kant's view, we are entitled to invoke a mass of human testimony to the effect that the good man is one who naturally and spontaneously does what he ought to do. Unselfishness, for example, is not always unpleasant to the unselfish person; it is often displayed unthinkingly and unhesitatingly by those to whom unselfish actions are natural and habitual. They act unselfishly, in fact, because they are unselfish persons, and, since unselfish action is in accordance with their natures, we cannot suppose it to be naturally disagreeable to them.

### The Paradox of Ethics.

(a) THAT VIRTUE MUST BE NATURAL. Having reached this point in our reflections, we find ourselves in sight of one of the paradoxes of human conduct. The perfectly good man might, one would suppose, be defined as one who habitually and unhesitatingly does what is right. For the perfectly good man is not, one would have said, a man who, by taking continual thought for his virtue, by being constantly on his guard against temptation,

avoids doing wrong; he is rather one who, because of the inherent goodness of his nature, experiences no temptation to act otherwise than as the dictates of morality demand. He has, as Aristotle would say,<sup>1</sup> and as Butler agrees,<sup>2</sup> a "settled habit of virtue"; or, as popular usage has it, the habit of acting rightly is, or at any rate has become, second nature to him. So habitual, so almost instinctive, would be the virtue of such a man that he might be described as being almost unconscious of it. For to be conscious that one is virtuous, is to be complacent, and complacency at any rate in a mortal who, however near to perfection he may be, can never quite attain it, is a defect. It follows that the completely good man will be an unselfconscious man, unselfconscious, that is to say, so far as his own virtue is concerned. The good man, then, is one who naturally, easily, habitually and unselfconsciously does what is right. So, at least, one would naturally have thought.

(b) **THAT VIRTUE MUST BE ACQUIRED.** Yet the paradox of ethics consists in the fact that what one would naturally have thought, what in fact on reflection one still does think, is not the whole of the truth. For on reflection one sees that the contrary is also true. It is true, that is to say, that moral experience, as we understand the term, must involve an element of struggle. If we never felt any temptation to do wrong, there would be little or no virtue in doing right. To affirm the contrary, would be to make the possession of moral virtue a purely natural endowment for which one could no more take credit than for the gift of a good eye at games; and that it is such a purely natural endowment is a view quite obviously at variance with the judgment of mankind. For the judgment of mankind holds that, however easily a man's goodness may sit upon him now, there must have been a time when he had to struggle to acquire it. The notion of character formation, in fact, implies precisely this, that a way of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 200.

life which was once achieved hardly and precariously as the result of difficult acts of will and constant struggles against temptation, can become, when the character is formed, its natural expression. In other words, the man of good character does easily what, prior to the formation of such character, he did hardly. What is more, it was precisely by virtue of his doing it hardly, yet, nevertheless, continuing to do it, that his character came to be formed, and as a result he learned to do it easily. So, I think, runs the traditional moral teaching of mankind, a tradition which the following quotation from Havelock Ellis admirably enshrines:

“We cannot have too much temptation in the world. Without contact with temptation virtue is worthless and even meaningless. To face temptation and reject it may be to fortify life; to face and accept temptation may be to enrich life. But he who cannot even face it is not fit to live, for temptation is an essential form of that conflict which is of the essence of life.”

Thus in opposition to the view that goodness is a natural disposition of the soul, there is a substantial weight of human testimony to the effect that it is something which must be acquired. Or rather, even if we have by nature what Aristotle would call a potential disposition for goodness, the disposition can only be actualized by moral experience, which must often be difficult and painful. In so far as this disposition is not actualized, the character, it would be added, is not formed. It follows that, if a man has never felt the temptation to evil, then he may be accounted fortunate but not good, since his experience will have lacked that element of conflict and struggle, in the fires of which alone the steel of human character can be tempered. Of a divine being it might be true to say that he could be perfectly good without conflict or effort, but to a fallible human being such effortless goodness is not permitted. Such, I suggest, are the deliverances of the popular consciousness on this issue, and it is to the popular consciousness that, as I have several times pointed

out, we must in the last resort appeal, even when, as in the present case, its deliverances appear to be inconsistent.

**The Brave Man and the Insensitive Man.** An example may serve to illustrate the paradox whose two sides I have tried to present. Courage is a virtue, and a brave man might be plausibly defined as one who feels no fear. Hence, the virtue of courage consists in not feeling afraid; that is the first side of the paradox. But reflection suggests that a being who never feels fear is lacking in sensibility. For example, the angry bull who, maddened by the darts of the picadors, violently hurls himself against any object in sight, is without fear, yet he does not constitute an obvious example of what we mean by bravery; and he is not, we should say, brave because, whatever his native sensibility may have been, it has been dulled by rage. For the same reason we do not accord to the man who performs feats of reckless courage, when doped by rum or inflamed by brandy, the same meed of admiration as we do to the man who, justly appraising the danger that confronts him and feeling a natural emotion of fear—for it is, in fact formidable and he is a sensitive man—nevertheless coolly faces and overcomes it. Dutch courage in fact is inferior to courage *tout court*. The point of the example lies in the fact that, while the second man feels fear, the first does not; yet it is the second man who is brave. The moral virtue of courage does not, then, consist in not feeling fear, but in feeling it and overcoming it.

As with courage, so with the other cardinal virtues. The performance of our duty, the resistance of temptation, cannot, as I have said, always be easy, even for the best of us. It must, indeed, often be difficult, if only because, if it were not difficult, the obligation which we feel to perform our duty would not require to call upon the authority of the moral *will* to implement it. The good man must, then, be regarded as one who, fully conscious of the difficulty of doing right, nevertheless overcomes it.

So far Kant is right and his theory embodies an important truth. But to suggest, as Kant does, that our duty must *always* be disagreeable, and disagreeable just because it is opposed to desire is to travesty the truth. The good man must sometimes *want* to do what is right, and, the better his character, the more frequently will desire and duty coincide. But such coincidence must—I am here again interpreting what I take to be the testimony of the popular consciousness—be the experience of a *formed* character. It must, that is to say, be the fruit of successful struggle in the past and not of the natural endowment which a man receives at birth, as he receives a good circulation or a good eye at games. If such natural endowments do exist, then they are emphatically not what we mean, or at any rate not *all* that we mean, by moral virtue.

**Recapitulation.** In this chapter I have given some account of that type of ethical theory which is known as Objective-Intuitionism. Objective-Intuitionism maintains that the characteristics of being right and being wrong are the intrinsic properties of actions, are, that is to say, possessed by them in their own right independently of the consequences of the actions. From this conception of a right action the theory proceeds to a conception of moral worth, defining the morally good individual as he who habitually discerns those actions which have the property of being right and habitually performs them. It is entailed, therefore, that we possess a faculty by means of which we discern those actions which have the property of being right. But the moral faculty is not, on this view, a purely cognitive one; it is not enough to discern what is right; it is also necessary to do it. The moral faculty appears, therefore, both in Butler and in Kant as one of authority as well as of discernment; it is will as well as insight.

After a brief glance at the English intuitionists, who sought to demonstrate the existence of such a faculty, I gave some account of the philosophy of Bishop Butler according to which conscience, the sense of right and wrong,

is in an ideally good man set over all the other faculties. Our sense of duty is, in other words, or rather, in the ideally good man it should be, in authority over both self-interest and desire. I then outlined the moral theory of Kant, according to which the authority with which the feeling of moral obligation makes itself felt is derived from the world of reality, distinguished from that of appearance. Kant may be classed as an objective-intuitionist in virtue of his teaching that the moral law prescribes the performance of certain actions irrespective of consequences or desires, these actions having the property of being such as we ought to perform.

Finally, I ventured to criticize this specifically Kantian conception on the ground that the view that what we ought to do as something which distinguishes itself mainly, if not solely, in opposition to what we want to do, is at variance with the deliverances of the moral consciousness of mankind.

### *Books*

**BUTLER, JOSEPH.** Sermons; Dissertation on Virtue. (Both in Butler's Analogy and Sermons, Bohn's Library).

**KANT, IMMANUEL.** Foundation for a Metaphysic of Morals.

The text of Kant is very difficult and the student will be well advised to read Kant in the form of extracts. Selections from Kant, translated by John Watson, pages 225-302, is recommended.

**BROAD, C. D.** Five Types of Ethical Theory, Chapters III and V.

**SELBY BIGGE, L.** British Moralists. Contains an account of the English Intuitionists referred to at the beginning of the chapter.

**MARTINEAU, JAMES.** Types of Ethical Theory, represents a somewhat extreme intuitionist point of view.

**FIELD, G. C.** Moral Theory.

## CHAPTER VII: THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL

**That Ethics Implies Freedom of Choice.** A discussion of the problem of free will is introduced at this stage for two reasons. First, unless the will is in some sense free, ethics, as a separate branch of philosophical study, must be dismissed. Secondly, the problem is, as I hope to show, intimately bound up with the question of the nature of the moral faculty; for it is only if it is with a faculty that is reason, or is at least rational, that we will morally and judge morally that, most philosophers are agreed, the moral will and the moral judgment can be held to be free.

The first of these contentions, that the freedom of the will is indispensable to ethics, has been widely denied. Canon Rashdall, for example, whose book, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, is one of the best-known works on ethics written during the present century, was an avowed determinist, who was nevertheless an objective-intuitionist. He held, that is to say, as a matter of theory, that actions and characters possessed the characteristic of goodness in their own right, and that this characteristic is unique in the sense that it cannot be resolved into any other characteristic; he also held that we ought, as a matter of practice, to try to achieve a good character and to perform good actions. Again, modern rationalists insist upon the practical importance of morality, although in theory they subscribe to the iron determinism entailed by the metaphysical philosophy of mechanism which, conceiving of the universe after the model of a gigantic clock, regards every event as completely determined by a preceding event. Moreover, so far as conduct is concerned, it cannot be denied that determinists have led good lives



—at least they are not notably inferior to those of non-determinists: indeed, it is open to question whether the belief that one's acts are determined makes any difference at all to one's conduct.

In spite of these considerations, it is plain, at least to the present writer, that the validity of ethics is incompatible with the denial of free will in any of the senses in which that term is ordinarily used, and that, conversely, Kant is right in saying that "ought" implies "can".

If determinism is a fact, we are not responsible for our actions. Hence reproof is as impertinent as praise is irrational: nor does it alter the case that the reproving and the praising are beyond the control of the reprover and the praiser. Now ethics is a structure which is built on the twin pillars of praise and blame. If you cannot judge in regard to a man that he ought to do action X, and approve him for doing, blame him for not doing it, then there is *no* ethical judgment which you can validly pass. Yet if he *can* only perform action Y, it is surely nonsense to say that he *ought* to have performed action X, just as it would be nonsense to say of a stone that fell from the top of a cliff on to the beach below, that it ought to have fallen upwards into the sky. If, then, there is no power of choice, ethics is meaningless. In order that ethics may have meaning, we must at least be free to choose that which appears to us to be good, even if we are not free in any other way, nor do I think that many philosophers would dissent from this view.

As regards my second contention, many philosophers have held that reason can neither determine choice nor motivate action. I shall try to show that, if they are right in holding this view, the task of maintaining free will, in any event a difficult one, becomes impossible.

## I. THE CASE AGAINST FREE WILL

The task is, I repeat in any event a difficult one and, the more closely one looks into the question, the more difficult

it appears; for, directly one begins to reflect upon the problem of freedom, almost all the considerations that occur to one seem to tell against it. All the obvious arguments in the freewill-determinism controversy are on the side of the determinist. In this sense it may be said that free will is something that will not bear thinking about, since directly you start to think about it, you find that it disappears. The arguments against it may be divided into three main groups.

(1) **Cosmic Arguments for Determinism.** There is, first, a group of arguments which seek to establish the general proposition that every event must have a determining cause. These arguments are in essence metaphysical. They maintain that an uncaused event of any kind is unthinkable. Acts of will are events; therefore they must have been caused; therefore they cannot be other than they are, their causes being what they are; therefore they are not free. This view is generally put forward as both an integral part and a necessary corollary of a mechanist-materialist theory of the universe. Mechanism asserts that the universe works after the manner of a vast machine; Materialism, that whatever exists, is of the same nature as a piece of matter. If all other events in the universe were like mechanical events, it would be very odd indeed, if one kind of event and one only, namely, the event which is an act of the human will, were an exception, since there would then be two orders of events in the universe, the order of caused and the order of uncaused events, the latter order being confined to acts of the human will. Since an event of the latter order might at any moment interfere with one belonging to the former order, that is, with the order of caused events, the order of nature which science investigates, is liable at any moment to be upset by an event from outside the boundaries of the scientific scheme of which science can give absolutely no account. Such a suggestion is intolerable to the scientist, since it implies that his whole endeavour, which is to discover the laws

that govern phenomena, in terms of which he may be able to calculate and predict future events, cannot possibly succeed. Yet it is in precisely this endeavour that science has already achieved considerable success. It is not, therefore, a matter for surprise that scientists should be instinctive determinists, and, should refuse to admit the possibility that what they would regard as arbitrary and capricious acts of will can interfere with the order of nature. The conclusion is that acts of will must themselves be events which fall within the order of nature. Therefore, like all other such events, they are caused events.

(2) Arguments from the Relation Between Mind and Body. Materialism, which asserts that everything which exists is of the same nature as matter, entails a particular view of what is called the Mind-Body problem.<sup>1</sup> The body is admittedly a piece of matter, and, as such, it obeys the laws which govern the movements of pieces of matter, that is to say, the laws of mechanics and dynamics. By means of these laws, the movements of material bodies can be predicted. This power of prediction applies to some at least of the movements of my body. If, for example, my body and a wax effigy of my body, suitably weighted, were dropped over a precipice, each would reach the bottom at the same time and behave in much the same way when they hit the ground.

Where, then, it may be asked, and how does the mind come in? Either the mind interacts with the body, or it does not. If it interacts, then events in the body will produce effects upon the mind, and events in the mind, or at least some of them, will be the results of these effects. This, as we know, frequently happens: for example, if a pin is pushed into my skin, I shall feel pain; if adrenalin is injected, I shall feel afraid; if I fail to digest my food, I shall feel depressed. In respect then, of these feelings, which are events in my mind, I am not free, not free,

<sup>1</sup> For an enlargement of the summary account of this problem in the text see my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XVIII, pp. 498-521.

that is to say, not to have them, since they are the effects of occurrences in my body. If, however, the body does not interact with the mind, then it is difficult to explain the apparent parallelism between the two, a parallelism which is illustrated at almost every moment of our waking life. For example, when I feel hungry and see food, my salivary glands secrete fluid, and when the food is put before me my hands make the necessary movements to convey it into a hole which opens in the bottom of my face. It is difficult to account for this synchronisation between mental desire and bodily movements, unless we assume that the mind and body interact. But how, it may be asked, can that which is material interact with, and produce effects upon, that which is not? How, for example, can a sledge-hammer break a wish, or a steam roller flatten the inspiration which produced Beethoven's Fifth Symphony? Or how, to take an instance which is relevant to our present discussion, can the secretion of adrenalin by a gland cause me to feel afraid, if my feeling of fear is an exclusively non-material event? Things, it may be said, can only "get at" one another in virtue of their possession of certain properties in common, but between a material and an immaterial entity there are no properties in common. Therefore they cannot interact with each other. Yet, as we have seen, mind and body do palpably interact. The mind then, it is argued, cannot be wholly other than the body. It too must be material, or must be at least an emanation from or a function of that which is material, namely, of those occurrences which take place in the body. Now these, as we have seen, are caused events, each of which is the effect of a preceding bodily event, the first bodily event in this chain of caused bodily events being the determined effect of an external stimulus to which the body is exposed and to which it reacts. What are called mental events are, the materialist argues, links in the same chain of caused events, and are dependent upon the movements in the nerves and the brain which cause them to happen. Acts of will are mental events: therefore acts of

will are not free. If we knew enough about the machinery of the brain and could observe its workings through a sufficiently powerful microscope, we should see minute changes in its cells whenever we experienced the sensation of willing something. These changes would be the causes of the sensation of willing.

(3) **Psychological and Physiological Determinism.** A distinguishing characteristic of the forms of determinism just considered is that they regard man as a member of a world order which extends beyond him. This world order is physical, and the events in it are determined in accordance with the laws of cause and effect. On this view, human choice is, in the last resort, an event not different from other natural events. Therefore it is functionally dependent upon the nature of the world order in which it occurs. Man's will, in short, is determined by events outside himself and other than himself.

Another and not less formidable form of determinism is that which represents man's will as determined by events within himself. This form of determinism is not perhaps, in the last resort, different from those already considered, since in representing our choices as made for us by the accumulated influence of all the forces and factors of our natures, it would not wish to suggest that these forces and factors were causeless and purely arbitrary facts. The forces and factors of our natures must, it would be said, spring from something; and, in point of fact, our natures, temperaments and dispositions are represented by those who are in general disposed to adopt what I have elsewhere called explanations in terms of origins,<sup>1</sup> as being conditioned by the nature of the origins from which they sprang. Although, however, the two forms of determinism, that which holds that our actions are determined by events outside ourselves, and that which holds that they are determined by forces and factors within ourselves, may not, in the last resort, be distinguishable, their immediate bearing

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, p. 29.

upon the free will problem is very different. Now the effect of the form of determinism at present being considered is to represent human acts of will as determined by the characters and temperaments of the human beings whose acts they are. Our willings are, on this view, the natural products of our inherited psychological and physiological constitutions.

Let us suppose that on a particular occasion I judge that so-and-so is the right thing to do. The view which we are considering asserts that my judgment is the necessary consequence of earlier acts and events that have made me what I am. It is not the workings of a cosmic machine by which, on this view, I am bound; I am fettered by the influence of the past, nor is the constriction of my fetters the less absolute because the past is my own.

The arguments for this view are not essentially different from those which I briefly surveyed in the last chapter to illustrate Kant's treatment of man from the point of view of the special sciences.<sup>1</sup> But there is this important difference that, whereas Kant exempted the moral will from the scope of the operation of these arguments, they are for the determinist all-embracing.

**That Human Nature is Biologically and Anthropologically Determined.** Think of man, says the determinist, biologically: you will see him as a member of a species, acting and feeling and desiring in ways appropriate to the nature of that species. Think of him again anthropologically: you will see him as a member of a culture, the inheritor of a tradition, the child of an age, acknowledging the standards of valuation appropriate to his culture, the codes of conduct and forms of belief enjoined by his tradition, and the world-view common to his age. Plato was right to point out that the ordinary man cannot make his morals, his religion or his politics for himself; he can only take them ready-made from his environment. Thus his views on morality or his beliefs about the nature and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 203, 204.

purpose of the universe are determined not by him but for him, by considerations over which he has no control. His sexual morality, for example, is largely determined by considerations of topography. Thus if he is born in a bedroom in Balham, he will think it right to have one wife and condemn sexual intercourse outside the marriage tie; if he is born in a bedroom in Baghdad, he will think it right to have four wives, provided that he can afford their upkeep, and see nothing to censure in concubinage.

#### **That Human Nature is Physiologically Determined.**

Or consider him, again, from the point of view of physiology. A man's nature is, it is obvious, largely the product of his bodily constitution. An invalid, for example, has a different mentality from a healthy man; a hunchback from a straight man. It is only to-day that we are beginning to realise the extent to which character is dependent upon the secretions of the ductless glands. An inefficiency of thyroid produces a half-wit, and an excess of adrenalin a coward. Even the moral sense is apparently dependent, at least in part, upon the constitution of the blood stream. For example, one of the most disturbing after-effects of sleepy sickness is an outbreak of kleptomania, and ladies of hitherto irreproachable moral character are assailed by irresistible temptations to abstract articles from shop counters.

These observations are of a general character and are such as will occur to any educated person not possessed of special technical knowledge. The more closely, however, the relation between the mind and the body is investigated, the more absolute does the dependence of the former on the latter appear to be.

**The Evidence from Genetics.** Consider, for example, the light which is thrown upon the question by the recently established science of genetics. The necessity for some form of determinism being taken for granted by both sets of disputants, the question was at one time much debated

whether a man's character was the result of his heredity or his environment. Both factors, it was agreed, played their part, but controversy turned upon the precise amount of weight which should be attached to each of them. It now appears that the distinction between inherited and environmental factors is neither clear-cut nor absolute.

Biologists seem to be in general agreement that the substances passed from parents to offspring, which constitute the individual's initial physiological inheritance, are numbers of separate packets of diverse chemicals embedded in a less diversified mass of material. These packets of chemicals, the genes, are strung like beads along the line of the chromosomes. The chromosomes exist in pairs, so that for each packet on one chromosome there is a corresponding packet on another. When the organism becomes a parent, it distributes to its offspring one packet only from each of its pairs, the corresponding second packet of the pair being supplied by the other parent.

The genes, therefore, constitute the raw material of inheritance. Nor is this inheritance confined to bodily characteristics. There are gene combinations for bad temper and sadism, just as there are gene combinations for red hair and pink eyes, or, in theory, there ought to be. But whether in any individual a particular combination will or will not become operative, depends upon his environment, the environment being taken to include not only the external circumstances of the organism, but also the constitution of and conditions prevailing in the rest of the body. It is not true that because one inherits certain characteristics one will exhibit them. What is true, is that one inherits an immense number of potential innate characteristics; which of them one will in fact display depends upon the environment in which one is placed. Hence, the characteristics that appear under training are as much inherited as those that appear at birth; the only difference is that the former set require the application of certain conditions over a period of time to bring them out. The distinction between heredity and environment,



between innate characteristics and acquired is, therefore, a false one. Strictly what one inherits are not characteristics at all, but certain material which, given certain conditions, will produce certain characteristics.

The scheme, it is obvious, is a purely deterministic one. It is not deterministic in the sense that what the individual will become is preordained by the supply of genes which he gets from his parents; it is deterministic in the sense that what he will become is the result of a complex constituted by this initial supply and the environment in which he develops, for neither of which can he be considered responsible.

**The Case of Identical Twins.** Thus the characteristics of the organism are, on this view, determined by the germinal material which he inherits, the nature of this material being in its turn determined by the characteristics of the parents. The characteristics of the parents are derived from those of the species to which they belong, and those of the species to which they belong are in the last resort determined by the influence of the external physical environment on the species. And if it be objected that mental events lie outside the confines of this scheme, and that nobody has yet been able to locate the inspiration of a poet in a chromosome, those who advocate deterministic views might concede that this *may* be so. 'One's view on this question depends', they would say, 'upon the attitude one takes to Materialism in general and to the Mind-Body problem in particular. We cannot as yet *prove* that mind is only a function or a by-product of the body.' Nevertheless, although absolute proof is agreed to be lacking, they would point to the impressive weight of evidence in favour of the view that mental no less than bodily characteristics are determined by genetical constitution. Evidence of a very striking kind pointing to this conclusion has recently been afforded by some investigations into the characters of identical twins. Some years ago Professor Lange, with the help of the Bavarian Ministry

of Justice, investigated every available case in which a person who had come into contact with the police was a member of a pair of living twins of the same sex. His object was to discover whether the other member of the pair of twins had a criminal record; whether, in fact, the likelihood of criminality in one member of a pair of twins was greater, if criminality existed in the other. So far as ordinary twins were concerned, the additional likelihood appeared to be very small. In the case of fifteen criminals, each of whom was a member of an ordinary pair of twins, it was found that one brother only was also a criminal. There were two doubtful cases. Thus we may say that in the case of ordinary twins criminality was evinced by both members of the pair in the proportion of roughly two instances out of seventeen. This proportion is, of course, higher than the incidence of criminality in the population as a whole, but the excess may readily be accounted for by environmental factors. In the case of pairs of identical twins, however, the position was very different. Thirteen pairs were investigated, one member of each of which was a criminal, and in ten cases the other member of the pair was also found to be a criminal. What is more, there was a marked similarity between the crimes of which criminal pairs of twins were convicted. There was one pair of habitual burglars, one pair was found guilty of petty theft, and two pairs were swindlers; another pair were guilty of the same type of sexual abnormality, and so on. Thus in the case of identical twins genetical constitution apparently determined closely similar behaviour in ten cases out of thirteen. Nor can this closely similar behaviour be ascribed solely to the influence of environment. One pair of identical twins who, as adults, were guilty of the same crime, had been separated at eight years of age, while another pair who were separated rather later left their jobs at the same moment when over a thousand miles apart.

The evidence in these cases is highly suggestive, though not, of course, conclusive. What it suggests is that not

only our bodily, but our moral characteristics are largely, if not wholly, determined by our initial bodily inheritance. Nor is the suggestion confined to moral characteristics. Researches into the intellectual capacities of identical twins, recently conducted in America, show striking similarities in the matter of intellectual attainment; similar weaknesses and proficiencies were evinced in the same subjects, and closely similar marks obtained in examinations. While the evidence of similarity in the case of intellectual characteristics is less striking than the evidence relating to moral character, it tends to bear out the determinist's contention that, the more we study a man's bodily constitution and initial genetical equipment, the more convincingly does his character appear as a function of his constitution and equipment. The implication is, of course, that a complete knowledge of genetics and physiology would show the dependence to be absolute.

**That Human Nature is Psychologically Determined.** Not less formidable than the physiological are the psychological arguments for determinism. The outlines of the case for psychological determinism have already been indicated in Chapter IV in illustration and development of Aristotle's doctrine of Self-Determinism.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting upon the conclusions of psychology and psycho-analysis, we cannot but admit that the evidence which these sciences have accumulated has greatly strengthened the self-determinist's case. Modern psychology represents the most lately evolved faculties of human nature, such as the will, the reason, and the conscience, as determined by non-rational forces which lie, for the most part, below the threshold of consciousness, whose genesis we do not know and whose effect upon consciousness we cannot calculate. This doctrine in its most extreme form appears in the teachings of psycho-analysis, which insist that the main-springs of our nature lie outside the realm of consciousness,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 111-113.

the events of which we are normally conscious being represented as the sublimated or distorted versions of unconscious urges and stresses. The unconscious is pictured as a restless sea of instinct and impulse, agitated by gusts of libido, swept by the waves of desire, and threaded by the currents of urge and drive. Upon these waves and currents consciousness, with all that it contains, bobs helplessly like a cork, the movements of the cork being determined by the nature and direction of the ground swells below the surface.

The familiar argument from origins is used to reinforce the conclusion that the fundamental forces of human nature are not rational and moral, but instinctive and impulsive. The animal origin of man and the fact that his roots are deep down in nature are emphasised; the inference is that fundamentally he is still swayed by the same kind of *natural* forces as those which dominate the behaviour of animals. Of these *natural* forces we know very little, especially since we have succeeded in evolving reason, one of whose main functions is to rationalise them, and so to disguise from us their real character. But reason is itself an expression of these instinctive *natural* forces, one of the latest and weakest. It is a feeble shoot springing from a deep, dim foundation of unconscious strivings, and maintaining a precarious existence as their apologist and their handmaid.

Nor is it only psycho-analysis which sponsors this attitude to the more lately evolved human faculties. Much modern psychology lends support to the conclusion that human nature is fundamentally non-rational in character. I have already quoted a passage from Professor McDougall's account of instinct<sup>1</sup> which represents instinct as the driving force of all the activities of human nature, including the activity of reason, and shown how, on this view, such faculties as reason and will come to be regarded as the tools by means of which the fundamental urges or drives of human nature obtain their natural satisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 115.

**Bearing of the Psychological Analysis upon Concepts of Will and Reason.** What, it may be asked, is the bearing of these conclusions upon the question with which we are immediately concerned—the question of the freedom of the human will and, we may add, of the human reason? I include reason as well as will since, if there is to be freedom of choice two conditions at least must be satisfied; there must be not only a will which can freely choose between two courses of action that which appears to be the better, but a reason which can impartially estimate and freely decide between the relative worths of the two different courses under choice.

Both these requisites of freedom are denied by the psychological analysis I have described. Its effect upon the will has already been indicated in a previous chapter;<sup>1</sup> will, if the psycho-analytic account can be accepted, is a sublimated form of desire, for the working of which we are no more responsible than for the promptings of desire undisguised.

The effect upon reason is, from the point of view of freedom, no less detrimental. Reason tends to be exhibited as a mere tool or handmaid of desire. Its function is to secure the ends which we unconsciously set ourselves, by inventing excuses for what we instinctively want to do, and arguments for what we instinctively want to believe. There is, in fact, at bottom very little difference between reason and faith; for, if faith be defined as the power of believing what we know to be untrue, reason is the power of deceiving ourselves into believing that what we want to think true, is in fact true.

**Reasoning and Rationalizing.** We are accustomed to make a distinction between reasoning and rationalizing. Reasoning, we hold, is an honest, rationalizing a dishonest use of reason. A person who reasons uses his mind to take impartial stock of the evidence, and permits his conclusions to be determined by what he finds; he does

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 114-116.

not, that is to say, in so far as he is reasonable, allow the operations of his reason to be biased by his wishes or dictated by his hopes. A person who rationalizes uses his reason to arrive only at those conclusions which he consciously or unconsciously desires. Paying attention to those facts which support the desired conclusion, he ignores all others. If supporting facts are wanting, he imagines them. It is rationalizing when the smoker persuades himself that tobacco ash is good for the carpet, the fisherman that fish being cold-blooded creatures do not mind their throats being torn out by a hook, and the British patriot that between 1914 and 1918 it was right to kill Germans because of the violation of Belgium. Thus, while the conclusions of reasoning are determined by circumstances external to and independent of the reason that investigates them, those of rationalizing are determined by personal hopes and fears. It is on these lines that, I think, most people would be disposed to distinguish between reasoning and rationalizing.

Now this distinction cannot, if the conclusions of psycho-analysis are correct, be upheld. For the distinction between reasoning and rationalizing is, it might be said, itself a product of rationalizing, the offspring of our desire to think that our reasons are or can be free. If reason is called into action by instinct, it must needs arrive at those conclusions which instinct demands. If reason is the handmaid of desire, reason must dance to the tune which desire pipes for her. Reason, in fact, is never free, but is suborned from the first. The views which we hold are not the result of an impartial survey of the evidence, but are the reflections of the fundamental desires and tendencies of our natures. Our beliefs are based upon instinct, but we have also, as F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) pointed out, an instinct to use our reasons to discover arguments in support of our beliefs. But these reasons, if psycho-analysis is correct, have no objective validity; they do not point to and correctly report some factor in the nature of things; they reflect instinctive needs of human nature for whose

thwarting we demand compensation, or instinctive inferiorities and deficiencies, our realization of which leads us to demand reassurance.

If this view of reason is right, the belief in the freedom of the will must be abandoned. For, if the faculty which is involved in moral judgment and choice is fundamentally non-rational, then it is not freely exercised; if feeling alone can motivate to action, then action is never freely chosen; if the conclusions of the reason never afford a sufficient ground for conduct, then conduct is always determined by non-rational factors.

**Self-Determinism Latent in Many Philosophies.** Now many philosophers have adopted views which entail that the forces which motivate human beings to action are non-rational, even when they have repudiated the determinist implications which, if I am right, follow from these views. Aristotle, for example, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> announces that thought itself cannot motivate movement, and, although he goes on to qualify the statement and suggests that what he calls practical thought, practical, that is, as opposed to theoretical or speculative thought, *may* motivate to action, his doctrine of the will certainly lends itself to the view that it is not reason but desire that determines our actions.<sup>2</sup> Philosophers have used ambiguous phrases such as "rational desire" to suggest that, when we will to act in a certain way, or endeavour to obtain certain ends, the elements in our nature engaged in making the choice or pursuing the endeavour are not necessarily irrational, even though they are essentially emotional or desiring elements. The only meaning that it is possible to extract from such phrases is that, while the emotional or desiring parts of our nature determine our actions, they may on occasion operate in accordance with the dictates of reason, and so deserve the title of rational. The philosopher, T. H. Green (1836-1882), for example, speaks of our desiring or appetitive

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 110.    <sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 112, 113.

nature as supplying us with various "solicitations" to action. He holds that from these "reason" selects, or should select, that particular one with which the man who is entitled to be regarded as acting rationally and voluntarily will "identify himself". But that we have responsibility for our desires, that, to use Green's own language, the "solicitations" from which "reason selects", are in any sense such as we voluntarily provide *for* ourselves and not such as are provided for us by a given condition *of* ourselves, Green nowhere suggests. Again, William James (1842—1910), speaks of what he calls our "passional nature", supplying the determining factor in all choice. What in fact chooses is, he suggests, not an intellectual or rational faculty, but a passional and non-rational faculty. Since choosing is a preliminary to all so-called voluntary actions, it follows that thought never motivates to action.

That what does motivate to action is something which is not properly entitled to be called thought, is a premise, whether implicit or explicit, which underlies the treatment of the subject by almost all modern philosophers. More logically than Green, more explicitly than James, Thomas Hobbes (1588—1679) states the doctrine of the non-rationality of choice. Deliberation, he holds, is a mere see-saw of conflicting appetites; one pulls us this way, another that. There is an appetite for X, and an appetite to restrain the appetite for X, for reasons of prudence, or of reputation, or of what the agent conceives to be morality. Whatever the object of the restraining appetite may be, it is no less "desireful", no more rational, than the appetite which it seeks to restrain. What is called the will is merely "the last appetite in deliberation". "In 'deliberation'," Hobbes writes, "the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is what we call the 'will'." The will is thus, for Hobbes, the final weight which inclines the scales of action, but its substance is not essentially different from that of the other weights. This conclusion of Hobbes's, and the steps by which it



is reached, are strongly reminiscent of the attitude to the will which characterizes the writings of psycho-analysts.<sup>1</sup>

**Bearing of Foregoing on the Freedom of the Moral Judgment and the Moral Will.** The effect of all these views is broadly the same. All concur in holding that my personal judgment that this thing or that is the right thing to do is the necessary consequence of past acts and past events. These past acts and past events have, between them, formed my present psychological disposition as completely as the taste of a stew is formed by the various elements which have gone to its making. If, then, I now judge X to be good, or to be seemly, or fitting, or the right thing to do, it is not because I have made an impartial and disinterested choice between X and the alternative courses which are open to me, but because I have judged X<sub>1</sub>, X<sub>2</sub>, and so on to be good, or to be the right things to do in the past. To quote Professor A. E. Taylor, my act of choice is, on these views, "no more the expression of a dutiful spirit than the utterances of a man 'possessed' are the expressions of his own thought". "Hopeless slavery to the past," Professor Taylor continues, "does not cease to be slavery because the past is to some extent of my own making." For what, after all, do these views imply? That the way in which I act always exhibits conformity to a certain rule. This rule is the rule of my own character, a character which has been built up as the result of the reaction of the initial psychological equipment which constituted my personality at birth to the environments in which it has successively been placed. Admittedly, the rule is not completely known either by me or by anybody else; admittedly, the elements which have gone to its making are exceedingly complex. Nevertheless, it exists, and my actions illustrate it, just as the behaviour of chemicals in compounds and solutions illustrates the rule of their composition. To quote Professor Taylor again, the self-deterministic views which I have been engaged in summaris-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 114-116.

ing imply that "there is a formula which adequately describes my own personal moral character, and that knowledge of this formula would make it possible to calculate the line of action I shall take in a difficult situation, exactly as the astronomer calculates an eclipse or a transit of Venus". The fact that successful calculation of conduct is rarely possible in practice only, on this view, illustrates the complexity of the elements which make up character. It does not mean that character and the conduct which springs from it are not in theory calculable and, if calculable, therefore determined.

**Summary of Implications of Self-Determinism.** I have put this view, the view that we are determined by our own pasts, in the most cogent form in which it is capable of being stated. This is the form which insists that both when we choose and when we act the motivating faculty is non-rational, and this view, I am suggesting, almost inevitably entails some kind of Self-determinism. It is, however, also possible to state the self-determinist view in such a way, that, while admitting that it may be reason which chooses, while conceding that reason can even motivate to action, it still implies that in so choosing and motivating reason is not free. This form of the self-determinist view may be stated as follows: freedom of the will does not, it is clear, mean mere motiveless caprice; there must be some reason why we choose as we do, even if our choices are free. Now if it is in fact reason which chooses, reason must choose with a motive. Let us suppose that there are various alternative motives between which reason deliberates, that it ultimately selects one of them, and that the agent acts in accordance with the choice made. Why does it choose this one? Because it appears to it to be the weightiest motive in the field. Why does it so appear? Because the reason is so constituted that it cannot help but so regard it. Why is the reason so constituted? Because of the past history of the person reasoning and of his initial cast of mind. Once this answer is

given, all the factors at which we have already glanced, inherited constitution, psychological disposition, training, environment, and the rest, may be introduced in order to explain why it is that our reasons work in the way and reach the conclusions they do, and why, because they do work in this way and reach these conclusions, certain motives cannot help but appear to them the weightiest for the determination of action. Thus although the case for Self-determinism can be argued most persuasively on the assumption that non-rational factors govern choice, it need not necessarily reject the view that it is our reason which chooses and determines our actions.

## II. THE CASE FOR FREE WILL

### A. Criticism of Determinist Arguments

I mentioned at the outset that what might be called the short-term arguments in the controversy between free will and determinism are all on the side of determinism, nor are those which I have examined refutable by logic. In so far as a case can be made for free will, it will be found to depend very largely upon certain metaphysical considerations. It will, that is to say, presuppose the acceptance of certain views of the nature of the universe as a whole and of the status and function of human consciousness within the universe. The adequate discussion of these views falls outside the scope of this book.

#### (1) Criticism of the Cosmic Arguments for Determinism.

It is, however, relevant to point out that the cosmic arguments for determinism presuppose, no less than the arguments for free-will, a particular metaphysical view. This is the view that nature works like a vast machine, and that human nature is merely one particular cog in the machine. This view is one which most philosophers reject. The universe, as many have thought, may be ideal; it may, that is to say, be in its essential nature akin to

a mind rather than to a machine, or it may be a colony of souls, or it may be an actively developing spirit, a unity of thought, or a flux of time.<sup>1</sup> If any of these metaphysical views of the nature of the universe is true, or even approximates to the truth, the commonsense conception of the world as consisting of solid objects extended in space separate from but interacting with one other must be false. The universe, again, may be fundamentally dualistic; it may, that is to say, be partly physical and partly spiritual or mental. The physical part is, the dualist would affirm, the order of nature which scientists study, while, of the spiritual or mental part we have experience in our own consciousness. It is admittedly exceedingly difficult to see how the mental or spiritual element can interact with or produce effects upon the physical, but this difficulty, he would insist, gives us no right to reject the dualist hypothesis out of hand. If the dualist hypothesis is correct, then mind or consciousness is outside that natural order of events in which mechanistic science proclaims determinism to reign supreme, and no arguments which purport to establish the mechanistic nature of the physical universe will touch the freedom of the mind.

Let us, however, suppose that we provisionally accept the mechanistic scheme in its entirety and bring everything, including the operations of mind, within its framework. We shall find that we are now committed to an assumption that is at least as difficult to sustain as that of the freedom of the will.

**Determinist's Uncritical Acceptance of the Notion of Causation.** This is the assumption that physical causation means something and that we know what it means. Upon this assumption the mechanistic conception of the universe rests. The postulate of mechanism is that events are continually causing other events to happen; mechanism repudiates the notion of an uncaused event. Yet,

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Part III, for an account of some of these theories.

as the philosopher Hume (1711-1776) showed, we can find no basis in reason for the belief in causation.<sup>1</sup> The notion of causation presupposes the presence of a bond or tie between the events which are deemed to be causally related; that is to say, between the so-called cause and the so-called effect. Yet such a tie or bond is precisely what we are unable to discover. Hume's conclusion is that, so far as reason and experience go, all that we are entitled to assume is regularity of sequence. To say that A causes B, means, in fact, no more than it has been frequently observed that B follows A. Various attempts have been made to answer Hume's criticism of the notion of causation, but it cannot be said that any of them have been very convincing. The most elaborate attempt is that of Kant. Many people would regard Kant's defence of causation against Hume's criticism as successful, but the view of the universe which Kant's refutation implies is certainly not compatible with the mechanist conception which underlies the form of determinism we are considering. Unless and until Hume is answered in a manner compatible with mechanism, we cannot uncritically accept the scientific scheme of the universe with which the postulate of determinism is so intimately bound up, for this scheme, although it works well enough for practical purposes, entails an assumption which has no established philosophical foundation. In this connection it is significant that physics, the most advanced of the sciences, has abandoned the notion of force acting from a distance, the notion, that is to say, that a body A, separated in space from another body B, can exert an influence over B, and has substituted the conception of events happening in the immediately contiguous neighbourhood of B to explain what was formerly thought to be due to the influence of forces emanating from body A. Yet the notion of a force emanating from one body and impinging upon another is ordinarily bound up with what most of us mean by causation.

<sup>1</sup> See *My Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter VIII, for an account of Hume's criticism of causation.

for this reason, some physicists show an increasing disposition to dispense with the notion of determinism in fields in which its efficacy has hitherto been unquestioningly postulated.

(2) and (3) Criticism of the Arguments for Determinism Based upon a Consideration of the Mind-Body Problem and the Conclusions of the Special Sciences

**The Necessary Assumptions of Science.** The arguments for determinism based upon conclusions derived from a consideration of the relations between the mind and the body, also involve certain metaphysical assumptions, though these are less easy to detect than the assumption in regard to the nature of causation which underlies the mechanist view of the universe.

Of these assumptions two are important. There is the assumption, first, that all things may be adequately regarded as the sum total of their constituent parts and as nothing more than this sum total. There is the assumption, secondly, of the universal validity of what, in a previous chapter, I have called the mode of explanation in terms of origins.<sup>1</sup> The first of these assumptions has, by implication, been rejected in Chapter II,<sup>2</sup> where I pointed out various senses in which some wholes may be regarded as being more than the sums of their parts. The second assumption implicitly denies the efficacy of teleological modes of explanation.

Both assumptions are necessary assumptions of scientific method. That this is so may be seen by reflecting on the function of science. The function of science is to classify and predict. In order that it may effectively perform this function, it must take the objects with which it deals to pieces in order to find out what are their component parts. Observing that the pieces into which it has broken up some initially unknown thing which happens to be under investigation are of the same kind as the pieces of some other thing whose behaviour it already knows, science

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-29.    <sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 52-54.

associates the unknown thing with the known thing as members of the same general class, repeats the procedure in relation to a number of other unknown things, and on the basis of the resultant classification draws up a formula governing the behaviour of all members of the class, both those members of it which have been examined and those which have not. The unknown thing under investigation is then brought under the formula, with the result that it is possible to calculate and predict its behaviour. But if we are to regard this procedure as valid, we must, it is obvious, assume that a thing is analysable without remainder into its pieces and so is capable of classification in terms of them.

Secondly, if it is to perform the function of prediction, science must also assume that everything has its complete cause in the state of affairs from which it took its rise.

Now science cannot help but proceed in this way; it cannot, that is to say, help assuming that a thing is only the sum of its parts or pieces and that it is completely determined by its constituents and origins. If *any* compound could result from a particular combination of elements, if the same compound did not *always* in fact result from that combination, if a totally or even partially different effect were to follow the application of what appeared to be the same cause, then science as an established body of knowledge would be impossible. Thus the experiments of science are conducted on the assumption that the universe, or at any rate that aspect of the universe which science studies, is like a gigantic piece of machinery, every part of which is just a collection of smaller parts, and every event in which is both the cause of its necessary and predictable result, and is itself the necessary and predictable result of its cause.

**The Extension of Scientific Method to the Treatment of Human Beings.** Nor can science depart from this standpoint when it seeks to give an account of a human being. It cannot, merely because it is concerning itself

with living things, allow the possibility that some arbitrary non-mechanical principle of life may at any moment intrude itself to upset the causal chain of stimulus and response which mechanist biology seeks to establish. Thus it is no accident that field and laboratory workers in biology are strongly mechanist in sympathy and outlook.

As with biology, so with psychology. In so far as science is successful in bringing human beings within its scope, its success depends upon its ability to treat them as highly complex mechanisms whose workings are subject to the same laws as those which are observed to hold in the rest of the world, a world which it is the purpose of science to describe. Of this world human beings are themselves a part, and the laws which science reveals as governing the events which occur in it must, if the scientific standpoint is to be maintained, be exemplified in the lives and histories of the men and women who are items of its contents. If we cannot as yet show this exemplification in detail, that, science insists, is only because of the lack of adequate knowledge. Men, in other words, must be studied as mechanisms responding to stimuli, and the mind, in so far as its separate existence is conceded, must through the speech and actions which are commonly said to spring from it, be studied as objectively as the growth of a plant or the movements of a planet. Inevitably, then, Behaviourism is the appropriate psychology for the scientist. "The behaviourist," says Professor Watson, "puts the human organism in front of him and says, What can it do? When does it start to do these things? If it doesn't do these things by reason of its original nature, what can it be taught to do?"

Thus the human being is treated as a laboratory specimen who is under observation. How, the behaviourist asks, will a particular specimen behave when confronted with a certain situation? and, conversely, when a specimen behaves in a certain way, what is the object or situation which causes it so to behave? These are strictly scientific



questions. Unquestioningly, the view which suggests them postulates the universal applicability of the law of cause and effect. It assumes that an account of behaviour in terms of that law is adequate and ultimate, and it refuses to admit the existence of any intrusive immaterial element such as consciousness or mind. If such exists, then, say the advocates of this view, it plays no part in determining what occurs.

**The Analysis of Man.** Let me cite an example of such laboratory treatment. In his book *The Proper Study of Mankind* Mr. B. A. Howard quotes the following significant prescription:—

Enough water to fill a ten-gallon barrel;  
 enough fat for seven bars of soap;  
 carbon for 9,000 lead pencils;  
 phosphorus for 2,200 match-heads;  
 iron for one medium-sized nail;  
 lime enough to whitewash a chicken coop; and  
 small quantities of magnesium and sulphur.

Take these ingredients, combine them in the right proportions in the right way and the result, apparently, is a man. This, at least is *one* of the things that a man is. There is, in other words, a scientific formula for the production of men as there is for the production of any other commodity. And, if it be objected that the formula applies only to the body, and that the mind has been left out of the recipe, we have only, as we have seen above, to go to the biologists and geneticists for information as to genus, species, race, initial inheritance, and distribution of chromosomes and genes, and to the psychologists for a statement of inherited disposition, temperament, mental structure and unconscious complexes, and the mind and character can be brought within the bounds of the formula. Now just as, if you know the formula for the ingredients of a chemical compound, you know how the compound will behave in such and such conditions, so, from the stand-

point of science, if you know the formula for the ingredients of a man's bodily and mental constitution, you can tell how a human being will behave in such and such circumstances; for, directly you take it to pieces and examine the parts then, as we have seen, each part appears to be completely determined by the others. The assumptions involved in this treatment are those which have already been pointed out. It is assumed that a man is the sum total of the pieces into which he can be analysed and that he is the product of the antecedents from which he can be shown to have derived.

So treated, a man inevitably appears to be determined. His constitution is determined by its constituent parts just because, from *this point of view*, it is the sum of its constituent parts, and his present is conditioned by his past antecedents just because, when *he is so regarded*, it is the outcome of his antecedents.

**How the Scientist Brings Himself Within the Determinist Scheme.** Now these, it must again be insisted, are the only lines along which science can proceed, and in so far as science aspires to give an account of a human being, it is within the framework of these assumptions that the account must fall. To deny the applicability of the method or the adequacy of its results, is to deny the competence of science in certain spheres. It is to say in effect—'when it comes to a question of mind and soul, the scientific method is no longer fruitful; at any rate its fruitfulness is limited'. And when the scientist proceeds, if ever he does, to consider himself introspectively, examines his own consciousness and asks himself whence, in spite of all his intellectual arguments, this insistent sensation of freedom which he undoubtedly experiences derives, he will, it must be presumed, have little difficulty in bringing himself by analogy into the determinist scheme which he has already framed to fit his fellows. He has, we must suppose, already taken the minds of his fellows to pieces and analysed their consciousness into

series of carefully linked psychological events. These he has observed and correlated, as he might observe and correlate facts about crystals or about plants, and having framed certain formulae on the basis of his observations, he naturally regards those whom he has been observing as specimen examples which obey the formulae. He then, we must further suppose, remembers that he too is, from the point of view of others, a specimen example. Therefore, since he cannot help but admit he is in no way exceptional, his own acts of will must, he will argue, be completely caused psychological events falling within the framework of the formulae which he applies to his fellows. 'Therefore,' he will conclude, 'the sensations of voluntariness which I undoubtedly experience must be illusory.'

**Doubts of Efficacy of Scientific Method as applied to Analysis of Human Beings.** In criticism of this mode of treatment, the advocate of free will will point to the unproved assumption which throughout informs it. 'It is,' he would say, 'a begging of the question from the start, to assume that the voluntary and purposive acts of human beings are events in the scientific sense of the word at all. They are, it is true, events in so far as they are caused and determined, but *only in so far as they are caused and determined*, and whether they are wholly caused or determined or not, is precisely the question at issue. Nevertheless, I find it easy to see why the scientist must take the line he does, and proceed, as if all events were determined by the factors which caused them, whether they are in fact so or not. For science, as I understand it, seeks to bring the phenomena which it studies under the aegis of law. In order that it may effect this purpose it must (a) classify the phenomena with other phenomena of the same type, and (b) represent them as effects of their conditioning causes. Classification of phenomena enables the scientist to predict the behaviour of the unknown X in the light of his knowledge of that of the known Y. Ability to represent phenomena as effects enables him

to predict the occurrence of A, given the known occurrence of A'. In sum, then, I conclude that a scientific explanation can only give an account of a thing in terms of the conditions which preceded and caused it; and I see, therefore, that by its very nature a scientific account must be a determinist account. In so far, however, as a phenomenon is not completely determined by the conditions which preceded it, science is disabled from explaining it, or from accounting for its occurrence. Now I do not deny that those phenomena which are human acts of volition are influenced by pre-disposing factors, those, namely, upon which the sciences of biology, psychology, anthropology and the rest lay stress. The question which concerns me is whether they are *completely* determined by these factors. Now this question is one which your decision to adopt a scientific mode of approach begs from the outset. Put the question as you put it, and you are bound to give to it a determinist answer, for the conditions under which you put it dictate the terms of your answer. But, whether the question can be so put, depends very largely upon whether the phenomenon under consideration can be adequately regarded as the sum of its parts. For my part, I contend that if the phenomenon in question is an act of human will, it cannot be so regarded.' The principle which underlies the denial with which the foregoing criticism of determinism as applied to human beings concludes is that some wholes are, as I suggested in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> more than the sum of their parts.

**Departmentalized Account of Human Nature.** Now, it is not, I think, difficult to show that a human being is a whole of this kind. Suppose that we try to take a human being to pieces and see what results we obtain. The pieces will, presumably, be those which the separate sciences take for their special provinces, each science making it its business to give an account of a different piece. We will suppose that these various accounts are drawn up and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 52-54.

collated. We will imagine ourselves to begin with the physiological account in terms of tubes and pipes, nerves and bones and blood vessels. These, presumably, can be analysed into their chemical compounds, and there will be, therefore, a chemical account in terms of molecules and elements. These, again, can be analysed in terms of their atomic constituents, and to the chemist's, therefore, we must add the physicist's account in terms of protons and electrons. Beginning at the other end of the scale, we shall have to include the psychologist's account in terms of mental events, images, sensations and so forth, with special departmental accounts such as the behaviourist's in terms of language habits and conditioned reflexes, and the psycho-analyst's in terms of unconscious desire and promptings of the libido. From other points of view there is the economic man and there is the median man of the statistician; there is man from the standpoint of the biologist and man as he appears to the anthropologist. There is also the account of particular individual men to be found in the works of the great novelists. Each of these accounts could in theory be made accurate and complete—complete, that is to say, so far as it goes; yet each would be couched in different terms. To say that no one of these accounts conveys the whole truth about a man, but describes only some particular aspect of him which has been selected for special attention, would be to state a commonplace.

**That a Man's Personality Eludes Scientific Description.** But more than this is implied by the statement that a man is more than the sum of his aspects or parts and that an adequate account of him cannot, therefore, be given in terms of scientific descriptions of his parts. It is implied that, if all the different accounts, the physiological, the chemical, the physical, the psychological, the behaviouristic, the psycho-analytic, the economic, the statistical, the biological, the anthropological and the novelist's, were collated, supplemented with other accurate and complete

but partial accounts and worked up into a comprehensive survey, they would still fail to constitute *the* truth about a man. And they would fail to do this, not because some particular piece of information had been left out, or some particular point of view forgotten—for, it would be urged, no matter how complete the collection of scientific accounts might be, the truth would still elude them—but because they would remain only a set of separate accounts of different parts or aspects, and a man is more than the different parts or aspects which are ingredients of him. True knowledge of a man is not, in other words, the sum-total of the complete and accurate accounts of all his different aspects, even if those accounts could be made exhaustive. True knowledge is, or at least includes, knowledge of the man as a whole. To know a man as a whole, is to know him as a personality, for a personality is the whole which, while it integrates all the parts and so includes them within itself, is, nevertheless, something over and above their sum. Now to know a man as a personality, is to know him in a manner of which science takes no cognizance. It is to know him as an acquaintance, and it is, for deeper knowledge, to love him as a friend.

The conclusion is that in the degree to which a man may be considered to be more than the sum of his parts or aspects, science is disabled from giving a full and complete account of him. If, then, we are agreed that he may rightly be so considered, we shall refuse to treat the scientific account of him, which takes him to pieces and then represents him as the resultant sum of the pieces, as exhaustive. There is always, we shall insist, some factor in a human being which escapes from the meshes of the scientific net, and this is precisely the factor in respect of which he is more than the sum of the parts or aspects which the sciences study. It is also in virtue of this factor that he is free.

**Acts of Will as Acts of Creation.** If this conclusion is true of a man's personality, it will be true also of at

least some of the acts in which his personality expresses itself; for example, of his acts of will. Acts of will undoubtedly occur, and because they do occur, they can be treated as events in exactly the same way as any other events which the sciences study, the particular science which undertakes their investigation being psychology. But they may be, and if the foregoing argument is correct, they always are, more than events, and, in so far as they are more, the scientific analysis will fail to apply to them; at least it will fail to apply completely. *Prima facie* every act of free choice certainly appears to embody a new creation, and it is certainly not a foregone conclusion that the appearance is a delusion. It may, on the contrary, be due to precisely that characteristic of acts of will which I am seeking to emphasize, the characteristic, namely, in virtue of which every such act, though it is an event and to this extent is scientifically determined like other events, is also more than an event. It may also be the case that it is in virtue of this "more" that the act wears the appearance of being free and provides us with the experience of freely willing.

**Bergson's Treatment of Freedom.** Although I have put the foregoing argument into my own words, it follows fairly closely the lines along which many philosophers have sought to rebut the arguments against determinism. The philosopher Bergson, for example, sponsor of the theory of creative evolution, has more forcibly than any other writer emphasized the creative character of acts of will. It is this character which, he insists, will slip through our fingers, if we consider acts of will in isolation from their context, or try, as science tries, to analyse them into their component parts. It is impossible to do justice to Bergson's treatment of freedom without giving some account of his metaphysical views, and for this I would refer the reader to my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XIX. Briefly, Bergson regards determinism as the sort of view which the intellect must inevitably take with regard to the nature of reality,

because of the intellect's incorrigible habit of cutting up the reality with which it deals into little bits. When the reality which is an individual personality is divided into bits, each part of it appears to be causally dependent upon all the other parts, each event in it to be the necessary result of every other event, each phase of the character which the personality assumes to be the product of all the past phases, and each action in which it expresses itself to be determined by all the motives and desires which are playing upon it at the moment of action.

But this view, Bergson insists, is only true of the part, the event, the phase, and the action when they are considered in isolation. Now an action considered in isolation is an abstraction and a false abstraction from the action which in real life occurred. The abstracting has been done by the intellect which insists on regarding our personality as being made up of states of consciousness which persist unchanged until they are replaced by other states, and of actions in which the separate states of consciousness express themselves. Having made this abstraction, the intellect then proceeds to reason about the actions so abstracted, as if they were isolated and self-contained events springing from and entirely conditioned by the states of which they are the expressions.

But, Bergson insists, the life of the individual is not to be regarded as a succession of changing states; the life of the individual is a continuous and indivisible flow, and it is precisely when it is taken as such that it is seen to be free and undetermined. Divide the individual's life into parts, consider the individual's actions separately, and you will find that each part and each action is determined by its predecessors. But what is true of the parts is not true of the personality as a whole. It is the nature of life to be creative, and the individual taken as a whole is necessarily creative by virtue of the fact that he is alive. But if his life is creative, and creative in each moment of it, it is clear that it is never completely determined by what went before. If it were so determined, it would only



be an expression of the old, and not a creation of the new.

Free will, then, Bergson holds, is creative action; that is to say, action as it really is, while determinism is a belief imposed upon us by our intellectual view of reality, which reasons so convincingly, not about our lives as a whole, but about that false abstraction from our lives which is a separate state of consciousness and about its expression in action.

But do we, in spite of the intellect's convincing reason, really believe in determinism? Our reason may, indeed, be convinced, but our instinctive belief, persisting in the teeth of reason, is that we are free. Why does instinctive belief persist in contradicting reason? Because, says Bergson, instinctive belief is of the character of intuition, whose function it is to comprehend life as a whole. Seen as a whole, life is a creative activity, and its nature, therefore, is to be free to create the future.

## B. The Minimum Conditions for Free Will

**Involuntary, Voluntary and Willed Actions.** The positive case for free will is, as I have already suggested, difficult to divorce from metaphysical considerations. Something, however, may be said on the subject of the minimum conditions which are necessary, if the freedom of the will is to be at least possible. These conditions have been set forth by Professor A. E. Taylor, whose treatment I have partly followed in the ensuing exposition.

It will be convenient to begin by making a distinction between willed actions, voluntary actions and involuntary actions. An involuntary action is one which is performed by a body without any necessary intervention on the part of the mind; for example, withdrawing the hand from an unexpectedly hot surface, falling over a precipice, or contracting the pupils of the eyes. For these, it is obvious, no freedom is, or can be, claimed. Voluntary actions I shall define, for the purpose of the present discussion, as

those which proceed from the promptings of a particular impulse which they express; for example, breaking the furniture in a rage, singing in the bath, boasting when drunk, or taking to one's heels when pursued by an angry bull. Now there may be some sense in which these actions are free; some sense, that is to say, in which the agent who performed them need not have done so. If, however, there is such a sense, it is not here proposed to try to establish it. My present concern is only with those actions which would normally be regarded as proceeding from deliberate choices. These I propose to call "willed actions". A willed action is one that I perform when, after balancing two alternatives one against the other, I deliberately opt for one of them because it seems to me, as the result of a dispassionate survey of all the evidence which can be adduced in favour of both, to be the better of the two. When, for example, in a game of chess after deliberating whether to move a bishop or a knight I decide to move the knight, my action is a willed action in the sense defined. Now although the distinction between voluntary and willed actions may be difficult to establish in theory, it is, I think, sufficiently clear in practice. For example, in referring to a particular situation which we expect to occur, we may determine in advance to follow a deliberately planned course of action, or we may determine to trust to the impulse of the moment; to prepare a speech with a sheaf of notes, or to speak as the spirit moves; to follow a route previously marked out with the aid of a map, or to follow our fancy and be guided by the weather.

**The Significance of Character Formation for Free Will.** A fruitful line of approach to the problem of freedom is afforded by a consideration of the difference between a formed and an immature character. Aristotle suggested that the distinctive feature of what is popularly called a "formed character" is the ability of its possessor to escape from domination by impulse, and to act upon a deliberately planned rule of conduct. The more formed our character is,

in other words, the more frequently do we perform what I have defined as willed as compared with voluntary actions. It is difficult not to recognize the force of Aristotle's view. Actions which spring from one or other of the particular impulses belong precisely to that class of action to which the arguments based upon the conclusions of the sciences—anthropology, biology, psychology and the rest—most forcibly apply. For to act from impulse—if, indeed, we ever do act *purely* from impulse, and I am for the purpose of argument imagining an extreme case, which may be a hypothetical case, in which we do so act—is to express as it were a particular “part” or “bit” of oneself. Now it is precisely in so far as a human being can be regarded as made up of parts—precisely in so far as we are able to see him as a collection of bits which can be separated, so that we can see what he is made up of—that, I have suggested, his actions wear a determined appearance. It is only in so far as he acts as a whole—as a whole, that is to say, which is more than the sum of its parts—that he may be able to escape *complete* determination by the thousand and one influences of heredity, constitution, training and so forth, that play upon him. What is popularly known as the formation of character, may, then, from the point of view of the present discussion, be regarded as the building up of a personality which, in so far as it is entitled to be regarded as a whole, both integrates and transcends the parts which have gone to its making.

**Freedom a Negative Conception.** The fact that it is only for acts which may properly be regarded as expressions of the whole personality that the claim to a measure of freedom can in any event plausibly be made, suggests a new and important point. Freedom of the will is in essence a negative conception. It is freedom *from* domination by particular influences, those, namely, which the various sciences investigate and emphasize. These influences may be thought of as hampering the operations of our reason and blurring the clearness of our vision; and, since

I am trying to make out the case for freedom, in any event a difficult case, in the clearest and most convincing form in which I can find it, I shall add that the case with which I am concerned is the case in which the operations of our reasons are hampered, the clearness of our vision blurred, when we are pursuing what Socrates called the Good.

**That Man has a Natural Disposition to Pursue and Revere the Good.** Socrates, it will be remembered,<sup>1</sup> held that, if a man perceived the Good, he must pursue it, and that all wrong-doing, therefore, was a form of misperception, arising from the fact that we take that to be good which is not. That this is so in regard to our general judgments of good may well be the case; for, other things being equal, we have, as I have already tried to point out,<sup>2</sup> a natural tendency to value and pursue goodness as opposed to evil. To adduce again a few of the more obvious examples of this generalization:—for telling the truth no justification is required, but we always lie in order to gain a particular end by lying. We lie, in fact, for a reason, but we tell the truth, when we do tell it, for no reason at all; other things being equal, to tell the truth is the natural thing to do. Similarly with honesty; when we deal fairly with others over matters of property and pay our just debts, we do these things, if I may so put it, for their own sake. To quote the philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–1796): “It may always be expected that they [mankind] will have some regard to truth and justice, so far at least as not to swerve from them without temptation.” Thus modes of conduct normally called good are often regarded as ends in themselves. When, however, we steal or falsify accounts, we do so in order that we may achieve some end beyond the activity of falsification, the end, namely, of securing for ourselves money which would not otherwise come to us. All men, again, prefer happiness to unhappiness, think kindness to be better than cruelty, and consider a good-tempered person more admirable

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 46 and 48.   <sup>2</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 212, 213.

than a bad, an unselfish than a selfish. So far, then, as the qualities of character, by reference to which we deem a man virtuous, are concerned, we have a general disposition to revere, we may even, as Socrates held, have a natural tendency to pursue, the Good. What is more, it seems probable that in the matter of this tendency and disposition we cannot help ourselves. It seems probable, that is to say, that, just as we cannot help seeing that a certain conclusion follows by valid reasoning from self-evident premises, so we cannot help preferring what we take to be good to what we take to be evil. To the extent that we could help doing this, we should not, it may be said, be fully human beings. The following quotation from T. H. Huxley admirably expresses this view: "While some there may be who, devoid of sympathy are incapable of duty, . . . their existence [does not] affect the foundations of morality. Such pathological deviations from true morality are merely the halt, the lame and the blind of the world of consciousness; and the anatomist of the mind leaves them aside as the anatomist of the body would ignore abnormal specimens."

**That we are Free to Go Wrong in Particular Cases.** When, however, we come to particular cases, we find no such obvious determination. Although I must "needs love the highest when I see it," I am free to turn my eyes away from the highest and to give my energies to the pursuit of ease, power or wealth here and now. Though I am bound to desire what I take to be good, I am not bound to identify my good with moral virtue; I may see it in sensual indulgence or power over my fellows. Although I cannot help but subscribe to the general proposition that honesty is to be honoured above dishonesty, I may find it all too easy on a particular occasion to be dishonest; nor does my general preference for good temper over bad prevent me from being disagreeable when I get up in the morning. Thus we certainly *seem* to be free on particular occasions either to do what on general principles

we believe to be right, or what we know to be wrong. And, admittedly, on particular occasions we often do do what we know to be wrong. The Latin tag already quoted:

“ . . . Video meliora proboque  
Deteriora sequor . . . . ”

(I see the better course and approve it, but I follow the worse), enshrines a mournful and only too familiar truth. Yet a perfect being would, presumably, always follow the better course; so, presumably, would we, if we were always to follow our natural inclination to pursue the Good. Why, then, on some particular occasion, do we not pursue it? *Prima facie* for one or other of two reasons. The first is that our vision of the Good may be clouded by some obscuring factor. Thus, if we are in a towering rage, we do things that in our calmer moments we should, and subsequently do, recognize to be harmful to others and to ourselves; things which, as we say, we subsequently regret. The second reason is that our will to follow the Good may be undermined by some particularly seductive temptation. For example, the general approval of honesty which expresses itself in a resolute refusal to abstain from forging a cheque when one has the chance, may be overborne on a particular occasion by one's need for money with which to dazzle a desired woman.

Now these clouding and undermining elements, of which I have instanced two, are precisely those whose presence in our general make-up is due to the factors of which the sciences take account. It is because of my heredity it may be said, that I am prone to fall into such blinding rages. It is because of my training that I am apt to be lax about money matters; because of my physiological constitution that I am subject to overmastering sexual desire for women who attract me.

Now the question to which our discussion of freedom must address itself is whether it is ever possible for me to win free from the influence of these factors, whether the

are inherited, environmental or physiological, which cloud my judgment or undermine my will, with the result that I do not recognize what it is right for me to do or, having recognized what is right, nevertheless do something different. If freedom is a fact—and I am, it will be remembered, concerned only to indicate the minimum conditions which must be satisfied, if freedom is a fact—it will consist in just this ability to eliminate the influence of the factors which science emphasizes, so that my judgment can give an unhampered verdict upon what is right, and my will then proceed to realize in action that of which my judgment approves. Thus to act freely will, on this view, be to do what one's judgment, uninfluenced by the bias of inherited or environmental factors, tells one that one ought to do. We may thus fine down the issue of our discussion to this single question, are we ever in this sense free?

**St. Thomas Aquinas on Freedom.** In discussing freedom the philosopher Leibniz (1646–1716), a professed believer in free will who, nevertheless, frequently gives unwitting hostages to determinism, invokes the simile of a swinging pendulum. The pendulum, he points out, never really comes to rest; it is always swinging in one direction or the other. Similarly, the estimates and judgments of the human mind are never completely unbiased; they are always inclined in one direction or another, and they are inclined from the start. I mention the simile because, if it is apposite, if, that is to say, human nature is in fact like a swinging pendulum, which is *never* at rest, then the belief in free will must be surrendered. For the minimum condition of free will is that there should be a period of deliberation during which we compare the various alternative courses of action which are before us, and weigh and estimate their respective merits, while not, as yet, inclining to any one. A phrase of St. Thomas Aquinas's (1227–1274) clearly brings out the nature of this unbiased period of deliberation. While I am weighing the various alternatives, comparing their respective merits and wonder-

ing which is the better, I am, he says, "indetermined to either alternative". Professor Taylor proceeds to develop St. Thomas's view as follows: "When the comparison is over and the estimate 'A is better than B' passed, this indetermination ceases; my will is *now* determined, or to speak in the more accurate terminology of our own psychology, I am determined to take A and leave B, and what I am determined by is this judgment of relative worth. In other words, what is demanded as a minimum condition of accountability is that I shall be able to make an *impartial* estimate, correct or otherwise, of the two relative values. It is not the case that whenever I attempt such a comparison some secret influence, the violence of a present desire, the persistence of an old opinionative prejudice, the effects of my past habits, hereditary non-rational bias, or what you please, tilts the scales of the balance. Of course, we all know that all these sources of bias do exist and may interfere with our estimates, but precisely because we are aware of the fact, a prudent man sets himself to discover these sources of prejudice and to eliminate them. Admit simply that the elimination can sometimes be achieved, that sometimes at least we act as we do because we have made an impartial comparative judgment about the relative value of two goods of which we cannot have both, and in principle you have admitted all that clearheaded libertarians mean by the 'freedom of the will'."

The passage I have quoted emphasizes the following points:—

(1) that we are usually biased in our choice of actions by the factors upon which the various sciences lay stress;

(2) that, nevertheless, we can on occasion eliminate this bias and impartially weigh the merits of the various alternatives that present themselves;

(3) that, when we do so, that which induces us to choose alternative A rather than alternative B is an impartial estimate of their respective merits;

(4) that in making this estimate the will is free. It is of course determined in one sense, determined by what it



perceives to be the superior goodness of A as compared with B. But determination by the Good or, to elaborate the phrase, freedom to escape from inherited or constitutional bias and to be determined *solely* by the Good is all that the advocate of free will can fairly claim.

(5) We might add—the point is one which I have already made above in another connection—that the formation of what is commonly known as “character” consists precisely in the ability to eliminate the bias imparted to our wills by factors outside our control, whether inherited, environmental or constitutional, and to choose precisely what seems to us, as the result of an impartial consideration of all the available data, to be the best or most reasonable course.

**The Nature of the Faculty Involved in Choice.** It will be observed that throughout the foregoing the stress has been laid upon *reasonable* choice. This stress is deliberate. I have already emphasized the point that, if the faculty with which we choose is impulse or desire, if choice is primarily an expression of the appetitive, or emotional parts of our nature, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to emancipate it from determination by the various factors of heredity, environment, constitution, disposition and the rest; for it is the non-rational aspects of our nature which are pre-eminently the products of these factors. The question discussed above, whether reason can ever motivate to action, is, therefore, highly relevant to our consideration of the freewill-determinist issue. I have already glanced at the considerations which have been adduced by those who deny that reason ever can. What is there to be said on the other side?

Nothing in the nature of proof is available. In the last resort we can only consult our own consciousnesses and ask ourselves whether what is commonly called thought ever does prompt our actions, and, where the issue raised involves an appeal to introspection, it may be doubted whether the philosopher has anything of special value to

contribute. Nevertheless, most of those who have written upon this topic have felt themselves able to announce with some degree of unanimity that their reasons can and do motivate them to action. There are two general considerations which may be relevantly mentioned.

(1) **THAT THERE IS NO CLEAR-CUT DIVISION OF FACULTIES.** First, no sharp division of faculties, between reason and emotion or between reason and passion, is feasible. As I pointed out when discussing Plato's three-fold division of the soul<sup>1</sup>, most psychologists are agreed that, to speak of the human psyche as if it were a bundle of faculties, as if, for example, it were or contained reason plus will plus emotion, is to falsify the facts of consciousness. We can only do justice to these facts by conceiving of the psyche as at any given moment functioning in a predominantly reasonable or a predominantly emotional way. I suggest elsewhere<sup>2</sup> that the activity of consciousness is always in essence cognitive, that an act of consciousness is, that is to say, always a knowing of something other than itself upon which the activity of consciousness is directed. Whether a particular state of consciousness is such as we call reasonable, or whether we describe it rather as emotional or appetitive depends upon the degree to which the cognitive activity of knowing is emotionally or desirefully coloured. The questions raised by this assertion belong to the theory of knowledge and cannot be pursued here. What for our present purpose is important is the recognition that, whatever the nature of the psychological activity in which at any given moment we happen to be engaged, it is not a special faculty, for example, reason or imagination or emotion or desire, which is being called into play, but the *whole* psyche which at that moment is expressed in the activity.

As I pointed out when discussing Plato's theory of the soul<sup>3</sup>, it is not the case that the soul is divided into three

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 55-57.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 410-412.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 56, 57.

parts in the strict sense of the word "parts". What is the case is that the whole soul expresses itself at any given moment in what is a predominantly conative, spirited or rational activity. Plato, it will be remembered, puts this point by attributing to each part of the soul its own characteristic appetition. Reason, therefore, has its appetitive side; it is not merely the static or mechanical instrument of a dynamic desire. Reason no less than desire is dynamic; it, too, "makes after" ends, but its ends are different ends from those of desire. They are such as appear desirable specifically and distinctively to reason. When, then, we say that reason can determine choice and motivate to action, we are postulating not a bloodless faculty of intellectual apprehension, but a mode of thinking, or, as I should prefer to say, of experiencing, that can not only impartially judge the rightness and reasonableness of a particular line of action or the desirableness of a particular end, but incline the agent to act upon the line decided, and to pursue the end which is judged reasonable.

(2) THAT FREEDOM IS PRE-EMINENTLY EVINCED IN THE SPHERE OF THE INTELLECT. In the second place, it is worth pointing out that those cases in which the exercise of our freedom appears to us to be most unmistakable belong pre-eminently to the intellectual sphere. The chess-player's decision to move his knight rather than his bishop, the traveller's decision when in doubt about the way to take the left fork rather than the right, the investor's decision that A rather than B is likely to prove the safer security, the candidate's that X in an examination paper is a question which he will be likely to answer more effectively than Y, certainly *seem* to the person deciding to be free; or, to translate in terms of the formula I have used, it certainly seems in cases of this kind that the will is, after a period of deliberation, "determined" only by the agent's "judgment of the relative worths" of the two alternatives between which he is deliberating. It is, of course, the case that these predominantly intellectual decisions can, in

common with others, be represented by the determinist not as the expressions of a freely acting will, but as the determined resultants of the interaction of a number of factors over which the will has no control; it can even be shown that the will is itself one of these factors. But *prima facie* it is much harder to apply the explanation of choice of action in terms of origins to a man's decision to move his knight rather than his bishop than it is to his preference for a blonde over a brunette; much harder to show that his decision to take the left fork is determined by his physiological constitution, than it is to ascribe to physiological factors his preference for treacle toffee over marzipan. If, then, the fact of freedom is to be demonstrated in any sphere, the demonstration will be easiest in relation to those choices which would be normally said to be predominantly rational.

**Free Will in Relation to Moral Choice.** Most writers on ethics have held that moral choices are of this character. The position, then, which I have been outlining, namely, that the will is on occasion determined by nothing but an impartial judgment of the rightness or reasonableness of a particular line of action, is one which most moral philosophers have been disposed to adopt. On what grounds have they supported it? Or, to put again the question formulated above, how have they sought to show that what is called thought can motivate our actions? No very convincing argument has ever been brought forward in favour of this position. The issue, as I have already pointed out, is one in regard to which proof is not possible. What the philosophers have done is what, on a previous page, I suggested that the reader should do, they have looked into their own consciousnesses and reported that, as Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) puts it, "the perception or judgment that an act is *per se* the right and reasonable act to be done is an adequate *motive* to perform it".

Having looked into my own consciousness, I feel that I can subscribe to Sidgwick's affirmation; I believe, that is

to say, that it is, on occasion, my perception of the rightness or reasonableness of a certain course of action which determines me to move a piece at chess, to choose one fork of a road rather than another, or to select an investment. The philosophers, on the whole, have agreed with Sidgwick. "An affection or inclination to rectitude cannot," says the eighteenth-century moralist, Price (1723-1791), "be separated from the view of it"; while T. H. Green, whose general attitude to the question under discussion is, as I have already hinted,<sup>1</sup> far from clear, denies that "those desired objects which are of most concern in the moral life of the civilized and educated man are directly dependent on animal susceptibilities at all". If Green is right in thinking that it is not our animal susceptibilities that cause us to do our duty, or to hunger and thirst after righteousness, then, presumably, it is the rational element in our natures. The philosophers Reid (1710-1796) and Kant similarly agreed that men do habitually prefer to do what is right and reasonable, unless they have an inducement to do otherwise; that man has, in fact, just because he is a rational animal, a standing bias, other things being equal, to do what he conceives to be the right and reasonable thing, and that he has this bias independently of all personal likes and dislikes.

**Summary of Foregoing.** I have fined down the issue of this discussion to a question which, in the last resort, the reader must answer for himself. In considering what his answer should be, I would suggest that he bear in mind the two positions which, in the preceding discussion, I have tried to establish.

(1) It is sometimes possible to eliminate the influence of past factors which have made us what we are. There are, in other words, occasions on which the judgment with which I judge and the will with which I will are not wholly to be explained as the necessary consequences of past acts and influences.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 241 above.

(2) Secondly, all writers are agreed that by freedom of the will we do not mean mere motiveless caprice. If, then, it is not my past which always determines my judgment, the question must be asked, "What it is that does"? The answer which has been suggested is that what determines my judgment in certain cases is the discerned goodness of a particular end or the perceived reasonableness of a particular course of action; something, in other words, is seen to be good and reasonable in and for itself. The validity of this answer depends upon the admissions (a) that men do possess a natural bias to do the right and to pursue the Good; (b) that it is with this predominantly reasonable part of themselves that they seek to do the right and pursue the Good; (c) that reason is not a separate and is never a purely cognitive faculty; when, therefore, we do what we judge to be the right thing, and pursue what we judge to be the Good, it is the reasoning part of our natures that prompts our endeavours; reason, in other words, has itself an appetitive side; (d) that, although reason is inclined to do the right and to pursue the Good, it is never necessitated. It may be true that we are necessitated by the Good in general; in the sense that we cannot help preferring what we take to be better to what we take to be worse, but we are free not to pursue some particular good. We may not be able to withhold our assent from the conclusions of a chain of argument based upon self-evident assumptions, but we are certainly not forced to think correctly on a particular occasion.

If these admissions be granted, then it will, I think, be found difficult to answer the questions, "Can reason ever motivate action, and, when it does so motivate, can it be regarded as free?", in any sense other than the affirmative.

### C. Logical Arguments against Determinism

(1) **THAT IF DETERMINISM IS TRUE, THE MIND CANNOT FREELY EMBRACE TRUTH.** The case for free will may be strengthened by certain arguments of a logical order. The strongest of these may be stated very shortly. If the conclusions of the determinist who bases his reasoning upon the results of the sciences are correct, our volitions are always determined by past events. When they relate to moral questions, our volitions take the form of judgments to the effect that so and so is right and good, and obligations which we recognize to do our duty. The arguments rehearsed in the earlier part of this chapter endeavour to show that the judgment 'this is right' or 'this is good' or 'this is my duty' is never, as it appears to be, based upon a dispassionate investigation of the nature of the 'this' in question, an impartial estimate of its moral worth, and an objective comparison of this worth with the worths of alternative objects of choice or courses of action.

But if this argument is valid in regard to the judgment 'this is right', it must also be valid in regard to the judgment 'this is true'. Nobody, therefore, who assents to the truth of the conclusion of a valid chain of reasoning from self-evident premises does so because his mind is convinced by the strength of the reasoning in question and the cogency of the conclusions that follow from it: he does so, because of the influence of past events which, in determining the general character of his mind, have determined also this particular judgment which is made by his mind.

"What determines your likes and dislikes?" asks T. H. Huxley. "Did you make your own constitution? Is it your contrivance that one thing is pleasant and another painful?"—and answers that it is not. But if it is not, it is also not "your contrivance" when one thing seems to you to be true and another false. But if, when I think a particular proposition to be true, I do so not because it is in fact true, but because of my constitution or my training or of some

event in my past history, then the fact that I do think it to be true, even the fact that I believe myself to be in a position to *prove* it to be true, is no reason for thinking it to be so. For to prove it, is to prove it to somebody, and the somebody is no more responsible for being convinced by my proof than am I for believing it to be convincing.

Determinists do not think of applying these considerations to the conclusions of their own reasonings. When, for example, they are advocating determinist views, they make much of the impartial survey of the facts upon which their reasoning is based, stress the rigour of the reasoning by which they reach their conclusions, and draw attention to the open-minded and dispassionate character of their acceptance of the conclusions which necessarily follow from the facts, wounding though these conclusions may be to human pride, derogatory though they are to human dignity. But what right, it may be asked, have they to claim impartiality for *their* survey of the evidence, validity for the processes of *their* reasoning, and dispassionateness for the acceptance of *their* conclusion, if they deny the possibility of impartiality in *my* survey of the comparative worths of alternative courses of action, and the dispassionateness of *my* preference for one of them as being the better? For, if they insist that my judgment of what is right and reasonable in the sphere of conduct is determined for me by my past and not by me through my will, the same will hold good of their judgments of what is true and reasonable in the sphere of thought. That determinism is true and reasonable is one such judgment, but in the degree to which their arguments establish that it is true and reasonable, in that degree does the conclusion invalidate their arguments. For in showing that nobody ever embraces determinism because he is really convinced by the arguments for it, the determinist takes all the convincingness out of determinism.

(2) THAT IF DETERMINISM IS TRUE THE MIND REFLECTS NOT THE FACTS BUT THE CONDITION



OF THE BRAIN. This conclusion applies with even greater force to those forms of determinism which base themselves upon Materialism. For these, as we have seen, maintain that mental events are either disguised bodily events or at least determined by bodily events. The psychology of Behaviourism, for example, asserts that thought consists of bodily movements, more particularly of movements in the larynx. Now the movements of the body may be necessary and determined, but they can no more be true than a quadratic equation can be purple or a musical chord can be covetous. It is, of course, the case that I may feel convinced that my thinking relates to the outside world and correctly informs me of what happens there. But this conviction of mine is only another thought, and, therefore, a set of laryngeal movements, which, as I have pointed out, cannot of their very nature refer to anything outside themselves.

It is also the case, if Behaviourism is correct, that these arguments of mine are themselves no more than movements in my larynx and nervous system which are causally linked to other movements in my hand, as I write, and my face, as I talk. Therefore, they do not refer to Behaviourism at all. The reader's view of them is another set of movements in his larynx, and the belief that this is the correct description both of the arguments and of the reader's view of them is another set. It is impossible on these lines to find any basis from which thought can operate, for there are no common premises, no common presumptions, and no common conclusions of thought. On the basis of a thorough-going Materialism, every so-called thinker is boxed up within the circle of his own experiences. Thus the materialist locks up the mind—if, indeed, he admits a mind at all—in a cell whose walls are the neural and cerebral movements of his own body, which movements he plays no part in initiating. And, since nothing which mind experiences can reach it from outside these walls, so nothing that it thinks can refer to anything outside them. Materialism, then, which purports to be thought about

the universe, turns out to be unable to tell us anything about the universe. It can only tell us about what is happening in the bodies and brains of materialists. What is true of Materialism is true also of the determinism which is based on Materialism.

(3) THAT THE "ILLUSION" OF FREEDOM CANNOT BE EXPLAINED. For those readers who are disposed to be impressed by purely logical arguments, I add one more.

Let us suppose that the doctrine of determinism is true. It will follow that the belief in free will is an illusion. The question which has then to be answered is, how does this illusion arise? How, in a purely determinist world, is the fact of it to be accounted for? For, in a purely determinist world nothing can create anything, since every happening is the result of some preceding happening, and every event is a determined reaction to the environment in which it occurs. Now my belief in free will is an event. There can have been nothing in the causes which determined the event to produce this belief, since, if the determinist is right, there is in fact no free will; and there can be nothing in the environment to which the event is a reaction to generate the belief, since, once again, if the determinist is right, there is in fact no free will. Even then, if the belief in free will is an illusory image owning no counterpart in fact, the difficulty must be faced that there is no original for the image to mirror, no reality for the illusion to reflect. How then, the question persists, does the image, even if it is illusory, arise?

An example may help to illustrate the point. Let us suppose that a machine became conscious. Then we may conceive that it might entertain the illusory belief that it was free, for it would have a model on which to form this belief, an example of the freedom which it claimed for itself, in the apparently free behaviour of human beings. But suppose that there were no human beings; that there were no freely acting creatures anywhere in the universe. Whence could the machine derive the notion of freedom

which it claimed, albeit falsely, for itself? What, if the metaphor can be forgiven, could have put such an idea into the machine's head? It seems impossible to answer this question. Now in a purely determinist world there are no freely acting creatures. There is, then, nothing in such a world whose behaviour could have suggested the notion of freedom to human beings; nothing that could have put the idea of freedom into their heads. Yet, as we have already pointed out, they could not have spontaneously generated the idea for themselves, for in such a world nothing is spontaneously generated. How, then, in a determinist world, can the illusion of freedom arise?

### Books

## DETERMINISM

*Ethical Determinism.*

RASHDALL, H. H. *The Theory of Good and Evil.*

*Books on Materialism.*

×LANGE, F. A. *The History of Materialism.*

COHEN CHAPMAN. *Materialism Restated.*

*Books on the Mind-Body Problem.*

×BROAD, C. D. *The Mind and its Place in Nature, Section A.*

WISDOM, JOHN. *Problems of Mind and Matter, Part I.*

*Representative of Psychological Determinism.*

×ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics, especially Book II.*

Any good modern book on psycho-analysis, for example,

Freud, S. *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis.*

*Representative of Anthropological Determinism.*

WESTERMARCK, F. *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas.*

## LIBERTARIANISM

On the power of reason to motivate action the following may be consulted:—

PRICE, RICHARD. *Review of the Principal Questions of Morals.*

REID, THOMAS. *Outlines of Moral Philosophy.*

CUDWORTH, RALPH. *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality.*

A valuable treatment of the problem of freedom from the libertarian point of view will be found in A. E. Taylor's contribution to *Contemporary British Philosophy*, Vol. II, entitled *The Freedom of Man*. A sketch of the philosophy of personality is contained in J. M. Macmurray's, *Freedom in the Modern*

World. My Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science, Chapter VIII, may also be consulted.

F. H. Bradley's Ethical Studies and T. H. Green's Prolegomena to Ethics contain valuable discussions of freewill and determinism.

L. SUSAN STEBBING'S Philosophy and the Physicists contains a critical discussion of the claims put forward on behalf of freewill by some modern physicists on the basis of recent developments in the theory of the atom.

## Chapter VIII: NATURE OF THE MORAL FACULTY. CRITICISM OF OBJECTIVE INTUITIONISM

### I. NATURE OF THE MORAL FACULTY

**The Intuitionist Dilemma.** The discussion of freedom in the previous chapter was undertaken not only because of the importance for ethical theory of the establishment of at least the *possibility* of moral freedom, but also because of its bearing upon the question of the nature of the moral faculty. The conclusion of the discussion was briefly that, if the moral faculties ( I use the plural, for both will and insight are involved) are feeling or akin to feeling, then the task of vindicating free will is wellnigh impossible; if on the other hand they are reason or akin to reason, then moral freedom may be plausibly maintained. But if they are reason, or are at least reasonable, then they declare themselves unable to judge actions to be right or wrong without taking into account their consequences. Thus the view that some faculty within us pronounces upon moral issues as the faculty of smell makes pronouncements upon odours, judging actions to be right or wrong, characters to be good or bad, independently of the consequences of the actions or of the effects upon others of the characters, seems on examination difficult, if not impossible, to maintain in precisely the form in which I have stated it. We are, then, it appears, committed to taking consequences into account when passing moral judgments. There is here a dilemma in which most forms of Intuitionism are involved: if the moral faculty is feeling or akin to feeling, its operations would seem to be

determined; if it is reason or akin to reason, it would appear to require the admission of considerations which Intuitionism would not regard as relevant. A brief examination of the relevant views of some of the English intuitionists of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries will serve to underline this criticism. It is interesting to see how the views of these writers, who were in intention strictly intuitionist, nevertheless, evince an increasing disposition to recognize the importance of taking consequences into account, and by so doing prepare the way for the criticisms which, in the nineteenth century, the utilitarians were to bring against the whole intuitionist position.

**Views of Shaftesbury.** After Butler, whose views we have already considered, the most important writer of the English intuitionist school is Shaftesbury (1671-1713). His views, published in works entitled *Enquiry Concerning Virtue* and *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Nations and Times* is based upon a principle which he calls the Will of Nature. The Will of Nature is conceived primarily in physical terms; it is the force which underlies the uniformity of nature and maintains its equilibrium. Now human beings are part of nature; therefore the Will of Nature operates also in us. The Will of Nature is a beneficent force—Shaftesbury often writes as if, by the Will of Nature, he meant what others have called the Will of God—so much so, that we have only to act in accordance with it to achieve happiness. Happiness Shaftesbury conceives as a condition which may be achieved internally in complete independence of external circumstances; to obtain it we have only to live in accordance with the Will of Nature. Shaftesbury would have approved of Mrs. Knox's frequently reiterated doctrine in *Fanny's First Play* that "happiness is within ourselves, and doesn't come from outward pleasures. . . . If a girl has not happiness in her she won't be happy anywhere".

This cheerful doctrine had two important consequences. The first was its influence upon what was shortly to be the

dominating school of thought in the new science of economics, namely, the *laissez-faire* school. The manner in which this influence came to be exerted was broadly the following.

**The Will of Nature and Laissez-faire Economics.** The Will of Nature demands the preservation and advancement of the self, and the self is preserved and advanced by pursuing its own self-interest. In pursuing its own self-interest it does not, as one might have thought, come into conflict with selves pursuing their self-interests. Why does it not? Because Shaftesbury shares Butler's conviction of the fundamental identity between those actions which benefit the self and those which benefit others. Shaftesbury attacks what he calls "selfish theories" because he believes that they embody a mistaken view of self-interest; for it is, he thinks, by pursuing the good of society rather than by indulging our private whims, that we shall best advance the good of ourselves. This is because it is the same Will of Nature which animates both the self and other selves. The Will of Nature is beneficial; therefore, action which is in accordance with the Will is also beneficial. To pursue the true interest of the self is to act conformably with what the Will of Nature enjoins; therefore, action which promotes true self-interest is good and will be in harmony with the actions of others pursuing their true self-interests. There is, therefore, no opposition between private and public welfare; to pursue the latter is to achieve the former.

This doctrine has important consequences in the spheres of politics and economics. For if to act in accordance with self-interest is to fulfil the Will of Nature, to act in accordance with self-interest is likely to produce socially beneficial results. Shaftesbury's conception of the Will of Nature thus helped to pave the way for what were subsequently to be known as *laissez-faire* economics. If in the sphere of economics a man acts in accordance with his true self-interest, and if he is right in his conception of what constitutes his self-interest, he will automatically promote the

welfare of the community. The truly enlightened business man, like Shaftesbury's truly enlightened individual, realizes this; he realizes, that is to say, that there is no conflict between his own interests and those of society. When he finds that what appear to be his personal interests and those of society conflict, he may be sure that he is mistaken in thinking that what appear to be his personal interests really are his personal interests; in so far as he fails to realize this mistake, he is not truly enlightened. The economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) puts the point as follows: "The study of a man's own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily, leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to society." The conclusion is that if each man pursues his own true self-interest, the social and more, particularly, the economic effects are likely to be better than they would be, if human beings were prevented from pursuing their own interest by the arbitrary act of external authority; in fact they are likely to be the best possible. Thus the belief in the Will of Nature combined with the belief in the Natural Rights held by Locke<sup>1</sup> and also with the Hedonism of the utilitarians<sup>2</sup> to provide an ethical foundation for the economic theories which were associated with the development of the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of capitalist Individualism.

**The Relation between Reason and Feeling.** In the second place, the belief in the Will of Nature leads to an intuitional theory of morality. Shaftesbury discusses at length whether feeling or reason is the higher faculty, and concludes in favour of feeling. Among our feelings he includes direct intuitions in regard to moral issues. These, he holds, it is our duty to follow, and, since they spring direct from the operations of the Will of Nature within us, to act in accordance with our intuitions is to establish the best possible relations between the self and the world outside the self, in which the Will of Nature also prevails.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 493.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 348, 349.



As in Aristotle's ethics, reason is reduced to the rôle of planning the steps which are necessary to give effect to our intuitions. The view that feeling is the mainspring of morality, and that the function of reason is confined to planning the means and estimating the results of gratifying our desires and giving vent to our feelings, has several times engaged our attention in the preceding pages.<sup>1</sup> It is a view which continually recurs in the history of ethics, cropping up on occasions in the most unexpected places, as witness, for example, the following quotation from that champion of rationalism, T. H. Huxley: "In whatever way we look at the matter, morality is based on feeling not on reason; though reason alone is competent to trace out the effects of our action and therefore dictate conduct."

(The ambiguity of this last statement, "therefore dictate conduct," indicates the difficulty of reaching any satisfactory conclusion in relation to this issue, if we persist in regarding reason and feeling as separate faculties endowed with separate functions. The discussion in the previous chapter,<sup>2</sup> and the conclusion in which it issued, that the division of the human personality into a set of separate faculties is untenable, was designed to guard against precisely this difficulty.) Huxley continues: "Justice is founded on the love of one's neighbour and goodness is a kind of beauty. The moral law like the laws of physical nature rests in the long run upon instinctive intuitions."

Huxley's instinctive intuitions bear a close resemblance to Shaftesbury's Will of Nature; we have only, it seems, to obey them, and all will be well. When, however, he comes to work out his doctrine in detail, Shaftesbury abates something of the full rigour of his Intuitionism. This he does in two respects, both of which point in the direction which the utilitarians were subsequently to take.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 110-116, and Chapter VII, pp. 268-271.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 268-271, also Chapter II, pp. 55-57.

**The Moral Faculty Distinguished by Shaftesbury from the Senses. Its Resemblances to the Reasoning Part of the Soul.** In the first place, though he insists that "feeling" is at once the mainspring and the arbiter of morality, Shaftesbury ascribes to feeling functions whose performance most people would naturally be inclined to attribute to reason. There is, he says, a number of natural impulses in which the Will of Nature expresses itself. But morality is not to be found in the indulgence of any one of them. It is the result rather of a reflective process which, taking its standpoint outside the circle of natural impulses, either approves of or condemns them. The approval and the condemnation which morality brings to bear on the natural impulses are not exclusively rational; on the contrary, they are informed with an emotional quality in virtue of which we can encourage the indulgence of the impulses approved, and discourage the indulgence of the impulses condemned. Although, however, it is pervaded by this emotional quality, obedience to the moral faculty is not, Shaftesbury is careful to insist, to be likened either to the indulgence of the senses or to the gratification of self-interest.

The whole account is strongly reminiscent of Plato's description of the reasoning part of the soul with its characteristic qualities of "appetition", in virtue of which it desires the good, and of "conation", by means of which it reproves the unruly impulses.<sup>1</sup> It also recalls Butler's insistence upon the authoritative aspect of conscience.<sup>2</sup> In permitting us to make these comparisons Shaftesbury has, however, travelled a long way from the conception of an intuitive moral sense derived from and expressing the Will of Nature, of which we are entitled to ask nothing in the way of justification save only that it should function as the Will of Nature dictates.

While Shaftesbury's move in the direction of Utilitarianism is limited to attributing to the moral faculty, officially identified with feeling, functions which are

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 53, 56.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 196, 197.

normally regarded as being appropriate to reason, his predecessor, Cudworth (1617-1688) had pronounced quite unequivocally in favour of reason. With considerable emphasis he insists that our consciousness of the difference between right and wrong depends wholly upon the exercise of our reasoning faculties, and in no degree whatever upon feeling or emotion. It is quite possible that this is true, but unfortunately for Cudworth's Intuitionism, our reasoning faculties refuse to make moral judgments without considering circumstances and consequences. I shall return later to this point and develop its significance.

**Happiness the Reward of Virtue.** There is another path which leads from Shaftesbury's Intuitionism to Utilitarianism. Shaftesbury's main position is quite unequivocally that of an objective intuitionist; he holds, that is to say, that the universe contains elements or factors which we recognize to be good or right, but whose goodness or rightness is in no sense dependent upon our recognition of them. Misconduct is not wrong because we disapprove of it; we disapprove of it because it is wrong. When our feelings tell us that vice is odious they are, Shaftesbury holds, giving us true information about the nature of things. Similarly, virtue, which may be defined on Shaftesbury's view as the habit of acting in accordance with the moral law, that is to say, with the Will of Nature, is good whether its goodness is recognized or not. But, while insisting that virtue is good in itself, Shaftesbury concedes that it is also conducive to happiness and, because conducive to happiness, therefore good as a means to an end beyond itself as well as good in itself.

On this point his view was reinforced by that of his contemporary, Cumberland (1692-1718), who, more forcibly than Shaftesbury, emphasized the happiness-producing property of virtue. Public happiness, said Cumberland—the utilitarians were later to call it the greatest happiness of the greatest number—is a good. Hence any act which

tends to increase public happiness is also a good. Cumberland often writes in such a way as to suggest that for him a good act is simply an act which promotes public happiness; for example, he says "we derive the laws of nature from the results of human conduct, regarding that to be commanded of God, which conduces to the happiness of man". This is very close to the doctrine of the utilitarians, who held that the rightness of an act was to be measured by the degree to which its consequences were or were not conducive to happiness. Of all the intuitionists, indeed, Cumberland came nearest to building a bridge between the view which holds that a right act is one of which the moral sense approves because it is right, and the view that insists that it is one which promotes the best consequences.

**Inconsistencies of the English Intuitionists.** The foregoing survey of some of the views of the English intuitionists will, it is hoped, have served the purpose of revealing the difficulties which the general theory of Intuitionism, to which in various ways they all subscribe, has to meet. Of some of these difficulties they were themselves conscious, and it was this consciousness which led them to introduce into the doctrine of Intuitionism modifications which were inconsistent with the general theory.

Examples of such modifications are Shaftesbury's attribution to the moral sense of reflective and selective functions which would normally be said to be exercised by reason, and his admission that virtue is not only a good in itself, but a means to a further good, namely, happiness. Both these modifications take us some way along the road which leads from Intuitionism to Utilitarianism. Before, however, I proceed to a statement of the utilitarian theories of morals in which these modifications of intuitionist doctrine receive their full logical development, it will be convenient to complete the statement of what may be called the case against Intuitionism. The criticisms which follow do not appear in precisely the form in which they are given in the works of any ethical writer. They are all,

nevertheless, such as the utilitarians might have brought, and many are such as they did in fact bring, against theories which base ethics upon the deliverances of an alleged moral sense.

## II. CRITICISM OF INTUITIONIST AND MORAL SENSE THEORIES

(1) That it is Impossible to Separate an Action from its Consequences. I have already tried to show that, unless our sense of duty and our moral judgments are conceived to be at least in part rational, it is extremely difficult to establish their claim to freedom; if, on the other hand, they contain any admixture of reason, they cannot but take into account the consequences of actions. The fact that they do and must do so was one which the utilitarians frequently emphasized. You cannot, they said in effect, judge a person's character if it does not express itself in actions, while, the actions in which it expresses itself cannot, if considered apart from their consequences, be regarded as either moral or non-moral. Actions divorced from their consequences are, in fact, ethically negligible. What ground, for example, could there be for objecting to drunkenness, if it did not make a man arrogant in manner, halting in gait, thick in speech, sodden in mind, and disgusting in habit? If the traditional drunkard did not beat his wife, his wife would not mind his drinking. What, again, is the objection to cruelty unless it produces suffering in its object? For the notion of cruelty includes the suffering of its object.

The more closely the matter is examined, the more difficult does it become to see how a distinction can be drawn between an act and its consequences. Where, in fact, does the act end and the consequences begin? An act is a happening in the natural world; regarded from the point of view of the physical sciences it consists in the alteration of the position in space of one or more pieces of matter. That this is so with regard to actions which are

ethically neutral is, I think, sufficiently clear. If I dig a trench, I am altering the position of my feet and arms, of a spade and of a certain quantity of soil. If I take a match-box from my left-hand pocket and put it into my right-hand pocket, I am altering the position in space of my hand and arm and also of the match-box. I am also, presumably, displacing a certain quantity of air. Such acts are ethically neutral; they are neither right nor wrong.

Now let us suppose that I take as an example an act which would normally be regarded as an appropriate object for moral judgment. The act which I am proposing to consider is the forging of a cheque. Considered purely as an act, the forging of a cheque consists in a number of movements by the arm, hand and fingers, and the resultant alteration of the position in space of a pen and a certain quantity of ink. Now it is certainly not of these movements and of this alteration that it would be said we are judging when we judge that forgery is wrong. Of what then? Presumably, of the consequences of the movements I have described. These include the making over to oneself of money to which one is not legally entitled, and the possible loss to others of money to which they are entitled, entailing consequential deprivation and suffering. Now these consequences certainly form a part of what we mean by forgery when we say that forgery is wrong. For, if forgery did not include them, if it were simply a series of physical movements, it would not be forgery; at any rate, it would not be morally blameworthy as forgery. And since forgery undoubtedly is morally blameworthy, being reprobated by the moral consciousness of civilized mankind, it would appear that forgery must be taken to include some at least of what would normally be called its consequences.

Some, but not all. For among the consequences of successful forgery may be its emulation by others. Hence when we condemn an act of forgery, one of the considerations which influence our judgment may well be the effects upon society, if forgery became a common practice. 'We

cannot,' we might say, 'let this case pass unproved and unpunished, because, if we did, others might take heart of example and try to do the same thing; and if they did, and tried successfully, the banking system would break down'.

Thus it is clearly not the case, except perhaps in a remote metaphysical sense, that *all* the consequences of an act of forgery are comprehended in our judgment of condemnation, when we judge a particular case of it to be wrong. Some, at least, of the consequences are regarded as being separate from the act, and our disapproval of these is not the same as our disapproval of the act.

(2) That it is Impossible to Separate an Action from its Motives. Just as an action upon which we propose to pass moral judgment cannot be separated from some at least of its consequences, so it cannot be separated from its motives. For, if the act be strictly regarded as being what, from the physical point of view, it in fact is—an alteration of the position in space of pieces of matter—and if it be argued that it is not about the movements of matter that we believe ourselves to be judging, it is difficult to resist a further extension of the object of our judgment, difficult to exclude from its scope the motive from which the movements sprang.

The reasons for this further extension are as follows. In the first place, it is, I think, clear that we do not as a general rule morally judge involuntary actions. If, for example, a man forged a signature in his sleep, we should probably withhold moral condemnation. We might perhaps in some circumstances condemn forgery by a lunatic, but it is forgery by a sane and free person which is really the object of moral reprobation. Again, if a man's action in forging, though voluntary, was performed under duress, while, for example, a pistol was being pointed at his head, we should almost certainly admit extenuating circumstances. Even if the forgery were done freely and deliberately, we should judge it less harshly, if the intention of the act were to

obtain money to feed a starving family, than we should do, if the forger's object were merely to obtain increased opportunities for the gratification of his senses and appetites. Considerations of motive, then, affect our judgments of actions.

What, then, is a motive? A motive may plausibly be analysed into an act of will coupled with a judgment of expected consequences. I *will*, in other words, to do so and so because I expect such and such consequences to result from my doing so and so, and wish to bring these consequences about. Now the act of will, the expectation and the wish are all psychological events; they all occur in my mind. How events in the mind are transformed into bodily acts we do not know, since the nature of the relation between mind and body is itself unknown. Unless, however, we adopt a materialist philosophy, in which case, as I tried to show in the last chapter, the study of ethics may be dismissed as irrelevant,<sup>1</sup> we shall be justified in saying that acts of will do in some sense cause bodily movements. It is because, to take an example, I have first *resolved* to raise my left arm, that certain movements occur in the nerve cells of my brain; these cause other movements in the motor nervous system which governs the movements of my limbs and, as a consequence, my left arm raises itself in the air.

Willing and acting, therefore, are not two separate events; they resolve themselves on analysis into a chain of causally linked movements, each movement in the chain being the effect of the preceding movement and the cause of the succeeding, the earlier movements in the chain being called psychological and the later physiological. Now the earlier movements in the chain were those which we identified with what is commonly called motive. The conclusion seems to be as follows: the attempt to draw a line at some point across the chain with the object of consigning the events that fall on one side of the line to the category of what is called the motive, and those upon the other to the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, p. 227.



category of what is called the action, as a preliminary to declaring that the motive is the *cause* of the action and deducing that what we are judging about when, for example, we condemn forgery is an action and not a motive, or is an action rather than a motive, is impracticable, and the theory which entails it untenable.

**That the True Object of Moral Judgment is a Situation Considered as a Whole.** If at this point I may be permitted to intrude an opinion of my own, I should say that any attempt to restrict the scope of the purview of moral judgment, whether to motive, to act or to consequences, is bound to fail. What we are judging about when we judge morally is a whole situation of which motive, act and consequences all form parts. Within this whole situation we must also include the circumstances in which the act was performed, the temptations to which the agent was exposed, the heredity, the physiological constitution, the psychological disposition, the training, and the environment of the agent, the consequences which he expected to follow from his act, the consequences which, in the light of the facts known to him at the time, he was reasonably justified in expecting to follow, and the consequences which did in fact follow.

I do not, of course, wish to suggest that all these factors are actually taken into account when we morally judge. I am asserting only that all are relevant, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate one set of factors from another, that all would, therefore, be taken into account in an ideally perfect moral judgment, and that quite a number actually are taken into account on occasions when moral judgments are made. I would add, further, that the more enlightened the person judging, the more of these factors would he regard as relevant to his consideration before delivering judgment. A humane and enlightened man is one who takes into account heredity, circumstance and training and allows for the peculiar attraction of a particular temptation to one so circumstanced and trained. Even

if, for him, *tout comprendre* is not *tout pardonner*, he will at least insist on the greatest possible amount of understanding as a preliminary to pardoning whenever he can.

To return to our argument, it is clear that, if there is any force in the foregoing considerations, a strict Intuitionism which concentrates its attention upon actions and accepts direct intuitions as to their rightness and wrongness as a sufficient guide to morality is untenable. Such a view is an unduly simple one, and in practice too often issues in judgments which are harsh, unsympathetic and intolerant.

**The Motive School of Intuitionism.** It must not be supposed that the above considerations have occurred solely to the author, or that they have not been stressed in one form or another by many writers upon ethics, including those who have in general been disposed to adopt some form of Intuitionism. Many writers, indeed, have insisted that the motive of an action is the main factor to be taken into account in determining its rightness or wrongness. Bishop Butler, for instance, whose views I have already considered, maintained that "the rightness or wrongness of an act depends very much upon the motive for which it is done".

The advantage of insisting upon the importance of motive lies, from the intuitionist point of view, in the answer which the "motive" school of Intuitionism is enabled to offer to the criticisms just outlined. The effect of these criticisms was to demonstrate the impossibility of divorcing an act from its consequences and they bore, therefore, most heavily upon that form of Intuitionism which suggests that it is possible to pass moral judgments upon actions without taking their consequences into account. "The effects of our actions cannot," said Kant, "give them moral worth." But they can and must do so, if the action includes some at least of its effects. To meet this criticism, the intuitionist, while agreeing that motive, act and consequences cannot be divorced from one

another, while conceding that they are not isolated occurrences, but are related factors in a single whole, points out that the moral sense, in approving actions which are done from a good motive, is also bestowing its approval upon actions which are expected to produce good consequences.

This is the line which is taken by Professor Muirhead in his book, *The Elements of Ethics*. So far as an action is really planned and voluntary, the motive to perform it must, Professor Muirhead points out, contain an idea of the consequences expected therefrom, and, inasmuch as it inevitably points forward to those consequences and takes its shape and quality from them, it cannot be judged apart from them. When, therefore, the moral sense passes a judgment of approval on actions done from a good motive, it is not judging about motive or action divorced from consequences, but includes in its scope the end towards which the motivated action is directed, from the nature of which end the motive takes its colour. In affirming, in short, that the motive which leads people to torture animals is bad, the moral sense is influenced mainly by the result of the action in question, namely, the pain experienced by the victims of the torture; its reasoning, presumably, is that the motive of an act which is expected to produce pain derives its nature from the consequences it contemplates, and is, accordingly, a blameworthy motive.

**Consequences Immediate and Ultimate, Intended and Actual.** At this point Intuitionism approaches very close to Utilitarianism. The intuitionist says that a right action is one which is done from a good motive, and a good motive is a motive which aims at the production of certain desirable consequences. The utilitarian affirms that a right act is one which produces happiness<sup>1</sup> and praises, therefore, those characters or dispositions which naturally result in the performance of such actions. Thus Sidgwick (1838-1900), the most authoritative writer on

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, p. 293.

utilitarian ethics, says "the Utilitarian will praise the Dispositions or permanent qualities of character of which felicitific conduct is conceived to be the result, and the motives that are conceived to prompt it, when it would be a clear gain to the general happiness that these should become more frequent".

When the intuitionist insists that motive cannot be judged apart from the consequences which the action proceeding from the motive is intended to produce, the ultimate or final consequences of the action are those which are meant. These must be distinguished from the immediate consequences, although these are in an equal degree intended and expected. Thus, if a dentist uses a drill to stop a tooth, the immediate expected consequences are painful and unpleasant, although the ultimate expected consequences are beneficial. When the moral sense approves the motive of the dentist's action as taking its colour from the aim the dentist sets before himself, it is the expected ultimate consequences which constitute the reasons for its approval, not the immediate painful ones. Yet the immediate painful consequences are equally expected and equally intended. In order to maintain this distinction, some writers distinguish between motive and intention, defining a motive as that for the sake of which an action is done, whereas, an intention includes both that for the sake of which and that in spite of which an action is done. Intention is therefore wider than motive, and of the total amount of the intended consequences, only those for the sake of which the action is done form the subject of moral approval or disapproval.

If it is important to distinguish between immediate and ultimate consequences, it is no less important to distinguish between intended and actual consequences.<sup>1</sup> The consequences which the motive school of Intuitionism is prepared to take into account are the intended, not the actual consequences. If the intended consequences are

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 314-316 for an account of the significance of this distinction.

good, but the actual consequences are bad, then the intuitionist would still approve of the action, provided that the agent could, in the light of the data at his disposal, be considered to be reasonably entitled to expect good consequences to accrue from it. This insistence upon intended consequences affords a clear line of demarcation between any form of Intuitionism and the utilitarian view of ethics to be considered in the next chapter which regards the actual consequences, whether intended or not, as those which are relevant to our estimation of the moral worth of actions.

(3) That the Deliverances of the Moral Sense are Arbitrary, Changing and Inconsistent.

To resume our criticism of Intuitionism, the strongest and the most frequently urged objection to intuitionist theories directs attention to the nature of the deliverances of the moral sense. They are, it is pointed out, conflicting, capricious and arbitrary. They are relative to time, place and circumstance, and are, it is obvious, frequently inspired and dictated by non-ethical considerations. Although there may be a kind of vague consensus of opinion among most people in most periods of the world's history with regard to certain classes of actions—there is, for example, a fairly general disapproval of lying—there is almost invariably the greatest possible disagreement between people's intuitions in regard to particular actions.

As with the moral sense of individuals, so with that of communities. The moral public opinion of a community is not only capricious and arbitrary; it is also inconsistent with the moral public opinion of another community. Not only does the moral sense of different peoples pass contradictory judgments upon the same action at the same time, but the moral sense of the same communities, instead of being fixed, definite and infallible, as supporters of the intuitionist theory are inclined to suggest, passes different judgments upon the same action at different

times. The Greek historian Herodotus observes that, while fires burn upwards in all parts of the world, people's notions of right and wrong are everywhere different, whence the stability of natural and the mutability of moral phenomena are inferred. Canon Rashdall estimates that "there is hardly a vice or a crime (according to our own moral standard) which has not at some time or other in some circumstances, been looked upon as a moral and religious duty. Stealing was accounted virtuous for the young Spartan, and among the Indian caste of Thugs. In the ancient world Piracy, i.e., robbery and murder, was a respectable profession. To the mediæval Christian religious persecution was the highest of duties, and so on". In certain Greek States the exposure of unwanted infants was regarded as a moral and patriotic act. Whatever degree of social good such a measure may have conferred upon the States in question, it may be doubted whether it was conducive to the happiness of either the mothers or of the infants, and our own moral sense clearly condemns it.

**Illustration from Persecution of Witchcraft.** The burning of witches was in the Middle Ages regarded as a highly moral, even a religious act: it was also defended on moral grounds by many writers of the time, yet the consequences clearly involved unhappiness for the witches.

The persecution of witchcraft affords so striking an example of changing moral standards, that I propose to devote a little space to a consideration of its significance. In a province of Germany about the size of Wales, during a period of about seventy-five years in the latter part of the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth centuries, it is estimated that over a quarter of a million women were burnt as witches. In many villages it was impossible to find a single woman alive of over forty years of age. The provision of the necessary tar, pitch and faggots became after a time so burdensome a tax on the village exchequers

that in some cases burning at the stake had to be abandoned, and roasting in an oven was substituted. Ovens, it is obvious, were more economical, since one oven would serve for an indefinite number of witches.

The question inevitably arises, on what grounds these women were accused and condemned. Nobody, it is to be presumed, had seen them passing through key-holes, riding on broom-sticks, or indulging in intercourse with the Devil. They were, it appears, in every case condemned on their own confession. All these things they said that they had done, and they said that they had done them because they were tortured and retortured, until they reached a pitch of suffering at which they preferred being roasted to death in an oven to further torture. One woman was tortured and retortured in this way on fifty-six separate occasions. During torture, each woman was pressed to name her accomplices, and in hope of obtaining some remission of her agony, this she invariably did. Thus each accused became a little centre of infection from which fresh accusations, tortures and confessions spread out in every direction.

According to the moral consciousness of the twentieth century this procedure was an offence both against goodness and against truth. Yet it was unhesitatingly approved by the moral opinion of the times. So far as morality was concerned, the authorities who accused, tortured and condemned the witches appear to have acted from motives of the most creditable kind. Their conviction was, that women who were tortured on earth would be less tortured hereafter in hell. An earthly fire was no doubt painful, especially if slow, but it was not so painful as an infernal one, and even the slowest oven that ever roasted did in fact make an end of its roasting in time, whereas in hell one burned for ever. It was, therefore, with the object of diminishing the amount of suffering which the alleged witches would otherwise undergo that these appalling torments were inflicted. So far as the offence against truth is concerned, it would not be generally

admitted in the twentieth century<sup>1</sup> that confessions extorted by the infliction of gross physical agony can be regarded as trustworthy evidence.

**(4) That Consequences Must, therefore, be Taken into Account.**

We may express these conclusions by saying that the twentieth century has a more developed conception of what constitutes evidence than the sixteenth, and that it has a more enlightened conception of what constitutes humane conduct. Many people would, that is to say, refuse to-day to regard the infliction of gross physical agony on a sentient being as being morally justifiable, whatever the end in view. This at least is true of what might be termed advanced moral opinion. But why does advanced moral opinion disapprove of the infliction of torture, whatever the end in view? Clearly, because of the suffering which torture involves. Advanced moral opinion, in other words, condemns torture because of its consequences; and it condemns the consequences of torture because they are inimical to human happiness. Both these condemnations entail, as we shall see in the next chapter, a utilitarian theory of morals.

Now it is the fact that the moral sense has, during the recorded period of human history, so frequently approved of actions whose consequences were in the highest degree disagreeable, that constitutes, in the view of the utilitarians, which is also the view of most enlightened people to-day, one of the most serious counts in the indictment against moral sense theories. Many people, in other words, hold that the fact that actions of which the moral sense has historically approved have produced gross unhappiness, and the further fact that they could have been known to

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps open to question whether this statement does not call for qualification. It could have been made with some safety, so far as Europe was concerned, prior to 1914. The history of post-war Europe, however, seems to show that torture is again coming into favour as a means of discovering "truth." In its report for 1936-37, the Howard League for Penal Reforms speaks of the growing use of torture to obtain evidence, especially from political prisoners.



be likely to produce unhappiness at the time of the passing of the judgment of moral approval upon them, affords a strong presumption for rejecting a theory which insists that the passing of a judgment of approval by the moral sense is in itself a sufficient criterion of the morality of an action. One further objection remains to be noted. It often happens that when the moral sense of a particular person has approved of an action and declared it to be right, the moral sense of the same person or persons presently disapproves of the consequences of the action on the ground that they are bad. Now the fact of one judgment being passed about the consequences of an action while a contrary judgment is passed about the action itself, taken in conjunction with the difficulty attending the attempt to divorce an action from its consequences, forces us to the conclusion that the same wholes, wholes, that is to say, which include both actions and consequences, are being at the same time made the objects of judgments of approval and of disapproval by the moral sense, and are, therefore, at the same time both right and wrong, good and bad. This conclusion must surely be false. The fact that it is logically entailed by the position under consideration suggests that the mere passing of a judgment by the moral sense, whether upon an action or its consequences, is not in itself sufficient to establish the rightness or wrongness of the action.

(5) That some Moral Judgments are Trivial and Frivolous.

I have spoken so far of those judgments of the moral sense which may be impugned on the ground that they are self-contradictory or are deleterious to happiness. Other judgments are open to criticism on the ground that they are arbitrary, trivial or ludicrous. Thus our Victorian ancestors insisted on swathing the legs of their grand pianos on the ground that, being legs, they were necessarily indecent. The monks on Mount Athos carried the early Christian prejudice against the female sex to such

lengths that they devoted much time and labour to devising a method for producing eggs without keeping hens. The Aztecs believed that the light of the sun would grow dim, unless priests fed regularly upon human flesh. Ajumba hunters abjectly apologize to the hippopotamuses they have killed, and, when guilty of crimes, believe that they can transfer their guilt to a goat. Some peoples believe that only prostitutes can serve God; others that fornication is bad; others that it is good, but not for the crops. One race has no word in its language for chastity and cannot understand what it means; another knows what it means, but regards it as something which is evil and which is to be avoided if possible. One race holds that painted toes are an offence to the god of the tribe; another, that the Deity is outraged if the shins and knees of women are allowed to appear in His house. A list of these apparent absurdities could be continued indefinitely. Their cumulative effect is to lend support to the conclusion that the deliverances of the moral sense are frequently too trivial, arbitrary and contradictory in their nature to form a reliable criterion of right and wrong. As they are constantly changing, they involve the assumption that an action which is right in one age is wrong in another; as they are frequently contradictory, they involve the assumption that the same action is often both right and wrong at the same time.

**Recapitulation.** The conclusion of this line of argument may, then, be summarized as follows. The view which is under consideration maintains that the sole arbiter of right and wrong is the moral sense, and that the judgments of approval and disapproval which it delivers in regard to actions and characters constitute the sole and sufficient guide to moral worth. These deliverances, being of the nature of direct intuitions, do not need the support of reason, though they can, it is maintained, generally manage to give a good account of themselves, if called to the bar of reason. In criticism of this view it is urged that the judgments of the moral sense are neither unanimous nor

infallible. Intuitions, if they are to lay claim to our respect on the score of validity, and are not to be dismissed as the mere deliverances of irresponsible instinct, should be both. Not even with regard to classes of actions does the moral sense deliver itself in unmistakable terms. Spartan children were taught to steal; chastity was unknown among the Turks, truth among the Cretans.

Far from unanimous in regard to classes of actions, the deliverances of the moral sense are often chaotic in their application to particular actions. In this connection it is significant that, where people do differ in their judgments of the morality of particular actions, or communities in their estimates of the morality of particular modes of conduct, it is always by an appeal to *the consequences* of the action or conduct in question that one party invokes superiority for its own judgment.

### III. THE DELIVERANCES OF THE MORAL SENSE CONSIDERED IN THEIR BEARING UPON THE WELFARE AND PROGRESS OF SOCIETY

The Moral Sense Related to Social Need. But the moral sense view is not so readily to be disposed of as these arguments might at first sight suggest. Attempts are made to show that the deliverances of the moral sense are not as irresponsible as they appear, by pointing to the fact that they are usually directed to the preservation of the social structure and the promotion of the welfare of the community.

This view, that the moral sense has a social reference, clearly embodies an important truth. It rightly points out that morality does not and cannot be expected to consist in obedience to an unchanging code of rules, if only because the communities whose conduct morality governs are not themselves unchanging. Thus the deliverances of the moral sense vary in different societies, because

societies are differently constituted and have different needs. Morality which, to use a phrase of Professor Muirhead's, contains a "quality of social tissue" reflects these needs, and, since the needs vary, morality varies with them. In general, the morality of any society will prescribe as right and fitting whatever conduct contributes to the maintenance of that society and the promotion of its welfare. Not only do the needs of a society vary, the functions of individuals vary in that society. Each individual has a definite rôle to play and a definite status to maintain in the society to which he belongs. To this rôle and to this status his duty is relative. Hence what is right and fitting for one individual will be wrong and unfitting for another. It follows that individual morality cannot be considered apart from the place of the individual in the society to which he belongs, the functions which he performs in the society, and the structure and needs of the society.

**That Morality Evolves and Progresses.** Now societies evolve. Therefore the moral sense whose deliverances are, on this view, relative to their needs and conduce to their preservation evolves and progresses with them. The teaching of history shows that it has in fact done so.

The traditional moral customs of the barbarians and early Greeks become the highly elaborate and rational morality of the Greek philosophers. The general principles laid down in the Ten Commandments are particularized in the Book of the Covenant. The somewhat primitive and vindictive morality which animates the heroes of the Old Testament is refined into the highly spiritualized moral code of the Sermon on the Mount.

It would be superfluous to multiply instances. The process by which society becomes more complex and moral codes more elaborate is sufficiently obvious. Nor is the change only in the direction of greater elaboration. People to-day are, it is said, kinder, more sympathetic, more sensitive to suffering in others, than at any previous

time in history. On these lines, then, an endeavour is made to preserve the authority of moral judgments in spite of the admitted fact that they are relative, relative, that is to say, to the needs and circumstances of society; in spite of the fact, therefore, that they reveal themselves as being in the long run determined by what appear to be non-ethical considerations. The point of the argument is that the admission that moral judgments are relative does not justify us in concluding that they are not, therefore, binding. To admit that they were not binding would be to undermine the whole basis of the objective intuitionist position. "It is because", says Professor Muirhead, "morality is always and in all places relative to circumstances, that it is binding at any time and in any place."

## CRITICAL COMMENTS

### (A) That the Continuance of a Society is Not Necessarily a Good

The questions raised by the foregoing argument go far beyond the confines of ethics and cannot be adequately discussed in this book. For what precisely does the argument entail? The moral sense has been charged with being arbitrary and capricious. It is neither, the argument contends, for its deliverances are relative to the needs of society, and are consequently such as are conducive to the maintenance of society.

But why, we may ask, should societies be maintained? Or rather, why should it be taken for granted that any and every society should be maintained? Some societies are good, others bad. Hence, while that which is conducive to the maintenance of a good society is itself good and worthy to be trusted, that which conduces to the maintenance of a bad society is bad and ought to be rejected. It is difficult, for example, to believe that the moral sense of the ruling class of pre-revolutionary France, which was relative to the maintenance of a society based on property

and privilege for the few and poverty and injustice for the many, whose deliverances reflected and supported a civic code which sanctioned this same property and privilege, which enforced this same poverty and injustice—it is difficult, I say, to maintain that the deliverances of such a moral sense were based upon an accurate judgment of, and a nice discrimination between objective right and wrong.

A communist would inevitably take the same view of a moral sense which was commended to his respect on the ground that its deliverances tended to support societies which embody the capitalist, economic system. It is impossible in this connection to avoid reflecting upon the significance of the fact that most socialist political theory regards almost every form of society which has hitherto existed as a device for oppressing the mass of the people, and enabling the privileged few to maintain themselves on the fruits of the labour of others. Marx, for instance, regarded the State as an organization of the exploiting class for maintaining the conditions of exploitation that suit it,<sup>1</sup> and held that the moral sense of the proletariat was deliberately moulded and perverted by the capitalists into a readiness to accept those regulations and institutions which would secure to the latter the surplus value of the labour of the former. Those who adopt this view must necessarily regard the moral sense not as a force of progress, but as one of the most powerful instruments of oppression. The morality which is enjoined by the Christian religion is often singled out for special censure in this connection.<sup>2</sup> It is charged with inculcating the Christian virtues of humility and contentment, because their observance by the poor makes for undisturbed possession by the rich.

It is not necessary to subscribe to these extreme views as to the nature of the State, the utility of Christianity to the rich, and its consequent popularization among the poor, to recognize that the value of any existing form of social organization is not sufficiently established to enable

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 683-685, for a development of this view.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 672-676.

us to claim validity for the deliverances of the moral sense, solely in virtue of the rôle which it plays in maintaining and supporting that form. It is clearly not enough, then, to show that morality has a social reference.

VARIETY OF ISSUES RAISED BY VIEW THAT SOCIETIES EVOLVE AND PROGRESS. We agree that it is not, upholders of the theory reply, but societies evolve and progress and, since they do so, the moral sense evolves and progresses with them. It is at this point more particularly that we find ourselves faced with questions which, as I have already mentioned, take us beyond the confines of this book. The question which we are now asked to consider is, do societies progress or not? The answer to it involves (a) metaphysics, since we must know what we mean by progress and must have some view, therefore, as to the goal of human evolution; (b) ethics, since we must know what things are good; (c) politics, since we must know what sort of political organization is best calculated to embody and promote the things that are good; (d) biology, anthropology, and history, since having surveyed the past of our species, we must be in a position to judge whether the societies which exist now do or do not on the whole embody more of the things that are good than the societies which have existed in the past, and whether contemporary political forms of organizations are or are not more likely to promote an increase of the things that are good than those which have existed in the past.

To sum up in a single question the many questions that are involved, we have to ask whether, assuming that we know what we mean by "better", human life does in fact become "better". It is obviously impossible even to attempt to answer this question here, although some of the considerations involved, particularly those indicated under (b) and (c) above, form part of the enquiry to which this book is devoted. The most that I can hope to do is to offer a number of brief observations upon those of the

issues involved which have a particular relevance to the topic which led us to concern ourselves with the subject, namely, the validity of the deliverances of the moral sense in the light of their admitted relation to the needs, their admitted conduciveness to the maintenance of a society.

**(B) That the View that Societies Progress is an Unsubstantiated Dogma.**

It will be convenient to divide the observations that follow under four heads.

(i) **IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT SOCIETIES DO IN FACT PROGRESS.** To the question, does human life grow better, there is no agreed answer. Every age would, I suspect, tend to answer it differently. Until the middle of the eighteenth century the conception of progress was comparatively unknown. The Victorians, who were dominated by it, would have answered the question in a sense favourable to themselves. Shocked by the war and alarmed by the future, many of the most sensitive minds of our own generation would, I suspect, answer in a contrary sense.

(ii) The evidence of history seems on the whole to tell in favour not of a law of continuing progress, but of cycles of progress and decay. Again and again human civilization has reached a certain point; but it has never passed beyond it. Presently it has slipped back, and an era of comparative barbarism has succeeded. One might almost be justified in taking the view that human life, capable of rising to a certain level, is incapable of transcending it, or even of maintaining itself for any period of time at the highest level which it is capable of reaching. This generalization is clearly controversial, and to support it is beyond my competence. For my part, I am sceptical as to the possibility of deducing any law of human development, whether cyclical or progressive, from the teaching of history. It is, however, impossible to avoid being impressed by the



evidence accumulated in such a book as Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, in favour of the view that the major movements of history have been cyclical in character, so regularly do eras of stagnation, decay and relapse appear to follow eras of progress.

(iii) IF THEY DO, IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT THE PROGRESS IS DESIGNED OR IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH A PLAN. Let us suppose that societies do evolve and progress, and that we know broadly what we mean by saying that they do. The question then arises, is the evolution, is the progress accidental or designed? Is it, in other words, the result of a series of happy chances, or is it the expression of an advancing evolutionary purpose? Can we in fact assign to the development of the human race an ideal end or goal, by reference to which we can claim an absolute validity for the judgments of the moral sense, on the ground that they are concerned to further the advance of the human race in the direction of an ever greater realization of this ideal, and then deduce that this advance takes place in pursuance of a definite plan?

The bearing of this question upon the issue we are discussing is obvious. If changes in society which appear to constitute an advance in the direction of an ideal, are, nevertheless, arbitrary and irresponsible, then the code of morality which supports them is equally irresponsible. Again, if the process which we know as social evolution does not involve an ethical advance, or if, though it does do so, the advance is accidental, then the deliverances of the moral sense which both support the stage of social evolution which has at any moment been reached, and conduce to the realization of a further stage, are themselves devoid of that ultimate validity which a discernible and necessary relation to an evolutionary purpose can alone bestow, and morality becomes, in Professor Muirhead's words, "nothing but that kind of conduct which supports one or other of the accidental changes in the phantasmagoria of social forms"

Thus by recognizing that the moral sense is relative, we have transferred the whole burden of making good its claim to validity from the moral sense to the social structure to which it is relative. If progress in the direction of the realization of an ideal end can be observed in the evolution of society, and if this progress can be regarded in the light of the carrying out of a plan, or of the fulfilment of an evolutionary purpose, then a similar progress can be predicated of the deliverances of the moral sense which registers each stage in the advance of society with the mark of its approval. If, however, no such progress can be discerned, the moral sense will gain neither in significance nor in validity from the fact that it automatically confers approval upon conduct which tends to maintain existing social forms, and will be revealed merely as an instrument for bolstering up whatever form of social organisation happens to exist, an instrument which blindly lends its support to the bad as well as to the good.

The questions here raised once again involve metaphysical issues, nor is there any agreement as to the answers which should be given to them.

(iv) THAT THE MORAL SENSE IS OFTEN INIMICAL TO PROGRESS IN MORALS AND IN POLITICS. If we are agreed to answer them in a sense favourable to the notion of progress, progress, that is to say, in the realization of an ideal end, we cannot fail to be impressed by the weight of evidence in favour of the view that the moral opinions of most human beings are at any given moment inimical to such progress and, further, that they are inimical just because they *are* relative and conducive to the maintenance of the existing codes and institutions of a society. Advance in moral, as in intellectual or aesthetic insight, is generally made in the teeth of the opposition of the contemporary public opinion of a society.

Original creation in art, original thinking in morals or politics, original research in science, are the products not of masses of men organized in communities, but of the

the minds of single men and women. Now, the fact that the thought in which the minds of the pioneers find expression is original, is bound to make it appear shocking and subversive to the conventional many. Inevitably it challenges vested interests in the thought of the present, unsettling men's minds, alarming their morals, and undermining the security of the powerful and the established. Hence the original genius is only too often abused as an outrageous, and often as a blasphemous, impostor. Heterodoxy in art is at worst rated as eccentricity or folly, but heterodoxy in politics or morals is denounced as propagandist wickedness, which, if tolerantly received, will undermine the very foundations of society; while the advance on current morality, in which the heterodoxy normally consists, is achieved only in the teeth of vested interests in the thought and morals it seeks to displace. Thus, while the genius in the sphere of art is usually permitted to starve in a garret, the genius in the sphere of conduct is persecuted and killed with the sanction of the law. An examination of the great legal trials of history from this point of view would make interesting reading. Socrates, Giordano Bruno, and Servetus were all tried and condemned for holding opinions distasteful to persons in authority in their own day, for which the world now honours them. One of the best definitions of a man of genius is he who, in Shelley's words, "beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germ of the flower and fruit of latest time". To put the point biologically, the genius is an evolutionary "sport" on the mental and spiritual plane, designed to give conscious expression to life's instinctive purpose. He represents, therefore, a new thrust forward on the part of life and destroys the prevailing level of thought and morals as surely as he prepares for a new one. The thought of the community as a whole presently moves up to the level from which the genius first proclaimed his disintegrating message, and we have the familiar historical spectacle of the heterodoxies of one age becoming the platitudes of the next.

Inevitably, we hear only of the geniuses who "break through" and stamp their thought upon the minds of men. But for every one who, in spite of opposition, succeeds in imposing his original inspiration upon the mind of the race, there may have been, there probably have been, a dozen whom opposition has succeeded in stifling.

The conclusion seems to be that the received moral judgment of any given society cannot be accepted as a true guide to morality, if only because it is frequently opposed to what in the light of history we recognize to have been a moral advance.<sup>1</sup> Just because received moral opinion reflects the needs and conduces to the stability of a society, it is liable to be ranged against change. Yet change there must be, if there is to be evolution and progress in morality. Unless, then, we are prepared to accept the view that a final and ultimate revelation of right and wrong has already been vouchsafed to a particular community, we cannot but conclude that there are occasions when the interests of morality are best served by a refusal to abide by the received standards of the time.

#### IV. CRITICISM OF INTUITIONIST AND MORAL SENSE THEORIES RESUMED

(6) That if the Moral Sense is Feeling, its Deliverances are Subjective. To resume the general criticism of Intuitionism, any view which seeks to base morality upon feeling is exposed to the objection that the deliverances of a moral sense so conceived will have a purely subjective reference. For feelings, it may be pointed out, are relative and private in a sense in which the deliverances of reason are objective and public. Hence feelings give no information except about themselves. If feelings only give information about themselves, information, that is to say, to the effect that such and such a feeling

<sup>1</sup> This is a point of view which J. S. Mill elaborated with great force. See Chapter XIV, pp. 523-526.

is being entertained, they do not give information about the nature of those things external to themselves which they purport to report. In other words, feelings are not objective in their reference. On a previous page<sup>1</sup> I elaborated in some detail the distinction between subjective and objective judgments, and pointed out that many judgments, particularly judgments of taste and feeling, which are objective in appearance, are, nevertheless, subjective in fact, since they only succeed in giving information about events occurring in the mind of the subject judging. But while feeling judgments are by their very nature subjective in the sense defined, the judgments of reason can always *claim* to be objective, even when they are wrong. Feeling judgments, in other words, only report the feelings of the judger and convey no information about anything external to the judger; judgments of reason do convey such information, or, at least, they may do so. Thus, if I say that 3 plus 2 equals 5, I am making a statement whose truth is apprehended by reason, and, provided that you are a normal human being possessed of a reason, I can not only convey to you the truth expressed by my judgment, but I can cause you to see that it is true. When you see that it is true, you will have the same experience as I am having when I see it. If, however, when suffering from toothache I announce that my pain has a peculiar and distinctive quality, then all that I am conveying is that I am experiencing painful sensations which are unique but indescribable, and my statement will evoke no analogous experience in you. Indeed, unless you, too, have at sometime had toothache, the information conveyed by my statement will have, for you, a purely formal meaning. You will understand what I say to the extent of knowing that I have suffered or am suffering, but you will not understand what it is that I have suffered or am suffering.

In this sense, feeling judgments are private, and report something which has happened or is happening in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 159-163.

ourselves, while the judgments passed by reason are public and report what is external to ourselves. It follows that, if moral judgments are fundamentally judgments of feeling, they will tell us only about the feelings of those who make them. In so far as the person who makes the judgment does possess the feeling, all moral judgments are equally valid. They are equally valid, that is to say, in the sense that they tell us that the particular feelings which the judgment reports are being entertained. In so far, however, as they purport to do more than that, in so far as they claim to tell us that an action X really is wrong in itself, because the judge feels that it is wrong, they possess no authority. Furthermore, inasmuch as the contemplation of the action in question may produce an entirely different feeling in some other person, a feeling namely that X is right, the judgment that X is right will be equally valid as an account of the feelings evoked in this second person by the contemplation of action X, although it will not, any more than the first judgment, tell us anything about the real quality of X. If, therefore, the statement that X is wrong, or the statement that X is right, means simply that some person entertains a particular feeling towards X, and means no more than that, it is clearly possible, since different persons may at the same time entertain feelings of a contrary character with regard to X, for X to be both right and wrong at the same time.

This conclusion is explicitly accepted by those who take a subjectivist view of morality.<sup>1</sup> My present concern is to establish the point that, if the moral sense is feeling or akin to feeling, morality cannot ever be more than purely subjective.

**Recapitulation.** I began this chapter by considering the nature of the moral sense and summarizing the views of various ethical writers on the subject. This summary developed into a criticism of the doctrine of Objective Intuitionism. The criticism was (1) that if the moral sense

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 351, 352.

is feeling, its deliverances are almost certainly determined by non-ethical factors, yet we have agreed that the admission of free will is essential to ethics. If it is reason, then it insists on taking into account the consequences of actions; and not only the consequences of actions but also the motive and the circumstance, the training, the heredity and the constitution of the agent. To this criticism I have added two more. (2) The deliverances of the moral sense are changing and capricious. If it is argued that they are not, therefore, arbitrary, since they support society, it is not, I suggested, clear that the maintenance of society is always a good; if it is said that societies progress, I have replied that this is a dogma which cannot be known to be true, while, even if it is true, the fact that societies progress does not suffice to endow the deliverances of the moral sense with authority, unless it can also be shown that societies progress as part of a plan, in accordance with a law, or in fulfilment of a purpose. Moreover, the moral sense which prevails at an existing level of the development of a society has often impeded progress to a new level. (3) Finally, if the moral sense is feeling, its judgments are subjective and only report events occurring in the biography of the judger; if reason then, as before, it insists on taking consequences into account.

### *Books*

- For an account of the views of the intuitionists see L. SELBY BIGGE's, *British Moralists*.  
 ROGERS, A. K. *Morals in Review*, Chapters VIII and IX.  
 SHAFTESBURY, ANTHONY. *Inquiry concerning Virtue*.  
*Discussions of Intuitionism*.  
 MOORE, G. E. *Principia Ethica*.  
 SIDGWICK, HENRY. *The Methods of Ethics*. Books III and IV.  
 RASHDALL, H. H. *The Theory of Good and Evil*.  
 MILL, J. S. *Utilitarianism*.  
 MUIRHEAD, J. H. *The Elements of Ethics*, especially Books II and V.  
 HOBHOUSE, L. T. *Morals in Evolution*.

## CHAPTER IX: OBJECTIVE UTILITARIANISM

Sidgwick, Bentham, John Stuart Mill

**Intended and Actual Consequences.** Objective Utilitarianism may be briefly defined as the view that the moral worth of an action must be assessed by reference to its consequences, the characteristic utilitarian assertion being that a right action is one which has the best consequences on the whole. According to one form of the theory these are the intended consequences; according to another they are the actual consequences. If the intended consequences are those which are meant, Utilitarianism has much in common with the form of Intuitionism, described in the last chapter, which asserts that the object of our moral judgments is motive, or that it must include motive, and that motive includes a view of the consequences which the agent expects to follow from the action which he is motivated to perform.<sup>1</sup>

**Difficulties of the "Intended Consequences" Form of Utilitarianism.** Between the form of Utilitarianism which looks to the intended consequences of an action and that which insists that the actual consequences are those which must be taken into account, there is, it is obvious, a considerable difference. Each form is exposed to certain difficulties. To the view that an action is right, if the consequences which the agent intended are good, if, that is to say, to adopt the language of intuitionist theory, it proceeds from a good motive, it may be objected that many actions which proceed from the best motives have

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 292-295.



the most unfortunate consequences. As I pointed out in the last chapter, a plausible case may be made for the view that most of the harm which is done in the world is the result of the actions of well-meaning but ill-judging people. I cited the case of war as an example. Now it may reasonably be urged that there must be something wrong with a theory which requires us to regard as right, actions which produce such terrible consequences as those involved in the declaration and waging of a war, merely because the motives which lead people to fight in wars are such as we can respect.

It might be and has been urged in reply that we can and should divide what purports at first sight to be a single moral judgment into two separate judgments; that we can and should pass one judgment on motive and another on the action which proceeds from the motive. On this basis, we should be entitled to pass a favourable judgment on the motive of the enthusiastic volunteer who goes to war to fight for right and freedom, but an unfavourable one on the resultant killing and maiming for which his action is responsible. But this expedient, plausible as it appears, will not do. For, as I pointed out in the last chapter,<sup>1</sup> the view that we can in this way limit the scope of our ethical judgments is not one that can be sustained. If, as I hope to have shown, we cannot judge about actions in themselves, we cannot judge about motives in themselves, and, it may be, we cannot even judge about consequences in themselves. That which in fact constitutes the object of our moral judgments, is, I have suggested,<sup>2</sup> a whole situation of which motive, acts and consequences are all integral parts.

### Difficulties of the "Actual Consequences" Form of Utilitarianism.

The view that the rightness of an act depends upon its actual consequences, which has been on the whole the predominant utilitarian view, also leads to anomalous results: two may be mentioned. First, if this

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 289-291. <sup>2</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 291, 292.

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view is correct, it may sometimes be our duty to do a wrong action. Thus, if I see a man drowning it will be my duty to try to save him seeing that, apart altogether from the demoralising effect of cowardice upon myself, the consequences of his being saved may, since life is assumed to be a good thing on the whole, be reasonably expected to be better than the consequences of his dying. If, however, he subsequently goes mad, beats his wife, and murders his children, the actual consequences of my act of rescue will have been bad. Therefore, I shall have done a wrong action, which it was, nevertheless, my duty to do.

In the second place, as it is impossible to know *all* the actual consequences of any action, we can never tell for certain whether any action is right or wrong. Thus, although the utilitarian criterion of actual consequences provides a rough and ready test which serves the purposes of practical life, it is one which cannot, in practice, be applied with absolute certainty. This consideration does not, however, invalidate the *meaning* which the utilitarians give to the term "right action". It is obvious that we may know what is *meant* by the phrase "the temperature of the room", without knowing what its temperature is; and it is logically perfectly conceivable that the correct meaning of the expression "right action" should be "an action which produces the best possible consequences", although we can never know for certain in regard to any particular action whether it is in fact right.

**That the Possession of Good Judgment is a Necessary Part of Virtue.** This is not the place for a discussion of the respective merits of the two forms of utilitarian theory. One observation may, however, be permitted. It would, I think, be generally agreed that a well-meaning man who acts in such a way as to increase the happiness of his neighbours is ethically superior to an equally well-meaning man who habitually, or at any rate frequently, acts in such a way as to diminish it. To take an extreme

example, a lunatic might feel convinced that the best way to maximize the happiness of mankind was to cut the throats of all red-haired men with freckles. What is more, in order to realize his benevolent intentions he might, at considerable personal risk, actively take the steps which, in his view, might be expected to produce the desired increase of human happiness. Nevertheless, it is difficult to regard a lunatic inspired by this conviction as a really good man by any of the standards which are relevant to a judgment of moral worth. And the reason why we should refuse to give him full moral marks would be found in our conviction that his judgment as to the probable effects of his well-meaning actions on the human happiness which he wished to promote, was faulty.

It seems to follow that good will and good intentions are not enough to enable a man to qualify as a virtuous man; we also expect him to show good judgment. Now good judgment entails a just appreciation of the probable consequences of the line of conduct which we are proposing to follow. We may, of course, be mistaken in our estimate through no fault of our own. For example, the circumstances may be other than we had supposed, or even other than we had any right to suppose; again, all the data relevant to our judgment may not be available; it is conceivable that it may not have been possible to make them available; or, yet again, some sudden catastrophe which there was no reason to expect, a fire, for example, or a flood, a volcano eruption or an earthquake, may make the consequences of an action other than we had anticipated or had a right to anticipate. Nevertheless, if, after having taken what would generally be considered reasonable steps to obtain all the relevant data, and having further taken all these relevant data into account, one judges X to be a right action, having regard to the consequences that X seems to one to be likely to produce, one is obviously entitled to a greater degree of moral credit, than if one had made such a judgment on

insufficient data in circumstances in which one might, had one taken the trouble, have obtained sufficient data.

Not only are we required to take trouble to obtain the data necessary for judgment; we are also required to judge adequately on the basis of the data. If on the basis of adequate data a man makes a foolish and obviously mistaken estimate of the probable results of an action he is proposing to take, he is, it would be generally agreed, not so morally praiseworthy as a man who, in similar circumstances, makes a correct judgment. We here reach the conclusion which I have already endeavoured to establish in another connection,<sup>1</sup> namely, that it is not enough for the good man to have the will and the capacity to perform his duty; he is required also to know what his duty is. A man, in other words, is required to show good judgment in regard to moral issues no less than in regard to practical affairs. Now good judgment is no doubt in part the result of good training, and to the extent to which it is, its possession is one of those virtues which Aristotle calls virtues of character.<sup>2</sup> But although the formation of good judgment can be assisted by training and education, the initial capacity for judging accurately is a faculty implanted by nature. For good judgment is a product of a good native intelligence and this, like a good voice or a good eye at games, is part of our initial vital endowment.

We must also concede to Aristotle that a good natural endowment in the matter of intelligence can not only be affected by environment and developed by education, but will be favourably affected by the best environment, will be fully developed by the best education. Our conclusion is, then, that the man who is best qualified accurately to estimate the probable consequences of a given action will be one who both has a good native intelligence, and has been brought up in a suitable environment.

What do we mean by suitable? It is impossible to answer without begging questions. I shall return to this

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 104, 105.

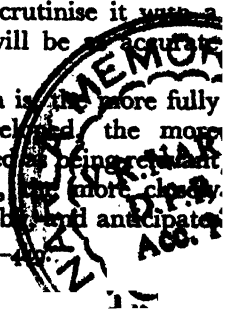
one and try to give a fuller answer as part of the general theory of value which is contained in Chapter XII.<sup>1</sup> Let us, however, say provisionally that a suitable environment must be at once a humane environment, so that a person who from birth has been subject to its influence will wish to prevent human suffering, and a sensitive environment, so that he will be quick to detect occasions for human suffering. In a word, the environment must be civilized.

Thus, when we judge an action to be right on the "intended consequences" theory, we are judging that it is such as a man will perform who desires to produce certain results which he believes to be good results, who is qualified by native endowment, by training and by education to make a reasonably accurate estimate of what the results of the action are likely to be, and, we must add, who takes the trouble to obtain all the data, or as many of them as are available, which are relevant to the making of such an estimate.

**The Element of Intelligence in Moral Worth.** Two conclusions suggest themselves. The first is one at which we have already glanced. The proper object of ethical judgment is neither action, motive, nor consequences, but is a whole situation of which each of these forms a constituent part but which nevertheless extends beyond them, and which should ideally include a reference to such factors as natural endowment, training, education, environment, and willingness to take trouble to collect the data necessary for judgment, and to scrutinise it with a view to ensuring that the judgment will be as accurate as possible.

Secondly, the more intelligent a man is, the more fully his natural faculties have been developed, the more numerous the data which he has collected as being relevant to his decision on a course of action, the more closely will the consequences which he intends to bring about and anticipate

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 447-449.



to follow from, his action approximate to those which do in fact follow from it. In other words, intelligence, training, and knowledge will go some way to ensure that intended consequences will coincide with actual ones. The conclusion seems to be that in a society of ideally judging persons the difference between actual and intended consequences would tend to disappear. Meanwhile, in the degree to which a person or a society tends to approximate to this ideal limit, to that degree will the disparity between the consequences which are expected to follow from the actions of that person, or that society, and those which actually do follow from them, tend to disappear. At this point, then, a formula for ethical progress both in societies and in individuals suggests itself, some of the implications of which I shall hope to develop in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup>

**Sidgwick on the Intuitions of Common Sense Morality.** This preliminary discussion of the implications and difficulties of both the "actual" and the "intended" consequences types of utilitarian theory having been disposed of, we are in a position to proceed with the exposition of the theory. Before embarking upon it, however, I propose to try to mitigate the sharpness of the contrast which I have hitherto drawn between it and intuitionist theories. I have already pointed out that certain forms of Intuitionism, by including within the scope of moral judgments the intended consequences of actions, tend to approximate to Utilitarianism. I have now to add that the utilitarians, for their part, are far from always rejecting intuitions.

It should, in the first place, be clear in the light of the conclusion of the discussion in Chapter V<sup>2</sup> on the subject of the nature of our recognition of ultimate values, that *some* intuitions must be involved in those judgments of the worth of consequences, by reference to which utilitarians hold that the rightness of actions ought to be assessed. For whatever the nature of the things which we judge to be ultimately valuable, our judgment must, I

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 466-468.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 166-170.



concluded; be in the last resort intuitive. I shall return to the significance of this point later.<sup>1</sup> In addition, however, to the general intuitions of value which are entailed in any assessment of the worth of consequences, the more clearighted of utilitarian writers have recognized that a number of other intuitions are involved in ethical judgments. Sidgwick's treatment of the subject affords a good example of such recognition.

Sidgwick (1838-1900) is a utilitarian in the sense that he believes that the ethical value of an action is established by reference to its ability to promote agreeable and satisfied states of consciousness. He is also a hedonist in the sense that he believes happiness to be the only thing which is ultimately valuable, although he thinks that it is our duty to promote everybody's happiness equally, and not to give a preference to our own. In spite, however, of his general utilitarian standpoint, he maintains that our ethical judgments always involve some intuitions, and he is anxious to show what these are. In the course of his treatment he makes a number of valuable observations on the morality of the ordinary man. This, he holds, is in the main intuitional. It is intuitional in the sense that certain intrinsic characteristics of actions are regarded by the commonsense man as establishing the rightness or wrongness of those actions. Cruelty, in fact, in the view of common sense, is wrong, *because* it is cruelty; lying *because* it is lying. (This does not, of course, alter the fact that the ordinary man will often condone lying or cruelty in particular cases, and justify himself by an appeal to the consequences, which are then made the subject of another intuition. Thus lying, he holds, is permissible to save a life, cruelty—although he would not call it cruelty—to discipline a character. The intuitions here entailed are that lives are worth while and ought to continue, and that strong characters are valuable and ought to be formed.)

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 419-426.

**Conditions Governing the Acceptance of Ultimate Moral Principles.** Sidgwick maintains that these intuitional judgments, which are unthinkingly passed by commonsense, point to the influence of certain ultimate moral principles upon men's minds. He is prepared to agree that there may be such principles and that they ought to be trusted—for what court of appeal, he asks, can there be in ethics save, in the last resort, the popular consciousness?—provided that they satisfy certain conditions. These conditions are that they must be clear; that they must be consistent among themselves; that there must be an unmistakable consensus of opinion among most normal people in their favour; and that they must not only seem to be self-evidently true, but continue to seem to be so on examination and reflection.

Judged by the standard of these conditions, most commonsense intuitions about morals are, he finds, open to criticism on two counts. In the first place, the ordinary commonsense man confuses his impulses of approval and disapproval with genuine moral intuitions. Thus the mother says to her child, "Don't be naughty", when all she means is "Don't be inconvenient to me personally"; the clergymen of countries at war maintain that the enemy is hateful, and justly hateful, to God, when all that they mean is that the enemy is dangerous to the clergymen, their relations, their property, their flocks, and their countries; elderly ladies consider that sex is shameful, when all that they mean is that it has passed them by. In short, most of the so-called moral judgments which most people pass are, on any view of ethics, subjective.<sup>1</sup> They are not, that is to say, judgments to the effect that a particular action has a certain quality; they merely report the fact that a certain person, the judger, is experiencing certain emotions of approval and disapproval.

In the second place, many so-called intuitions about conduct are, Sidgwick holds, merely the reflection of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, p. 159, for an account of the sense in which this word is used.

fashions of the age, of the conventions of the class, or of the needs of the society to which the judger happens to belong. That witches are wicked and should be burned; that capitalists are wicked and should be dispossessed; that Germans are wicked and should be killed, are examples of such judgments passed respectively by the average citizen of the Middle Ages, by the average working-class Communist in 1937, and by the average Englishman in the years 1914-1918. These judgments would not, in Sidgwick's view, entail genuine moral intuitions about the nature of witches, capitalists and Germans. They belong rather to the category of what the twentieth century calls rationalizations—rationalizations, that is to say, of superstitious fear, class hatred and national expediency. As we shall see in the next chapter,<sup>1</sup> it is quite possible to hold that all ethical judgments are of this type.

Are there, on Sidgwick's view, any intuitions which satisfy the conditions that he has laid down? Are there, that is to say, any genuine moral principles whose truth is intuitively perceived? He mentions a number of which two are important. The first is the principle that, whatever good may be, the good of no one individual is of any greater or any less importance, than the equal good of another. The second is the principle that it is a man's duty to aim at good generally, and not at any particular part of it, for example, at that part of it which is his own happiness. From these two principles Sidgwick deduces what he calls the Principle of Rational Benevolence, namely, that it is no less a man's duty to try to produce good states of mind in other individuals than it is to produce them in himself, except in so far as he may have less power over other people's states of mind than he has over his own, or may feel less certain in their case than he is in his own what is good for them. These principles are implicit in the writings of the utilitarians, and it is not difficult to detect the influence which, in the form of unconscious assumptions, they exert upon their theories.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 373-382.

**Statement of Utilitarianism : The Meaning of the Term "Right Action".** Utilitarianism is a perfectly clear and understandable doctrine and is capable of being stated in summary form. As expounded by those philosophers with whom its name is chiefly associated, it seeks to provide an answer to two questions. First, what do we mean by a right action? This it answers by saying that a right action is the one which, of all those which are open to the agent, has on the whole the best consequences. The reasons which the utilitarian adduces in support of this answer have already been incidentally mentioned in the course of the criticism of Intuitionism in the last Chapter, where I endeavoured to demonstrate the impossibility of separating the judgment of an action from the judgment of its consequences, if only because of the impossibility of isolating the action from its consequences.<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), who may be regarded as the founder of modern Utilitarianism, is particularly severe in his strictures upon the willingness evinced by so many of his predecessors to take some consideration other than the consequences of an action into account, when judging its worth.

**That Happiness Alone is Good.** The second question which Utilitarianism seeks to answer is the question, what consequences are valuable; and to this it answers that happiness is alone valuable. Combining the two answers we reach the result that, in the words of John Stuart Mill, "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." When, therefore, a utilitarian wanted to know whether an action was right, all that he had to consider was its happiness-producing qualities; he then pronounced that action to be right which had the property of promoting happiness. This is the standard of "utility" to which Bentham and his followers invariably appeal, when seeking to adjudge the moral worth of an action,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 287-289.

against what they regard as the arbitrary moral judgments of the intuitionist school. For, said Bentham in effect, there are only two alternatives to my view. The first is that we should say that unhappiness is good, and that an action is right, therefore, because it produces unhappy consequences. The second is that we should adopt the intuitionist standpoint and affirm that a right action is that for which a person happens to feel a sentiment of moral approval. This last view he denounces as being a principle either of tyranny or caprice, for it entails either that A is despotically to impose his judgment of moral approval upon B, which is tyrannical, or that there is to be no recognized standard of morality by reference to which we can determine which of a number of contradictory judgments of approval is to be preferred, morality being thus reduced to a chaos of conflicting opinions, among which the prejudice of irresponsible caprice is entitled to as much respect as the considered judgment of the sage.

**Ethical Philosophy of Bentham.** Although Bentham's views are included in the ethical part of this book, his main interest was in politics. His most important work is entitled *Fragment on Government*, and he was interested in ethics only because he wanted to know by what means the springs of human conduct may be most effectively tapped by the legislator, in order to produce socially beneficial results. It is the practice of the legislator rather than the theorizing of the philosopher that interests him. "The art of legislation," he writes, "teaches how a multitude of men composing a community may be disposed to pursue that course which upon the whole is the most conducive to the happiness of the whole community, by means of motives to be applied by the legislator." Bentham was, indeed, little interested in private morality for its own sake. His interest lay in public happiness and the extent to which government could promote it. "Morality," he declared, "is the art of directing men's actions to the

production of the greatest quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view." At what point, he enquired, may a government whose object is the increase of public happiness legitimately interfere with the private individual? What, in fact, is the sphere of individual liberty, what of government interference, and where should the line be drawn between them? With these questions I hope to deal in Parts III and IV.<sup>1</sup>

I mention them here only because Bentham's political preoccupations may serve to discourage us from looking to him for what he has not to offer, namely, a subtle analysis of conduct forming the basis of a consistent ethical theory. This his follower, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), sought to provide, with what results we shall see below.<sup>2</sup> For the present, our concern is with Bentham's insistence that the basic principle of morals is what he calls the principle of "utility", which he states as follows. "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question." In other words, the criterion of the rightness of an action is to be found in the consequences of the action. Upon this view three observations may appropriately be made.

First, the criterion envisaged for a right action is an objective criterion. It is not what any person or body of persons thinks or feels about an action which makes it right—indeed, the thoughts or feelings of human beings are irrelevant when we are considering the rightness or wrongness of actions; what makes an action right is certain happenings which are produced by, and follow from, the action. If these are of a certain kind, the action is right; if not, not.

Secondly, it is clearly impossible, as I have already pointed out, that we should ever know *all* the consequences

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 525-527, and Chapter XIX, pp. 777-781.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 334-342 below.

of *any* action. Indeed, the total consequences of an action will presumably extend indefinitely into the future. It is therefore impossible that we should know in regard to any particular action whether it is absolutely and certainly right, since among those consequences of the action which have not yet been ascertained, or which have yet to occur, there may be consequences of such a kind as to necessitate a modification of any judgment which might be passed on the basis of *existing* information with regard to the action.

Thirdly, it is the actual consequences of actions and not their intended consequences which Bentham considers to be relevant to the judgment of their worth. Bentham is not always consistent on this point, yet his general view is sufficiently clear. It is that the actual concrete results of actions in terms of their effects upon individuals are what the legislator is required to take into account in deciding what kinds of conduct to encourage by his laws. This insistence upon the effects of actions upon the well-being of individuals constitutes Bentham's most distinctive contribution to ethical theory. Political formulas and ideals have no meaning for Bentham except in terms of their effects upon individuals.

**Bentham's Account of Virtue.** What account does this theory enable Bentham to give of what is commonly called virtue? Virtue is, for him, simply the habit of endeavouring to secure happiness, whether for ourselves or for others—and for Bentham, as I show below,<sup>1</sup> there is in the long run no difference between what will promote the greatest happiness of ourselves and the greatest happiness of others—by means of our actions. The greater the effort a man brings to this endeavour and the more foresight he shows, the more virtuous will he be. It is our duty, in other words, according to Bentham, to take thought as to the probable effects of our actions, and to do everything we can to ensure that these effects will be good.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 332, 333 below.

It is of course the case, as I have already pointed out, that, having passed the most careful judgment that I can on the data available as to the probable effects of my action, I may nevertheless judge wrongly. Things, in fact, may turn out unexpectedly, so that an action from which I have every reason to anticipate the best possible results actually produces very bad results. In such circumstances it would, on Bentham's view, be my duty to perform a wrong action, since it would be my duty to perform the action which I had reason to think would have the best possible results, and the fact that the action in question had bad results and was, therefore, a wrong action would not affect this duty.

**That Happiness or Pleasure is alone Desirable as an End.** I turn to the second main contention of the utilitarians that, when we are assessing the consequences of actions, only pleasure or happiness (the two words may be used synonymously) needs to be taken into account, since only pleasure is valuable. This maxim is laid down in a number of celebrated passages, of which I give three. The first is from Bentham:

"Nature has placed man under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. . . . We owe to them all our ideas; we refer to them all our judgments, and all the determinations of our life. He who pretends to withdraw himself from this subjection knows not what he says."

The second is from John Stuart Mill:

"Desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful are phenomena entirely inseparable . . . in strictness of language, two different modes of naming the same psychological fact: to think of an object as desirable (unless for the sake of its consequences), and to think of it as pleasant, are one and the same thing; and to desire anything, except in proportion



as the idea of it is pleasant, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility."

One more quotation from John Stuart Mill will clinch the matter:

"Pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and . . . all desirable things . . . are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain."

The effect of the two passages from Mill is to abolish the distinction which is commonly made between what is desirable and what is desired. Most people, I think, would distinguish between the meanings of these two words broadly as follows. They would say that while many things were desired, only some of these things were desirable, since only some of them were meet or fitting to be desired. In making this distinction they would be passing a judgment of value. Some things, they would be saying in effect, are such as ought to be desired, whether in fact they are desired or not. Mill says that there is only one thing which is such as ought to be desired, namely, pleasure. As he further maintains, following Bentham, that only pleasure is in fact desired, the distinction which is ordinarily made between desired and desirable disappears.

I am proposing to examine in a subsequent chapter<sup>1</sup> the doctrine that pleasure is alone desirable, and the allied though different doctrine that only pleasure is in fact desired. Here it will be sufficient to indicate some of the difficulties in which Mill became involved, when he endeavoured to work out his theory in detail. These difficulties arise from the attempt to combine the utilitarian doctrine that a right action is one which has the best consequences with the hedonist contention that pleasure alone is valuable, or, as it is generally put, that pleasure alone is the good. The difficulties will be thrown into relief, if we endeavour to answer two highly important questions. The first question is, "Is there more than one

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 400-415.

sort of pleasure and if so, which sort is the most valuable?" The second is, "Whose pleasure is it that is entitled to be taken into account?" I propose to consider Mill's answers to each of these questions separately.

**That there are Different Qualities of Pleasure and that we Ought to Cultivate the Higher.** Bentham refuses to make any distinction between kinds or qualities of pleasure. On his view only quantity of pleasure requires to be taken into account. If one pleasure is greater than another then, he held, it is the superior in point of worth. This position is summed up in Bentham's famous aphorism, "All other things being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry." In other words, so long as men are really happy, the source of their happiness is immaterial. This doctrine is logical and consistent, for if our scale of value is marked out only in units of pleasure, quantity of pleasure is the only value that we can measure.

This view was severely criticized on the score of immorality. Surely, it was said, some pleasures, those of the good man, for example, or the man of good taste, or the scholar, or the sage, are intrinsically more valuable than those of the pig or of the debauchee? Mill agreed that they were. He pointed out that the best men who have access to every kind of pleasure do, as a matter of fact, prefer certain pleasures to others. These preferred pleasures taken in sum constitute what is in effect an ideal which we recognize as being possessed of superior worth. "Of two pleasures," he writes, ". . . if one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, *even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent,*" (my italics) "and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority of quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account."

**Criticism of Mill's Distinction between Qualities of Pleasure.** The first reflection suggested by this assertion, for it is, indeed, an assertion and not an argument, is that it is circular. We are told that we may recognize a superior pleasure by reason of the fact that those best qualified to judge prefer it. There is, then, a class of persons possessed of what is to be regarded as superior judgment. How is this class of person to be recognized? By reference to what standard is the alleged superiority of their judgment to be assessed? The answer presumably is, by reference to the nature of the things which they judge to be desirable. Now the things which they judge to be desirable are the superior pleasures. The conclusion is that the superior pleasures may be known by reason of the fact that persons of superior judgment prefer them, and persons of superior judgment by reason of the fact that they prefer superior pleasures. Mill admittedly proceeds to point out that people do as a whole prefer the pleasures attendant upon the exercise of their higher faculties, as compared with a greater quantity of pleasure produced by the indulgence of their lower. A wise man would not consent to be a happy fool; a person of feeling would not consent to be base, even for a greater share of pleasure—of the pleasure, that is to say, of the foolish and the base. "It is better," says Mill, "to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."

The admission is fatal to the position that the only thing desirable is pleasure. If in a whole  $X$ ,  $y$  is the quantity of pleasure and  $z$  the quantity of something other than pleasure, which Mill denotes by the adjective "higher", Mill regards the value of the whole as greater if  $z$  is present, than it is if  $z$  is absent. But if  $y$ , the quantity of pleasure, is the only element of value, the amount of  $z$  which is present will not affect the value of the whole. It can only affect the whole, if  $z$  is regarded as possessing value in its own right. If, however,  $z$  is regarded as being simply pleasure, and not as *higher* pleasure, what is the point of making the distinction between pleasures implied by the

word higher? We can only conclude that Mill regards certain other things besides pleasure, namely, those indicated by the words "superior quality," when he speaks of "superior quality" pleasures, as being desirable, and that, in so far as he does so, he gives up the hedonist position in the form in which he professes to hold it, namely, that pleasure is the only thing that is desirable.

It appears, then, to be impossible to hold that pleasure is the only thing which is desirable, and yet to maintain that pleasures can differ in quality.

**That we ought to Aim at the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number.** The attempt to answer the question, whose pleasure is entitled to count, leads Mill into even greater difficulties. The answer officially given to the question is "that everybody is to count for one, and nobody for more than one". Let us consider this answer in the light of Mill's hedonist contentions. Broadly, three positions are possible: (A) that I am so constituted that I can only desire my own pleasure; (B) that I can desire other things, but *ought* only to desire my own pleasure; (C) that I can desire other things, but *ought* to desire the greatest happiness on the whole, the greatest happiness on the whole being commonly taken to mean the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Bentham at various times holds all three positions. (A) It is the first law of nature, he says, to wish our own happiness, and his general view is, as we have seen, expressed in the assertion<sup>1</sup> that pleasure and pain are the two sovereign masters of human nature. He also holds (B) that, since pleasure is a good, the most virtuous man is he who calculates most accurately how to promote his own pleasure. Virtue, in fact, is the habit of accurately estimating the course of conduct which is most likely to secure one's own happiness. (C) The greatest happiness of the greatest number is, Bentham holds, the ultimate standard of value in a community, and is that at which the legislator should aim, the good legislator

<sup>1</sup> See p. 328.

being one who keeps this standard always in mind and directs his legislation by reference to it. Hence the good legislator is he who, being concerned to promote the welfare of society, makes an accurate calculation of the effects which his measures will have in increasing the happiness of its members.

And not only the good legislator, but also the good citizen! He, too, should aim at the general happiness. And if it be asked why he should, or why he should find satisfaction in other people's happiness, if he can only desire his own (position A), or why any course of action should appeal to him as being good or right except in so far as he judges it likely to increase his own happiness (position B), Bentham answers by casually invoking the operation of a vaguely conceived social sense which, he holds, leads us to take pleasure in the pleasure of other persons.

Bentham, as I have already remarked, failed to work out any detailed and consistent theory of ethics, but, if pressed, he would defend his position much as Hobbes, whose treatment of pity I have already referred to, defends a similar position,<sup>1</sup> by saying that benevolence is a motive to action, only because men are so constituted that the pleasures of others give them pleasure. Finally, Bentham might take a leaf out of the book of Glaucon and Adeimantus<sup>2</sup> and point out that, since society takes pains to encourage socially benevolent and to discourage socially injurious actions, the action which benefits other people will, in a good society, be the same as the action which benefits oneself.

**J. S. Mill on the Duty of Promoting Others' Happiness.** Bentham's theory identifies "is" and "ought." To quote an illuminating judgment by M. Halévy, Bentham believed "that he had discovered in the principle of utility a practical commandment as well as a scientific law, a proposition which teaches us at one and the same time what is and what ought to be". But things cannot, one feels, be quite

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 22-23.

as simple and as pleasant as that. There must, one regretfully concludes, be something wrong with a theory which always identifies what one wants to do with what one ought to do. It was the difficulty presented by the oversimplicity of Bentham's view which J. S. Mill (1806-1873) set himself to meet. His solution is curious. Mill, like Bentham, officially holds position (A). Mill was, however, an exceedingly public-spirited man, imbued by an intense dislike of what he calls the selfish egoist "devoid of every feeling or care but those that centre in his own miserable individuality". It is, therefore, a matter of prime importance for Mill to defend Utilitarianism from the charge of selfish Egoism, and to prove that the good utilitarian, no less than the good intuitionist, is required to aim at the welfare of others. If, then, he can show that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the one supreme good, it will, it is obvious, be the duty of the good utilitarian to try to promote it. He attempts to do so as follows.

"No reason," he says, "can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require, that happiness is a good: that each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons."

The argument is a bad one. What Mill is, in effect, saying is that, if A's pleasure is a good to him, B's pleasure a good to him and C's pleasure a good to him, and so on, then the aggregate pleasures of A, B and C will be good to all three of them taken together. Therefore, they will be a good to each one taken separately.

But the pleasures of A, B and C are no more to be moulded into a single whole than are their persons. Nor is it clear why, even if they could be so moulded, the resultant pleasure aggregate should, on the basis of Mill's hedonist premises, appear desirable to any of them singly. The point is obvious enough, and it was obvious to many

minds less acute than Mill's. The philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) justly observed that the aggregate of all persons is nobody, yet every good must, on Mill's premises, be a good for somebody; therefore, again on Mill's premises, the good of all, being the good of nobody, cannot be good at all; while Carlyle not unfairly caricatured Mill's argument by saying that, because each pig desires for himself the greatest amount of a limited quantity of hog-wash, we are entitled, if Mill is right, to conclude that each pig necessarily desires the greatest quantity of hog-wash for every other pig and for all the pigs.

The criticism serves to throw into relief the difficulty which underlies Mill's whole theory, namely, that of holding simultaneously both position A and position C. The fallacy involved has already been indicated in a previous chapter<sup>1</sup> by Bishop Butler's criticism of Hobbes's account of pity. The consistent egoist cannot give a satisfactory account of either pity or sympathy. For even if it be admitted that sympathy constitutes a motive for action only in so far as the alleviation of the misery of others confers pleasure upon the agent, the possibility of the agent's pleasure is dependent upon and conditioned by what happens to other people. It is conditioned, in other words, by the possibility of our being moved disinterestedly by the misfortunes of other people. Adam Smith (1723-1790), an objective utilitarian—he held that a right action is one that makes for the happiness of the community—who was, nevertheless, not hampered, as were Bentham and Mill, by an egoistic psychology, treats sympathy more convincingly. "Sympathy," he writes, in his *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, "is not a transfer to ourselves of passions which we note in others; it is an envisaging of the objective situation which our neighbour confronts, so that it calls forth in us independently its due emotional reaction." He even goes so far as to insist that "a view of the facts may arouse us to indignation for a man's wrongs, even when he does not feel it himself".

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 185, 186.

Not being tied to an egoistic psychology, Adam Smith is enabled to do justice to what would be normally called the altruistic sentiments. His account gives full weight to the pain which we feel for others' distress, and the pleasure which we take in alleviating it, without making the mistake of supposing that the removal of *our* pain, the promotion of *our* pleasure, constitute the sole motive for action taken to relieve distress. The mistake consists precisely in a failure to see that, since an initial concern for the welfare of other people is a condition of my sympathetic pleasure in the alleviation of their distress, such interest cannot itself be dependent upon or conditioned by my pleasure. If, therefore, we are to admit that sympathy can constitute a genuine motive for action, we must also agree that it is possible for the agent to feel an interest in something other than his own states of consciousness. If he *can* feel an interest in something other, then it is not the case, as Mill's position A asserts, that he can only desire his own pleasure.

**Mill on Social Good.** Mill vainly tries to escape from this difficulty.

The principle of utility which he maintains we ought to follow as our guide to conduct, aims at producing the greatest happiness of the greatest number; if the happiness of the individual conflicts with this principle, the individual must go to the wall. "In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth," he writes, "we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality." It is right, therefore, to promote the happiness of others. But how can this be, if one is so constituted that one can only desire the happiness of oneself?

Let us suppose that A can, by doing an action P, produce an amount of happiness X for himself, and an amount of happiness Y for three other people. Let us suppose that by doing another action Q he can produce an amount of



happiness C for himself, and an amount of happiness D for three other people. Let us further assume that X is greater than C, and Y is less than D, but that the whole X plus Y is less than the whole C plus D. Then ought A to choose action P or action Q?

According to Mill's first premise, namely that a man *can* only desire his own greatest happiness, the choice does not arise because A can only choose P, since X is greater than C.

According to his second premise, that "each person's happiness is a good to that person", A ought to choose P, since he ought to pursue what is good.

But according to his third premise, that a man ought to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, he ought to choose action Q, on the ground that the total happiness C plus D is greater than the total X plus Y.

The conclusion derived from the third premise is, then, that a man ought to pursue something other than his own pleasure, namely the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and furthermore that he ought to pursue it even if it conflicts with his own pleasure.

Now it may be argued that though this is giving up one form of the hedonist position—the form, namely, which asserts that a man *can* only desire his own pleasure, it is not giving it up in the form in which it asserts that pleasure is the sole good; for by insisting that he ought to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, Mill is still maintaining that pleasure is the only thing that ought to be pursued, although the pleasure in question is no longer that of the agent.

But in maintaining that the individual ought not to pursue his own pleasure always, but other people's pleasure even at the cost of his own, we are admitting that the individual can and ought to desire something which may have no relation to his own pleasure, namely, the good of the community. Now there is no necessary relation between the good of the community and the individual's pleasure.

Hence Mill implicitly admits that the individual ought to desire at least one thing besides his own pleasure, namely, the good of the community to which he belongs.

**Mill's Treatment of Virtue.** Mill's treatment of virtue is equally unconvincing. The utilitarian theory does not, according to Mill, deny that virtue can be desired. "It maintains," he says, "not only that virtue is to be desired, but that it is to be desired disinterestedly, for itself." Utilitarians, Mill continues, "recognize as a psychological fact the possibility of its being, to the individual, a good in itself, without looking to any end beyond it."

The admission seems at first sight to give up altogether the principle that only happiness can be desired. Mill, however, endeavours to reconcile it with his main doctrine, by asserting that though virtue may be desired as an end now, it has only attained this position because it was originally desired as a means—a means, that is, to happiness. People apparently found out that the practice of virtue tended to produce happiness, desired virtue as a means to happiness, and in due course by force of the habit of desiring virtue, forgot the reason for which they originally desired it, and desired it as an end in itself. This account of our approval of virtue is an application of the doctrine of the Association of Ideas which J. S. Mill derived from Hartley and from his father, James Mill. An outline of this doctrine will be given in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

For the present it is sufficient to refer to the conclusion, which I have already sought to establish in a different connection,<sup>2</sup> that the fact that something may once have been desired as a means to an end, does not necessarily mean that it is not now desired as an end; this only follows, if we are prepared to accept explanations in terms of origins as being universal and exhaustive. No teleologist would admit that they are. To take an instance given by Canon Rashdall, the fact that a savage can only count on the fingers of his two hands does not invalidate the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 380-382.   <sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30, 31.

truth of the multiplication table, just as the fact that religion began in devil worship, Totemism and exogamy, does not entitle us to conclude that it is not religion now.

Similarly, the fact that the desire for virtue began as a desire for something else—if it is a fact—does not alter the fact that it is desired for itself now; and, if it is so desired, it invalidates the principle that happiness is the only possible object of human desire.

Nor is it an answer to this argument to say, as Mill does, that in being desired as an end in itself, virtue is desired "as part of happiness". It is a matter of common experience that so far from always promoting happiness, the practice of virtue very frequently promotes the reverse. Novelists and dramatists have made us familiar with the antithesis between virtue and happiness, and one of the stock conflicts of tragedy is the conflict between the desire to act virtuously, on the one hand, and the desire to obtain happiness by following one's affections on the other. It is therefore, most unlikely, in the light of this common experience of mankind, that when men strive after virtue, they should *always* do so because they consider it to be a part of happiness.

**The View that Conduct Promoting Personal and Conduct Promoting Others' Happiness are always Identical Inconsistent with Admitted Facts.** Untenable in theory, the assumed identification between the positions which I have labelled A and C<sup>1</sup> is inconsistent with admitted facts. It is, of course, perfectly true that society takes care to encourage those actions which benefit it and to discourage those which harm it. Thus, as I pointed out in the first chapter in the discussion of the position adopted by Glaucon and Adeimantus,<sup>2</sup> there is a general presumption to the effect that a man will obtain more pleasure from socially benevolent conduct than from socially harmful conduct. Honesty, in fact, is the best, if only because it is the most expedient, policy. Again, as Butler pointed out,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 332 above.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 22-24.

there is a general coincidence between those actions which proceed from an enlightened selfishness and those which are motivated by benevolence. But to conclude, as Bentham, for example, does, that there is a *necessary* identity between actions which promote the greatest pleasure of the self and those which promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of other people is, I think, clearly unjustifiable.

To revert to a hypothetical illustration given on a previous page, if I am marooned with companions on a desert island and know where there is a store of food I shall, assuming that I am completely callous and unfeeling, promote my own greatest pleasure by consuming it privily, while I shall promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people by disclosing its whereabouts and distributing it equally among my companions. The conscienceless issuer of worthless shares, who gets away with the money before his fraud is exposed and lives happily throughout the rest of a long life during which he exhibits all the domestic virtues, can scarcely be said to promote the happiness of the greatest number; yet it is difficult to be sure that he does not enjoy himself.

A further point to be noted in connection with "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" formula has a certain political significance.

**That the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number is not Identical with the Greatest Happiness on the Whole.** Mill, as we have seen, held that a right action is the one which has better consequences in the way of happiness than any other which it is open to the agent to perform. He believed, that is to say, that it was a man's duty to maximize happiness on the whole. Now both he and the other utilitarians seem to have taken it for granted that the greatest amount of happiness on the whole was identical with the greatest happiness of the greatest number. For example, Sidgwick's *Principle of Rational Benevolence*, which I have already quoted<sup>1</sup>, lays it down that everybody

<sup>1</sup> See p. 323 above.

has an equal right to be considered, when we are asking whose happiness is relevant to our estimation of right actions. "Everybody," in fact, "is to count for one, and nobody for more than one." Possibly! But to say that everybody should count for one, and that we ought, therefore, to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, is not the same as to say that we ought to promote the greatest amount of happiness on the whole. It is possible to conceive of two societies A and B such that, while the happiness which exists among the members of A is more evenly distributed than that which exists among the members of B, the total amount of happiness enjoyed by members of B is, nevertheless, greater than that which is enjoyed by the members of A. For example, the ideal States of Aristotle and Plato might, from this point of view, qualify as B States, if only because they would have contained or, Aristotle's State at least, would have contained large numbers of slaves, who, we may suppose, would have had a meagre share of whatever happiness was available. Aristotle's State, therefore, may well have exemplified a society in which, while a high degree of happiness was enjoyed on the whole, the happiness was very unevenly distributed. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine a highly equalitarian State in which, owing to material poverty, the general level of happiness is low. It is also conceivable that the economic system which enabled the State to become an equalitarian one, might also be responsible for the low level of material prosperity. The case of Russia in the years immediately succeeding the Revolution is a case of this kind.

Which of these two kinds of states is the better, I will not presume to say. My point is merely that they are different, and that, if state B be judged the more desirable, then actions which utilitarian theory seeks to justify on the ground that they promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number will not always be right, in the utilitarian sense of the word "right", since they will not always promote the greatest amount of happiness on the whole.

If, on the other hand, we are prepared to accept as self-evidently true Sidgwick's Principle of Rational Benevolence, then we cannot always justify an action on the ground that it produces the greatest amount of happiness on the whole. To sum up, the greatest amount of happiness on the whole in a community, is not necessarily the same as the greatest happiness of the greatest number of persons in that community.

**Critical Survey of Utilitarianism.** We are now in a position to take a critical survey of the theory of Objective Utilitarianism as a whole. Of the many criticisms to which it is exposed, I will mention three.

(1) **THE DIFFICULTY OF ACCOUNTING FOR ALTRUISM ON AN EGOISTIC BASIS.** First, utilitarian ethics, as expounded by most of adherents of the theory, is tied to a psychological doctrine which asserts in effect that some change in the psychological state of the agent is the only possible object of human action. This change has usually been identified with an increase in the agent's pleasure. Thus the doctrine of Psychological Hedonism is the starting point of most utilitarian theories, which maintain with John Stuart Mill that "pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends", and with Bentham that "nature has placed man under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." These statements, if they mean what they say, mean that the only possible motive which a man can have for his actions is that of increasing his own pleasure. This doctrine may conceivably be true, although, as I shall try to show in Chapter XI,<sup>1</sup> there are good grounds for supposing it to be false. But, if it is true, then it is not possible also to maintain that men *ought* to be virtuous, that they *ought* to try to promote the welfare of others, or that they *ought* to aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number. If, in fact, we begin by basing an ethical theory on the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 400-412.

foundation of an egoistic psychology, we can assign no meaning to the word "ought", except a meaning derived from expediency. We can say, for example, that a man ought to behave in a particular way because, if he does, he will derive more satisfaction than he will derive from behaving in any other way, but we cannot say that he ought to behave in a particular way because it is right, and right because it will promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. For there is no reason why a man should wish to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, except in so far as it conduces to his own, and that it does not always do this, has already been pointed out. The conclusion is that an egoistic psychology can afford no basis for the concept of duty. Yet the utilitarians were imbued with a very proper respect for duty, and, though Bentham was unregenerately logical—"the word 'ought'," he said, "if it means anything at all 'ought' to be excluded from the dictionary"—J. S. Mill inveighed, as we have seen, with considerable emphasis against the selfish egoist.

(2) THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF AVOIDING THE ADMISSION OF INTUITIONS. Directly he abandons the psychology of Egoism, the utilitarian is driven to admit some at least of the contentions of the intuitionist. For, directly he says that we *ought* to do so and so, because of such and such results which will follow if it is done, he is implying that such and such results are desirable and are such as *ought* to be promoted. In the long run, as I have already tried to show<sup>1</sup>, there can be no basis for such a claim except an intuition which it is not possible to defend by reason.

Nor, as I have already pointed out,<sup>2</sup> does the utilitarian disown intuitions. His theory entails, it is obvious, the admission of such intuitions as that pleasure is the sole good, that we ought to maximize pleasure on the whole, and that the pleasure of every person is of equal value with

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 166-171.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 322, 323 above.

the pleasure of every other person, even though he does not call them intuitions. Some resort to intuitions on the part of any ethical theory is, indeed, as I have tried to show,<sup>1</sup> inevitable. Hedonism, for example, if it claims to be a principle of guidance for conduct and not merely a statement of psychological fact, must affirm not merely that pleasure is the end which men do in fact pursue, but that each man *ought* to pursue his own greatest pleasure. Now directly this assertion is made, the question presents itself, why ought he to pursue it? Many people would, if the question were put to them, insist that they do not always act in the way which they *think* will bring them the greatest pleasure, and if they are to be told that they ought so to act, they are perfectly entitled to ask for reasons why they ought. And in effect there are no reasons.

Pleasure, says the hedonist, is a good and of two pleasures, the greater ought to be preferred. Sidgwick, who frankly admitted intuitions as the basis of his theory, affirms that they are deliverances of what he calls the practical reason. We just see, he says, that of two pleasures the greater ought to be preferred; we just see that, if my pleasure is a good, so too is the equal pleasure of any other person; and we just see that, if the happiness of another man, or of a number of other men, is greater than mine, then it ought to be preferred to mine, because it is a greater good.

It is quite probable that we do just see these things, see them, that is to say, to be reasonable and right, although we cannot give reasons for our "seeing". But Bishop Butler also "just saw them", and embodied them in his principles of Self-love—I ought to act in such a way as to maximize my own happiness—and Benevolence—I ought to act in such a way as to maximize the happiness of other people; yet Butler was an objective intuitionist. Moreover, Butler recognized more clearly than the utilitarians that the two principles, the principle of Self-love and the principle of Benevolence, *might* conflict,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 166-171.



although he also held that actions proceeding from enlightened selfishness and actions prompted by benevolence were more often identical than was generally supposed. But, by postulating an over-riding principle of Conscience, he provided machinery for resolving the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Utilitarianism, while in the last resort it relies no less freely on intuitions than the contrary doctrine, refrains as far as possible from admitting the fact, and, when it is forced to mention it, does so only with the greatest circumspection. It is from this unwillingness to admit the intuitional basis upon which Utilitarianism rests, that there proceed such unconvincing arguments as that which is designed to show that the general and individual good do not really conflict, or that, in promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number, I am also promoting my own greatest pleasure. If we remain unconvinced by these arguments, we are confronted with the question, how are we to decide between the deliverances of the practical reason, I ought to maximize my own good, and I ought to maximize that of other people? If we are prepared to accept the authority of Butler's conscience, the decision is made for us, but then we shall also be committed to accepting his view that conscience derives its authority from another world, and that it is by reference to God's will that the problem of conduct is in the last resort to be solved. Unless we are prepared to follow Butler's arguments into the next world in order to resolve the puzzles of this one, there can, it would seem, be no way of deciding the conflict between these two intuitions except by invoking another.

Once the necessity for admitting intuitions is frankly faced, the question arises whether we must not extend their operation more widely than even Sidgwick would be prepared to allow. Most utilitarians would be willing, if pressed, to agree that the assertion, pleasure is a good, is based on an intuition, but is there, it may be asked, an intuition to the effect that pleasure is the *sole* good?

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 196-201.

It seems doubtful. Most people would, I imagine, confess to intuitions to the effect that beauty is a good, that truth is a good, and that moral virtue is a good. The line of thought indicated by this suggested expansion of the scope and increase in the number of our intuitions of value will be developed in Chapter XII.<sup>1</sup>

3. THAT SOME STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS ARE VALUABLE IN THEMSELVES. It has been suggested above<sup>2</sup> that in the last resort we must look for the raw material of our ethical philosophising to the deliverances of the popular consciousness; for, in the last resort, there is no other court of appeal. Now the popular consciousness undoubtedly holds that certain states of mind are valuable in themselves. No doubt its intuitions to this effect are neither universal nor unanimous, nor are their implications always consistent with the implications of other intuitions which are equally strongly held. They are, nevertheless, entitled to respect. Let us imagine a case in point. A man holds certain beliefs to be true and important, holds them so strongly that he is prepared to suffer for them. These beliefs are, we will suppose, political or religious; they constitute, in fact, the tenets of what would normally be called a faith. This faith, we will further suppose, is not the dominant one at the time; its opponents are strong, its adherents oppressed and subject to persecution which compels them to fight for their faith. The man whose case we are imagining is, we will further suppose, captured by his adversaries and put to the torture. Will he recant his opinions? Will he betray his faith? In spite of the torture he does neither, and in due course he dies under it. Of his martyrdom, we will suppose, nobody hears, while the cause for which the martyr suffers is lost, the faith suppressed as a heresy, and its followers persecuted, until none remain.

Granted these assumptions, we may, I think, safely conclude that from the determination and fortitude of our

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 439-447. <sup>2</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 173, 174.

hypothetical martyr no good results of any kind follow. On the contrary, the results which we are entitled to postulate are almost certainly such as would normally be called bad, including, as they do, the sadistic gratification of the torturers, appalling pain to the torturee, and a convincing demonstration that ideas can be stamped out by persecution. Nevertheless, most people would, I think, hold that the fortitude and resolution of the torturee were morally praiseworthy, they would, that is to say, pass a judgment of moral approval upon his state of mind. To generalize this example, we may say that states of mind are on occasion morally approved by the popular consciousness apart from their consequences and, further, that a willingness to do what a man believes to be his duty is thought to be valuable, even if the consequences are negligible or bad. Such judgments form part of the common experience of mankind, and, it might well be said, any moral theory which fails to make provision for them must, in respect of its failure, be regarded as faulty.

**The Historical Significance of Utilitarianism.** If the foregoing criticisms are valid, Utilitarianism no less than Intuitionism appears defective as an ethical theory. Each theory fails to make adequate provision for admitted facts of moral experience. Intuitionism fails to make provision for the fact that we do habitually judge by results and find it difficult to believe that good motives and good intentions are enough. Utilitarianism fails to make provision for the facts, (1) that some states of mind are commonly judged to be good independently of actions and the results of actions, and (2) that intuitions lie at the basis of all ethical theories including Utilitarianism itself, with the corollary that, if intuitions are to be admitted, the restriction of our intuitional judgments of value to the judgment that pleasure alone is valuable is arbitrary.

I shall endeavour in Chapter XII to sketch the outline of a theory of ethics which, though admittedly very far

from being adequate, does seek to make provision for those facts of moral experience which, if these criticisms are justified, both Intuitionism and Utilitarianism overlook.

One comment of an historical character will serve to relate the discussions of this chapter to those of Part III. The thought of the utilitarians dominated the early-middle years of the nineteenth century. These years saw the climax of the Industrial Revolution. Vast profits were made by the *entrepreneurs* of industry, yet the condition of the mass of the people remained almost as bad as it had been before the great increase in wealth which resulted from the application of scientific invention to productive processes. Bentham and James and John Stuart Mill were men of humane and enlightened views; they had the welfare of the people at heart, and sought to liberate them from every authority that could hamper their freedom, from every dogma and prejudice that could oppress their spirit.<sup>1</sup> It is, indeed, impossible for one who reflects upon proposals, which are summarized in Chapter XIV, not to carry away a conviction of the immense concern which their authors felt for the wellbeing of individual men and women. Yet during the period when they were writing, the economic condition of most men and women was in fact very bad. Is it not curious, to say the least of it, that amid so much that is advanced and enlightened on the subject of politics, there is in the writings of the utilitarians so little recognition of the fact that economics is the concern of politics. Why, one wonders, are not the proposals for ameliorating the political status of the people supplemented by proposals for improving their economic condition?

The answer is, because of the economic theory of *laissez faire* which taught that any artificial interference with the iron laws of supply and demand could not be other than harmful. This theory, which was maintained by James Mill and Bentham, no less than by Adam Smith, Ricardo

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 519-527.

and Cobden, provided an admirable theoretical background for the workings of Victorian Capitalism. It proclaimed that, since a man would always do what paid him best, and since he was the best judge of what would pay him best, he could plan and manage much better for himself than any person or body could plan and manage for him. Therefore the best economic arrangement must inevitably be that which actually obtained, since this, being brought about by the play of the competing economic motives of free competitive individuals, must be the collective expression of what each man individually thought best for himself. Now this theory had its ethical side. It was coupled with, and indeed entailed, a mixture of Psychological Hedonism—a man will always do what he thinks will give him most pleasure—and Universalistic Utilitarianism—the State and the individual ought to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number—which were the distinctive, albeit the inconsistent, tenets of the objective utilitarians. Thus the distinctively utilitarian view of human nature and the distinctively utilitarian theory of ethics contributed, throughout the nineteenth century, to effect a separation between politics and economics, which enabled politicians to justify their natural inclination to leave economic affairs to look after themselves. For if every man always did what was best for himself, the total effect must, it was thought, be what was best for everybody, the doctrine of each for himself working out by a pre-arranged harmony into each for all. But as James Martineau remarked, “from each for self to each for all there is no road”, and the misery of the masses during the nineteenth century presently forced statesmen to concern themselves with economics. Towards the end of his life John Stuart Mill was endeavouring to heal the split between politics and economics which the early nineteenth century economists had made, and was rapidly moving in the direction of some form of socialist theory.<sup>1</sup> But his departure from *laissez faire* was only achieved at

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, p. 723.

the cost of effecting a further breach in the structure of the utilitarian ethical and psychological doctrines which he had inherited from Bentham and from his father, James Mill.

*Books*

- ×SIDGWICK, HENRY. *Methods of Ethics*.  
 BENTHAM, JEREMY. *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.  
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## CHAPTER X: SUBJECTIVIST THEORIES OF ETHICS

**Introductory. General Characteristics of Subjectivist Theories.** All the views which we have considered hitherto agree in holding that actions, characters, and situations possess ethical characteristics in their own right. They are good or bad, right or wrong, independently of what any person or body of persons thinks or feels about them. These ethical characteristics are, for the objective intuitionist, intrinsic features of the actions, characters, or situations which they characterise, and they are revealed to the consciousness of the good man by the intuition of a faculty known as the moral sense. To the utilitarian, ethical qualities belong to actions only in so far as they produce certain effects, although the effects themselves are regarded as possessing ethical characteristics in their own right. All the views hitherto considered agree, therefore, in holding that when we make an ethical judgment about a situation, we are judging about the characteristics which that situation apparently possesses independently of our judgment—characteristics which our judgment, if it is correct, reports and by which our feelings, when we morally approve or disapprove of what we judge, are evoked. Subjectivist theories deny this. Subjectivist theories deny that is to say, that characters, actions and situations possess ethical characteristics in their own right, and assert that, in so far as they can be said to possess ethical characteristics at all, they do so only in the sense in which these characteristics are attributed to them by our judgments, or are conferred upon them by our feelings. If there were no judgments and no feelings, then, subjectivists agree, there would be no ethical characteristics. "There is nothing

right or wrong but thinking makes it so"; "Goodness like everything else is a matter of taste"; "It is the human mind which bestows values upon things"; are typical subjectivist statements. Now all these statements, and the theories which they illustrate, possess the common characteristic of defining good by reference to a state of mind on the part of some, most, or all men. They all, that is to say, imply in one way or another that, if there were no states of mind, there would be no such thing as good.

But the states of mind by reference to which good is defined are very various. "By good," says Professor Royce, in his book *Studies of Good and Evil*, "we mean whatever we regard as something to be welcomed, pursued, won, grasped, held, persisted in, preserved." Moreover, different theories define such mental states differently.

Subjectivist theories are, accordingly, very numerous. As it is impossible within the limits of a single chapter to do justice to all of them, to specify all the different mental attitudes which they regard as relevant to the establishment of good, and to enumerate all the theories in which these attitudes are embodied, I will select three main types of subjectivist theory which may be taken as fairly representative. These are, first, theories based upon an egoistic psychology, characteristic examples of which are to be found in the philosophies of Hobbes and Spinoza; secondly, a form of subjectivism which is a variety of Utilitarianism, and of which Hume may be taken as a characteristic exponent; and, thirdly, subjectivist theories which are derived from theories which are not themselves ethical, for example, scientific theories about the nature of evolution, or political theories about the origin and nature of society. Of these last Herbert Spencer's ethics affords a good example.

## I. THEORIES OF ETHICS BASED UPON AN EGOISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological Principles of Hobbes (1588-1679).  
The writings of Hobbes are more important in the



history of political than in that of ethical theory. Some account of Hobbes's political theory will be given in Part III;<sup>1</sup> here we are concerned only with his ethical views.

Hobbes begins with a psychological statement. All men, he says, are egoists. This statement is in the nature of a dogma; it seemed to Hobbes self-evident that Egoism was the fundamental law of human nature. Hobbes's Egoism was, however, reinforced by a certain theory of knowledge. This theory, which is known as Solipsism,<sup>2</sup> asserts that the only objects which I can possibly know are my own states of mind. If I can only know my own states of mind, nothing other than my own states of mind can, it is obvious, concern me.

If Hobbes is right in thinking that we are all egoists, he is faced with the necessity of answering the question, how did the belief in the existence of altruism arise? He answers it, not very convincingly,<sup>3</sup> by affirming that men are free to entertain whatsoever ideas about themselves they please. They may, therefore, think about themselves either truly or erroneously. In so far as they think about themselves truly, they cannot but come to certain conclusions which will be to the effect that, since, man is by nature purely egoistic, self-interest can be the only motive for action, and the advantaging of the self the only end of conduct. To realize that this is so, is to substitute an enlightened for an unthinking Egoism, for once having realized it, we are led to adopt right views in regard to the nature both to the individual and the community. Hobbes's conclusions in regard to the community are important and will be summarized in Chapter XIII.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 472-478, for an account of Hobbes's political theory.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account of Solipsism see my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter II, pp. 55-9.

<sup>3</sup> There cannot, as I shall try to show in the next Chapter (see pp. 387-392) be a convincing answer to this question on the basis of a purely egoistic psychology.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 474-478.

**Hobbes's Attitude to Human Nature.** So far as the individual is concerned, the most important conclusion derived by Hobbes from his egoistic psychology is a completely subjectivist theory of good. Good, he holds, is whatever conduces to the individual's advantage. This type of theory has a certain affinity with what in a previous connection I have called the scientific view of human nature,<sup>1</sup> that is to say, the view of human nature which interprets its present condition in terms of its origins. Hobbes, as we shall see later, makes a distinction between man in the state of nature and man in society. What is called morality is, he holds with Glaucon<sup>2</sup> in Plato's Republic, a creation of society. Granted, therefore, that there was a pre-social condition of man, it will follow that pre-social man or, as Hobbes calls him "natural" man, will be non-moral, and the correct method for the approach and understanding of man will be the sort of method which we should adopt with any other kind of animal. What, we shall have to ask, is his natural disposition, what sort of faculties has he, what is the mode of behaviour appropriate to him, by what sort of motives will the actions of a creature possessing such and such a disposition and such and such faculties be prompted? We are asked, then, to adopt a standpoint for our enquiry into human nature, from which man is regarded as a creature sprung from certain origins and endowed, as a result, with certain propensities, psychological and physiological, which determine his reactions to the environment in which he is placed. If, then, we can discover the nature of man's propensities, if we can determine the character of man's environment, we shall understand those reactions of the propensities to the environment which constitute human behaviour. In searching for the origin of those propensities which are our moral notions, it is upon physiology that Hobbes chiefly relies. Looking to man's primitive equipment of appetite and desire, he concludes that whatever satisfies appetite, whatever attracts desire,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 231-241.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, p. 21.

is good. "But whatsoever," he writes, "is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth 'good'; and the object of his hate and aversion, 'evil'; and of his contempt, 'vile' and 'inconsiderable.' For these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them, there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man, where there is no commonwealth, or, in a commonwealth, from the person that representeth it." In a word, that which we desire is good; that for which we feel aversion, evil. Or, more shortly, the meaning of good is what we desire, of evil, that for which we feel aversion.

**Hobbes's Account of the Virtues and Vices.** The feelings of appetite and desire which Hobbes describes in physiological terms as movements within the body, are pleasures; the feeling of aversion is a pain. When these feelings arise, not from the presence of objects, but from their absence, they become respectively joy and grief. From these simple passions all the more complex ones are derived. Appetite combined with the expectation of satisfying it is hope; aversion with the expectation of being hurt by its object, fear; aversion, with the hope of avoiding the hurt by resistance, courage; sudden courage, anger; grief, for the discovery of some failure in our abilities, shame; and so on. There is throughout this list a persistent identification between good and pleasant, evil and unpleasant. Starting from the assumption that I call good what ministers to my pleasure, and that by calling a thing good I mean merely that it is pleasant, we shall expect to find an analysis of all the so-called altruistic virtues into their elements of expediency and self-interest. Nor does Hobbes disappoint us. Altruistic sentiments, he agrees, *appear* to suggest that there is a good which exists outside the agent, but this appearance, he maintains, is delusive, for they are, in fact, concerned always and only to promote

the agent's pleasure. Pity, as we have already seen,<sup>1</sup> arises from the thought that a like calamity may befall ourselves. Laughter is a "sudden glory" caused either by something we do that pleases us, or by the apprehension of something deformed in another, the contrast between which and our own lack of the deformity gives us pleasure. The "worth" or "value" of a man is the same as his "price", and his "price" is simply what another would give for the use of his power. Honour is simply "the manifestation of the value we set" on a man because of our estimation of his "worth"; cruelty is men's "contempt, or little sense of the calamity of others . . . proceeding from the security of their own fortune." In opposition to the Greek thinkers, Hobbes urges that men have by nature no social character. They are not, that is to say, by nature political and social beings; they seek society not for its own sake, but only in order that they may enjoy its honours and win its prizes. Thus our delight in social gatherings is always self-interested—we meet in order to joke at others' expense, backbite the absent, boast about ourselves and display our learning or wit. In a word, the mind of man is concerned only with its own glory; his senses with their own pleasures.

**Ethics of Spinoza (1637-1677).** I have illustrated Hobbes's views in some little detail because his philosophy provides the most consistent and unflinching exposition of a certain type of ethical theory. This theory is egoistic. It envisages, that is to say, some change in the state of the agent as the only possible motive of action. It is also hedonistic, since the state whose promotion is recognized as a motive is always pleasurable and only pleasurable, naturalistic in the sense that it is based upon an alleged scientific study of the nature of man as just one among the many inhabitants of the natural world, subject to the same laws as those which determine the behaviour of his fellow creatures, and subjectivist, in the sense that the meaning which it gives to the word "good" is "that

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 185.

which happens to be the object of appetite or desire". Although it forms part of a very different philosophy, the conclusions of Spinoza's ethical theory are not dissimilar, and a brief summary will suffice.

Metaphysically, Spinoza may be classed as an absolute monist; he maintained, that is to say, that the universe was a single unity which was God, and that everything which exists is an aspect or an expression of this fundamental divine unity. Apart from the whole which is God, the individual is nothing; his being is derived wholly from God, of whose nature he is a partial expression. But although only an item in the whole which is God, the individual nevertheless plays within that whole a necessary and essential rôle. For although he is only a partial expression of God, if it were not for him, God would not be what He is, his completion being necessary to God's. It is, therefore, a law of the individual's nature, that he should struggle to preserve his integrity as an individual within the all-pervading one-ness of the universe, that he should struggle, that is to say, to affirm his right to realize himself. Thus the fundamental law of the individual's nature, a law whose operations he cannot escape, is a law of effort and struggle, and since there cannot be effort and struggle without desire, it is a law also of desire. Starting from very different presuppositions, Spinoza thus reaches a position which, so far as its psychological and ethical corollaries are concerned, is little different from that of Hobbes. Man is a determined being, in the sense that he is completely determined by the laws of his being. The word "good" has no meaning apart from the individuals who use it. Absolutely and objectively there is no such thing as good, nor have our ethical concepts any meaning in the outside world; there is only the good for me and the good for you, and the good for me, that which I call good, is whatever assists my endeavour to preserve my own being and further my realization of myself as an individual. Now whatever tends to further my self-realization, to make me, that is to say, more

completely my individual self, is pleasant. Whatever thwarts this endeavour is painful. Thus what I call good is identified with that which gives me pleasure.

**Spinoza's Ethical Conclusions and Account of Origins of Moral Ideas.** Though its principles are no less egoistic, Spinoza's system of ethics is altogether more dynamic than that of Hobbes. While, for Hobbes, the good is that which tends to my preservation and the object of my endeavour is to remain what I am, for Spinoza the good is whatever tends to the enhancement of my individuality, and the object of my endeavour is to achieve greater abundance and distinctiveness of being. Spinoza, like Hobbes, thinks of the individual's welfare very largely in physiological terms. The first endeavour of the mind is, he holds, to affirm the existence of the body, and it is in the enrichment of bodily life by the satisfaction of the body's needs, by the development of the body's capacities and by the enhancement of its powers of action, that the good for the individual consists.

Spinoza's practical conclusions are the reverse of ascetic. It is, indeed, difficult to see how any subjectivist system of ethics can subscribe to the admonition to mortify the flesh. If the good is that which I enjoy, the more the enjoyment, the greater, it is obvious, the good. The practical bearing of almost all subjectivist systems of ethics has, therefore, been Epicurean and Spinoza's is no exception. Eating, drinking, the pleasures of the senses, the beauty of nature, sport, art and the drama—all these are prescribed to keep the body in good condition, so that it may be in a position to perform whatever functions are appropriate to its nature. Such, for Spinoza, is the outline of the "good" life.

The word "good" is, however, rightly printed in quotation marks, for strictly speaking Spinoza recognizes no good. The universe as a whole is for him neither good nor bad; it just is. Good, then, can have meaning only in relation to those finite individuals who are the partial

expressions of the universe's nature. The good of the individual is, as we have seen, whatever contributes to the vigour of his bodily being; his evil, whatever contributes to the diminution of his well-being and the thwarting of his desires. Now the good of one individual will be different from the good of another, since what conduces to my well-being may militate against yours. Hence the notion of good is relative, relative, that is to say, to the individual, and the same thing can, therefore, be both good and bad at the same time, which means in effect that *in itself* it is neither good nor bad.

Value, being a product of human needs, can have no meaning apart from them. The individual mind has, however, Spinoza points out, a disposition to project its own creations upon the universe at large, and to father on to the external world its personal preferences and prejudices. It is thus led to regard good and evil as absolute concepts binding upon God, whereas they are in effect nothing more than the personal likes or dislikes of individual men.

To sum up, Spinoza reduces ethics to a series of what we should now call rationalizations. The universe possesses no ethical characteristics, and ethical terms are without meaning apart from human minds. Human minds, impelled by the needs of their bodies, strive to emphasize their individuality; they strive, that is to say, to achieve an enhanced vigour and abundance of life. Whatever conduces to this end gives them pleasure; accordingly, they call it "good." This "good" they project outwards on to the canvas of an ethically neutral universe, and then acclaim as independent facts the figments of their own creation. Such, broadly, is Spinoza's explanation of the existence of so-called moral values on the basis of a thorough-going Egoism.

**Modification of Spinoza's Determinism.** Since I am including an account of Spinoza's ethics in a chapter devoted to subjectivist theories, I have naturally stressed the purely egoistic aspect of his views. It should, however,

in fairness be mentioned that his philosophy has another side. Spinoza's one ultimate reality or God, of which or whom all things are different aspects, manifests itself in two main forms or modes of expression, the first mental, the second bodily. The body is not just something added to the mind; it is a parallel expression of the same fundamental substance. It follows, then, that any and every aspect of the immortal substance, that is of God, can express itself in bodily movements. In so far as it does so, and in so far as the bodily movements, in their turn, express themselves in mental events which are determined by the movements, there is no escape from a naturalistic, deterministic and egoistic conception of human nature. Given such a view of human nature, the system of ethics which I have just outlined necessarily follows, and since the bodily expressions of God's substance are no less real than the mental, and since body is in no sense dependent upon spirit, the naturalistic reading of human life is both true and ultimate.

But it is not the only reading, for God's substance also expresses itself in terms of spirit. The distinguishing activity of spirit, as Spinoza conceives it, is intellectual, and the purpose of the intellectual activity of the spirit is the quest for truth. To see things exactly as they are, and to accept unreservedly what one sees is to achieve truth. To achieve truth is to fulfil the spirit whose quest truth is, and to fulfil the spirit is to realize one's own nature or, as Kant put it, to obey the law of one's nature. Now, in obeying the law of our natures, we are free. When we act with the object of gratifying the desires and passions that derive their origin from the events taking place in our bodies, we are, Spinoza agrees with Kant,<sup>1</sup> in bondage to forces external to ourselves. But when we exercise the activity of the intellect in the quest for truth, we are determined only by a law which springs from our own being. Thus the positive side of Spinoza's ethics consists in an exhortation to pursue knowledge as the highest goal of man,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 203, 204.



since it is only in the pursuit and achievement of knowledge that man's spirit escapes from bondage to what is outside itself, and attains the true freedom of self-fulfilment. "You shall know the truth," Spinoza writes, "and the truth shall make you free."

The issues raised by Spinoza's philosophy are primarily metaphysical and cannot be pursued here. I have included the foregoing passage in order that I might exonerate myself from the charge of having presented a one-sided view of Spinoza's ethics. For my present purpose, it is the Subjectivism and Egoism of Spinoza which are important, because they constitute a striking example of the view that the statement "X is good" means "X produces a feeling of approval in me".

## II. SUBJECTIVIST-UTILITARIAN ETHICS

**Hume's Account of Good.** Hobbes's and Spinoza's ethics appear within our framework as examples of Subjective-Intuitionism. As an illustration of Subjective-Utilitarianism, I propose briefly to consider the ethical theory of Hume (1711-1776). The difference between the views of Hobbes and Spinoza, on the one hand, and of Hume, on the other, is one of form rather than of substance. Formally, it may be put as follows. A good action for Hobbes and Spinoza is one of which I approve; a good action for Hume is one *which has consequences* of which I, or rather, of which most men, approve, either because they are pleasant, or because they are useful—useful being defined by Hume as meaning conducive to pleasure. The difference is, I repeat, largely one of form, since although Hobbes and Spinoza define good as that of which I approve, they would agree that I only do approve of that which I believe will have pleasurable consequences to myself.

Hume, however, introduces a new factor into subjectivist theory which foreshadows the views which Bentham

and J. S. Mill were later to put forward; this factor also enables him to claim for his theory of ethics a certain degree of objectivism. The novelty consists in Hume's identification of good not with that which is approved of by me, but with that which is approved of by all or most men.

His theory briefly is as follows. There is, first, a definition of good; to say that X is good means, in Hume's view, that X is such that the contemplation of it calls forth an emotion of approval in all or most men; not, be it noted, in the agent or in the person judging, or even in the members of a particular society, but in all or most of the men who are now alive, or who have ever been alive. Secondly, there is an affirmation in regard to what things are good, that is to say, in regard to those things which call forth an emotion of approval in all or in most men. The affirmation is hedonistic. There are, Hume thinks, two classes of actions, of the qualities of things and of the characters of human beings, which are good in the sense defined, namely, those actions which are pleasant to the agent, those qualities of things which are pleasant to their possessor, and those characters of individuals which give pleasure to others, and also those actions, qualities, and characters which are useful. Hume proceeds to define useful as meaning, indirectly conducive to pleasure in the agent, in the possessor, or in other men. He holds also that the converse of these assertions is true, namely, that only those actions, qualities and characters which are directly pleasant or indirectly conducive to pleasure, evoke the emotion of approval in all or most men, and so are called good.

**Hume's Form of Hedonism.** Hume, then, is a hedonist, but a hedonist of a rather peculiar kind. He does not assert that we are so constituted that we can only desire pleasure, nor does he say that pleasure is good or is the only good, nor that pleasure and good mean the same thing. He would agree that the words pleasure and

good stand for two different things; but, he holds, there is a universal and reciprocal connection between them. Thus whatever we call good turns out to be pleasant or conducive to pleasure, and to whatever we find to be pleasant we give the name of "good."

Although it is subjectivist, Hume's theory is not egoistic. Just as his assertion that it is not the approval of the self, but the approval of all or most men that confers rightness upon actions, and goodness upon persons and characters, constitutes a departure from the extreme subjectivist position, so by his endeavour to establish the existence and validity of altruistic sentiments he declares his repudiation of Egoism. In this endeavour he succeeds better than any other subjectivist writer. His theory is as follows. Men, as we have seen, are so constituted that they feel an emotion of approval for happiness and for whatever conduces to happiness. This emotion of approval is not confined to the happiness, or to what conduces to the happiness, of themselves. On the contrary, they feel it in contemplating happiness wherever or in whomsoever it is found. The fact that they do so is invoked by Hume as evidence for what he calls "the principle of benevolence."

**Hume's Establishment of the Principle of Benevolence.** Now this principle is put forward as an altruistic one. Hume, in fact, goes out of his way to criticize Hobbes and Spinoza whose egoistic premises had committed them to a repudiation of any principle of benevolence. In opposition to their view, Hume brings forward the following arguments. We feel an emotion of approval for actions, characters and sentiments, in literature and on the stage, that cannot possibly affect us. Nor is it to the point to say that we imagine ourselves as contemplating those actions and being affected by those characters in real life, because, as Hume truly says, mere imagination could never produce the emotion by itself, if we knew that it was only imagination. Again, we feel the emotion of approval for qualities

useful to their possessor, which cannot possibly be useful to others; for example, the possession of good taste in literature or painting. We can even admire in our enemies virtues such as courage or resolution, which make them more dangerous to us.

If we do not in fact value and admire qualities and characters and actions in others which do *not* conduce to our own advantage, then, Hume points out, the sentiment of benevolence must be a delusive appearance of something else. How, then, are we to account for this appearance? There are, Hume argues, broadly speaking, only two alternatives. The first is that the appearance of the sentiment is due to deliberate fraud; the second that it is due to self-deception. The first objection is dismissed as palpably absurd. If everybody knew that there was no such thing as benevolence, it would obviously be no use trying to pretend that there was. With regard to the possibility that our so-called benevolence is a piece of self-deception, Hume admits that it may be so, but asks in effect, 'what if it is?' For let us suppose that it is self-deception; it would still be the case that men think it necessary to believe that altruism and benevolence exist and are real, even if they do not exist and are not real. What is more, because of this belief they will be habitually led to perform actions which benefit others, and we shall feel approval for these actions and for the persons who do them, even if we are only approving of those who habitually deceive themselves.

Hume's Subjectivism assists his argument at this point. His theory is not based on the supposition that actions are in fact benevolent, or that characters do possess moral worth in their own right. The basis of his theory is, it will be remembered, the fact of human approval; those things are good of which most men approve. Provided then, that there is human approval, provided, that is to say, that we do approve of actions which benefit others, or which are designed to benefit them, then benevolence is, for Hume, established. Now we undoubtedly do approve of such actions and, men are, therefore, benevolent.

**Hume's Refutation of Egoism.** Finally, Hume insists, we can all desire things other than our own happiness; we can all, that is to say act from motives other than that of self-love; if we did not, we should not be able to gratify self-love. The point is one which has already been made in another connection in criticism of J. S. Mill's Hedonism.<sup>1</sup> Revenge, for example, is sometimes necessary for the gratification of self-love; but revenge presupposes that we desire another person's misery. If, however, we can desire another person's misery, we can desire something other than our own happiness, and we can and do do this, even if the invariable effect of the gratification of the desire, is to promote our own happiness. Hume's refutation of Egoism does not involve any departure from his position that nothing has ethical value apart from human consciousness, and that happiness alone has ethical value. Hume, admittedly, sometimes writes as if we approved of certain actions and characters in themselves, but he speedily corrects himself and makes it clear that all he means is that we have a general approval of happiness combined with the belief that actions or characters of the type in question tend to promote it.

**Hume's Account of Justice.** Hume's grounds for insisting that it is only happiness, or actions or characters conducive to happiness, that are valuable are not in essence different from those which have been urged by other hedonistic writers. Hume has, however, an interesting hedonistic argument in relation to justice which deserves separate mention. In common with others who maintain that pleasure is the only good, he has to meet the difficulty that in the course of obeying rules, meting out justice, and administering laws, we sometimes do what may be unpleasant for ourselves, what is certainly unpleasant to other people, namely, our victims, and what seems, therefore, to be detrimental to the general happiness. Hume agrees that this is indeed so, but it is so,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, p. 336.

he affirms, only in isolated cases. Confronted by the difficulty of such cases, we find ourselves tempted to break the rules, to mitigate the rigour of justice, and to make an exception in our application of the law. When assailed by this temptation, we have, however, to ask ourselves the question, what would happen if our conduct in deciding to treat the case under consideration as an exception were to become general. Clearly, rules would be widely broken, justice would no longer be administered, and the law would fall into contempt. If these things were to occur, society would become impossible. The breakdown of society would be destructive of the general happiness, which is largely dependent upon the maintenance of security and order which society alone can guarantee.

The conclusion is that the utility of rules vanishes, if we are prepared to make exceptions. It is more desirable that we should maintain the rules, however hardly they may bear upon particular cases, than that we should suspend rules in order to avoid inflicting hardship in particular cases.

This is Kant's test of universalization<sup>1</sup> in another form. There is no contradiction in having rules which everybody keeps; there is contradiction in making an exception whenever the rules bear hardly, because if the exceptions become sufficiently numerous—and there is nothing to prevent them from doing so, once they are admitted—the rules will no longer command respect, and will cease to be rules. Hume's conclusion is that our willingness in particular cases to take action in the interests of law and justice, which is inimical to the happiness of certain persons, does not invalidate the general principle that in the long run happiness is the only thing for which men feel approval. For men, being rational beings, are able to take into account not only the immediate, but the remote consequences of their actions, and these, if they are to be such as we can approve, must entail respect for rules and a willingness to obey the laws, since without such respect

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 208.

and willingness society would become impossible and the general happiness would be diminished.

### III. THEORIES OF ETHICS BASED UPON NON-ETHICAL THEORIES AND PARTICULARLY UPON THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

**General Principles of Spencer's Ethics.** In the nineteenth century a number of ethical theories were propounded which owed their characteristic features to the popularisation of the doctrine of evolution. The general conclusion of these theories of ethics is briefly as follows. Evolution is a universal process of which human beings are particular expressions. Therefore the laws which govern the process of evolution are also the laws of human nature. These laws are broadly summed up in the doctrine of the struggle for survival. Therefore, whatever assists organisms, including human beings, to survive will be good; it will also be pleasant.

Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) so-called evolutionary ethics, the principles of which are set out in works entitled *Principles of Ethics*, *Social Statics*, and *Inductions of Ethics* may be regarded as constituting a typical statement of this point of view.

Spencer's approach to ethics is logical and scientific. His avowed purpose in writing is to give to the rules of moral conduct the status of deductions from self-evident premises; to give them, that is to say, the necessary character which belongs to propositions in logic. Good for Spencer has no distinctive, objective meaning. Good means, always and only, good of its kind; and a thing is good of its kind, when it adequately performs its appointed function. Good, therefore, is instrumental; it is a means to an end, namely, the right performance of function. The word has, however, for Spencer, a further meaning for, we may ask, "What is the end which the adequate performance of

function subserves, or why," if one cares to put it in this way, "is it 'good' to perform one's function?" Spencer answers that it is "good" to perform one's function, only in so far as such performance is a source of pleasure or satisfaction. For Spencer the only end which a rational being can propose to himself is that of a surplus of pleasure over pain. This end becomes progressively more desirable as the surplus grows, and if a condition could be reached in which pain had vanished absolutely, it would become an absolute end. So far, Spencer's principles diverge very little from the familiar tenets of Subjectivism and Hedonism. Good is identified with the right performance of function; the right performance of function is pleasant, and pleasure is the end of man. Spencer's distinctive contribution consists in the answers which he gives to such questions as "Why pleasure is good, what sort of conduct is likely to produce it for us, and why does it do so."

It is by virtue of this contribution that his ethics is usually entitled scientific. The introduction of science is effected as follows. It is not enough, says Spencer, that the ethical philosopher should point out that some things are pleasant and that these things are good. He must also demonstrate why it is that they are good; it is in order to effect the demonstration, that Spencer has recourse to the theory of evolution.

**His Introduction of Evolutionary Concepts into Ethics.** The nature of any organism is, he holds, determined by its character as an evolutionary product. As such it will inevitably tend to preserve and develop itself and to beget offspring, which will continue the species to which it belongs. Such evolutionary operations are pleasure-producing. If they were not, we should have no inducement to perform them; for a man, as Spencer is careful to point out, would not struggle to maintain an existence whose pains exceeded its pleasures. Pleasure, then, invests any vitality-promoting, evolution-furthering form of behaviour, while pain is a sign of the maladjustment of the



organism to its environment. Now a badly adjusted organism will have an inferior chance of survival to that of a well-adjusted one. Hence conduct which tends to adjust the organism to its environment will have a greater chance of being stamped into the customary behaviour of the species than conduct which does not. There will, therefore, be a natural tendency for painful forms of conduct to be eliminated, and for pleasant forms of conduct to become habitual, while only those species will survive whose conduct yields them a preponderance of pleasure over pain. The contrary is also true. Behaviour which assists the performance of function is, as we have seen, pleasant. There will, therefore, be a natural tendency for conduct which is useful in the struggle for existence to be performed. Thus pleasure-promoting conduct is performed because it assists the evolutionary process, and conduct which, from the evolutionary point of view is useful, is performed because it is pleasant.

Spencer was not, however, content to lay down in this general way that pleasure attended survival-promoting, and evolution-furthering, conduct. What conduct is it, he wanted to know, that promotes survival, what furthers evolution? His answer is, whatever conduct tends to adjust a man to his environment. Such adjustment may be envisaged as a harmony between man's instincts and the circumstances that call his instincts into play. Spencer conceives of the properly adjusted individual organism as functioning in relation to its environment like a well-oiled machine, responding to the demands for action which are made upon it without friction and with the minimum of effort. An organism whose conduct is adequately adjusted to, whose needs are adequately met by, a stable environment is described as being in a state of equilibrium. In a state of equilibrium it experiences pleasure. The achievement of this state is a permanent goal or end of human effort and all our actions are designed to realize it. If, indeed, we were to ask what is the object of the evolutionary process, Spencer would answer that, so

far as the individual is concerned, the end is precisely this state of equilibrium. Is it ever completely achieved? Obviously it is not. There is, then, for Spencer, no absolute standard of good. Ultimate good is an unrealized, possibly an unrealizable, goal, just because complete equilibrium is never realized and may never be realizable. Meanwhile, however, whatever conduces to this end is good. Human beings being various, and the contingencies of life unforseeable, scientific ethics cannot lay down exact rules for guidance as to how the end is to be achieved; it can only indicate the general direction, explain why it should be followed, and point out that, in so far as it is followed we shall experience pleasure. In thus insisting upon the provisional nature of all ethical rules and principles Spencer agrees with Aristotle.

**Spencer's Account of Altruism and Explanation of Society.** The scheme is, so far, a purely egoistic one. The Darwinian principle of Natural Selection announced struggle as the law of life, and the survival of the individual as its end. But creatures evolved by the method of struggle, and acknowledging only the law of self-survival, cannot be credited with the desire to promote the welfare—also, presumably, envisaged in terms of survival—of other beings. Spencer has, therefore, to meet the difficulty which all forms of subjectivist ethics encounter of explaining the existence of what are normally regarded as altruistic sentiments, and the operation of what are apparently disinterested motives. The difficulty is met within the framework of the general evolutionary theory upon the following lines.

Spencer propounded a celebrated formula for evolutionary progress in terms of an advance from the more simple to the more complex. Evolution, he says, is "a process whereby an indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity is transformed into a definite, coherent, heterogeneity". Thus the jellyfish is comparatively structureless and homogeneous, while man is a complicated vertebrate whose

bones are clearly different from his brains, and whose brains are different from his blood. In primitive society all men lead the same sort of life and the social structure is simple. In civilized societies one man lives in a hovel and another in a mansion, while society is cut across by infinitely diverse stratifications of class and creed and code. As human existence becomes more complex, some degree of co-operation is necessary in order that the needs of the more complex beings whom the evolutionary process throws up, may receive satisfaction. Co-operation relieves human beings from the necessity of supplying for themselves their most elementary needs, and thus releases their energies for the pursuit of fuller and more satisfying forms of existence. In addition, then, to his native egoistic impulses the individual gradually evolves another set of tendencies, those, namely, which enable and prompt him to co-operate with his fellows. These, no less than the egoistic impulses required for survival, appear as the necessary products of the development of the evolutionary process. Spencer even goes so far as to suggest that an enlightened scientist who was fully conversant with the nature of evolution from the first, could have predicted their appearance in advance.

If man must become a co-operating social being, in order that evolutionary development may continue beyond the animal level, he must also become an altruistic one. Society, to invoke again a simile of Schopenhauer's, is like a collection of hedgehog's driven together for the sake of warmth; hence the spikes of its members must be felted, if the discomfort occasioned by their pressure upon one another is not to become intolerable. Manners and morals are like a covering of felt which is imposed upon the spikes of primitive behaviour, and enable the group to cohere without pain to its members.

Spencer adds that, although the development of social sentiments and altruistic motives has the effect of screening the individual from the unrestricted incidence of the struggle for existence within the group, struggle, which is the law of evolution, does not cease, but is transferred

from the individual to the larger unit of which he is a member, and transforms itself into the conflict between one group and another. Hence arises the fact of war. Now it is clear that whatever qualities make for the success of the group in its conflicts with other groups, will possess evolutionary survival-value for the group, in just the same way as the primitive egoistic qualities possess evolutionary survival-value for the individual. Hence the evolution of such qualities as courage, unselfishness, helpfulness, loyalty and sympathy; hence, too, the value which the community places upon these qualities and the encouragement which it affords to its members to develop them by dignifying them with moral epithets. Good which, from the point of view of the individual unit in the evolutionary struggle, is whatever makes for equilibrium with environment, is from the point of view of the group whatever makes for group solidarity and effectiveness.

**Spencer's Conception of Duty.** It is a little surprising to find the idea of duty intruded into such a philosophy. Spencer nevertheless finds a place for it. It is, he holds, a man's duty to further and not to obstruct the evolutionary process of which he is a part. The ultimate end of this process is the production of a happier and better race of beings. This end assumes for Spencer the rôle of an absolute. Ethics is, he holds, at present relative and provisional because man's state is imperfect and transitional; but, when the end of the evolutionary process is reached, a good will have been evolved which is not relative but absolute. In the development of this good it is our duty to assist, in so far as in us lies, by furthering the evolutionary process which aims at it. But by what means we can help forward this process, how, if we can desire only the pleasure which accompanies our own achievement of equilibrium, we can also desire something else which has no connection with our pleasure, namely, the evolution of a better and happier humanity, and what meaning, on Spencer's premises, we are to assign to the word

“better”, are questions to which no satisfactory answer is given. Yet an answer is clearly necessary, especially to the last of these questions. If the meaning of “good” is fitness to survive, the “best” are presumably the fittest; but fittest for what? Presumably, to survive. Why, then, should it be “good” to survive? There is no answer. Nor, unless we are prepared to assign some meaning to the word “good” which is not exhaustively analysable into survival value, can there be an answer.

**Ethical Implications of Anthropology.** While the announcement and popularisation of the theory of evolution were chiefly responsible for the development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of subjectivist ethical theories, anthropology exerted an influence in the same direction. Anthropologists show how modern notions of right and wrong have developed by traceable stages from tribal rules, which were demonstrably utilitarian in intention. *This* they point out, was originally held to be right, *that* wrong, because *this* conduced to, *that* militated against, the welfare of the tribe. The argument from origins,<sup>1</sup> is then invoked to show that there is no more in moral notions to-day than the considerations of social expediency from which they can be shown to have derived. Thus Spencer, who adopted in the first edition of his *Social Statics* the standpoint of a member of the moral sense school—his attitude here is broadly that of an objective intuitionist—declares in the second edition, published thirty years later, that the study of anthropology has convinced him that what is called conscience is merely an inherited social sense, which bestows moral approval upon that which is socially useful. A similar standpoint has been adopted by a number of writers in modern times.

**Views of Westermarck.** Edward Westermarck for example, in a book entitled *The Origin and Development of Moral*

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-30.

*Ideas*, takes the familiar subjectivist view, that, when we say X is right, what we mean and all that we mean is that we approve of X; and approve of it because we think that it will bring us pleasure. "Every ethical theory," he writes, "that regards any course of conduct which promotes the attainment of a desired end as good, and any course of conduct which obstructs it as bad, is so far in agreement with my view that moral judgments are ultimately based on emotional reactions against pleasure and pain." His reasons for this view are derived from a study of social custom. For what communities have habitually done over long periods there is gradually, he argues, built up a sentiment of approval. Those who depart from the accepted code consequently experience feelings of guilt analogous to, because derived from, the experiences of our ancestors who transgressed a tribal taboo. Now tribal taboos were not purely arbitrary. They had a social basis in utility, conduct being pronounced to be wrong which was prejudicial to tribal welfare or unity. In the course of generations customs grew up which embodied socially useful conduct, and for those who violate these customs men feel an instinctive disapproval, which is directly derived from the indignation which members of savage societies have been wont to vent upon those who were felt to endanger their safety by the transgression of tribal taboos. "Custom," writes Westermarck, "is a moral rule only on account of the disapproval called forth by its transgression. In its ethical aspect it is nothing but a generalization of emotional tendencies." In other words, we feel an emotion of moral approval for what is customary, and what is customary is determined by what was once found expedient.

The final stage of the process is the ethical; it is the stage at which we call "good" and "right" that for which we feel an emotion of moral approval. Similarly moral disapprobation springs from the desire to inflict pain upon those who have offended us, by breaking the rules which we have come to regard as right because they are customary.

If we did not feel indignation at violation of custom, if, in other words, we did not automatically react against conduct which we instinctively felt to be socially injurious, there would be no ethics; for ethics is founded on precisely these instinctive reactions of approval and approbation. "It is the instinctive desire to inflict counter-pain," Westermarck concludes, "that gives to moral indignation its most important characteristic. Without it moral condemnation and the ideas of right and wrong would never have come into existence." And if we ask how, if morality is only disguised expediency, morality ever came to be contrasted with expediency, Westermarck's answer is that, although our ancestors originally approved of a particular form of conduct because it was useful, we have come, in course of time, to forget the reasons why it was approved, and to feel approval for the conduct in question for its own sake. This answer is based upon the theory of the Association of Ideas, of which an account is given below.<sup>1</sup>

**Durkheim on the Pressure of Social Feeling.** To illustrate the variations of what, from the point of view of ethical theory is broadly the same position, I will mention the conclusions of one other writer, Durkheim. The essential features of Durkheim's position are those with which we are already familiar. Conscience, or the moral sense, is utilitarian in origin, but actions originally approved for utilitarian reasons have now come to seem praiseworthy in and for themselves. The variation in which the distinctiveness of Durkheim's view consists relates to the rôle which he attributes to the herd instinct in the formation of our moral ideas. The conclusion which he seeks to establish is that in primitive societies there is a communal sense or instinct which is more than the sum total of the separate instincts of its members. This instinctive sense presses upon and influences the individual; "this pressure", he writes—I am translating from the

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 380-382.

French—"which is the distinctive feature of social facts is that which all exercise upon each". Durkheim, in fact, is postulating the existence of a kind of communal feeling like the intuitive sense which causes birds to fly in flocks, wheel in unison, or migrate at the same time, each member of the flock communicating its feeling to and so acting upon the others, without being consciously aware that it does so. In primitive societies bound together by laws of custom and taboo, this communal sense is, he points out, particularly strong. Pressing upon the individual from without, expressing itself as a series of promptings and impulses from within, it determines his views upon religion, politics and morals. What is sacred, what is due, what is fitting, what is right—all these concepts are determined for the individual by the social sense of the tribe. Now the social sense of the tribe is, in its origin, determined by utilitarian considerations. It approves whatever is, or at least was once, recognized to be beneficial for the tribe; propitiates what is felt to be dangerous; disapproves of what is seen to be harmful. Hence the effect of the pressure of social feeling is to cause the individual to feel and act in such a way as to conduce to the preservation of society and the promotion of its welfare. But that the preservation of society and the promotion of its welfare are at once the effect and the justification of their moral feelings and actions is not apparent to those who feel morally and do their duty, since they have forgotten, if they ever knew, what is the justification of those impulses of approval and disapproval, what the source of those promptings to action, which for them make up the content of morality.

**Summary of Subjectivist Theories.** This chapter has covered a considerable amount of ground and brought together under the common heading of subjectivist theories of ethics views which have been put forward at different times by very various writers. For the convenience of readers who wish to obtain a general survey of those



features which are both peculiar, and common to the various views surveyed in the later part of this chapter, I append a passage taken from Lowes Dickinson's book *After Two Thousand Years*,<sup>1</sup> which admirably summarizes the distinctive contentions of Subjectivism. This passage appeals in support of Subjectivism to the results of recent sciences such as biology and anthropology, and indicates the reasons which have seemed to many to operate conclusively against objective or absolutist theories of ethics.

“PLATO: You reject, then, the position which I remember finding, in Athens, the most difficult to refute, that of the sceptics who deny that there are any standards prescribing Goods for everybody, or ‘in themselves’, or whatever you would say, but only the opinions of any individual man as to what he does in fact judge it best to pursue. Have you no such school now?

PHILALETHES: In my own country, as I have already said, we are not philosophers, and it is impossible to say what views people do really hold. But I should say, from my own observation, that many of us do in practice accept the sceptical view, so far and so long as it spells advantage to ourselves; but if, or when, it is turned against us by others, we fall back on standards, declare our opponents to be immoral men, and do our best to have them punished.

PLATO: Men's thoughts, so far as I can learn from you, have not changed very much since my time. For our sophists used to argue that a strong man, though he would not accept the conventions of morality, might support them as applied to others. ‘They may be useful to me,’ he would admit, ‘and so far must be defended, but I may always break them, if this use should cease.’

PHILALETHES: Your sophists were more clear in their minds than are ordinary men. But many people do certainly act on some such view.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter III, p. 81, for an account of this book.

**PLATO:** And what could you reply, if a sophist put that view into words?

**PHILALETHES:** I should bring up arguments from history and biology rather than from philosophy. I should point out that common standards are earlier and more natural than individualistic self-interest. I should point to animals living in herds and to communities of insects, and show how all these creatures serve not themselves but the society, having not indeed a common ethical system, for we assume them not to think, but a common rule of life. And what we find in these creatures, I should add, we find also in the most primitive communities of men. They live under rules which it has never occurred to them to challenge. So that the common observance, which shows itself later as a convention, is the original fact, and has more authority, therefore, in the nature of things, than the egoistic perversion which grows up later like a disease, among men who have strayed from the natural atmosphere of the herd in which they alone can breathe healthily.

**PLATO:** Your egoists must be less convinced and pertinacious than ours if they are silenced by such arguments. For my young men, made subtle as they were by the sophists, would certainly have replied, that insects and animals and primitive communities were no law for them, that civilization means precisely escape from such base and slavish conditions, and that, if standards can in fact be denied, it is absurd to pretend that they ought not to be, merely because some primitive and savage creatures had not yet learnt how restrictive they are upon the splendour and force of noble individuals.<sup>1</sup>

**PHILALETHES:** If that line were adopted, I should reply that standards are as necessary to self-preservation in civilized as in primitive societies. For no individual can stand by himself. If his property, his contracts,

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter XVI, pp. 629-637 for a development of this position.

his life and person are to be secure, he must submit to rules; and if he breaks them, then, sooner or later, they will break him, as example after example is continually proving.

PLATO: At that point my sophist will return to his old argument. He will say: Yes, it may pay us to observe standards, but we observe them only if and because it pays us. If, by any chance, in any matter, we can safely elude them, to our own advantage, we shall certainly do so, and think it right to do so."

**Statement of the Obvious Objection to any Form of Subjectivism.** There is a certain rather obvious objection which, throughout the course of the foregoing exposition, may well have presented itself to the reader's mind. It is as follows. If human beings are by nature purely egoistical, as Hobbes and Spinoza maintained, in the sense that they desire only their own pleasure, and pursue only their own advantage, how do moral notions arise? Even if we agree with Hume that egoistic motives are not the only motives by which human beings are animated, and that people also acknowledge benevolent motives in the sense that they approve of what promotes the pleasure of others and try themselves to promote it, the question still, given subjectivist premises, presses for an answer. For it is not a satisfactory answer to say, as Hume does, that we call moral whatever evokes an emotion of approval in most of us, or, as Spencer would say, whatever enables us to reach equilibrium with our environment, or whatever helps us to survive, or, as Durkheim would say, whatever enables society to hold together. For, our question persists, why do we call these pleasurable, advantageous, expedient, survival-promoting, organism-adjusting, or society-maintaining modes of behaviour *moral*? Why, in fact, introduce such notions as good and bad, moral and immoral, at all? To this question there are various answers. There is the answer which is contained in Mill's account of virtue.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 338, 339.

or that entailed by Hobbes's account of pity,<sup>1</sup> or that suggested by Spencer's account of the co-operative sentiment.<sup>2</sup> All these answers have this in common, they derive an ethical sentiment from a non-ethical source, maintaining in effect that the virtue of unselfishness and the approval which we feel for it are inherited versions of dispositions and emotions which were once grounded in expediency or utility. It is upon the validity of this answer that subjectivist ethics must stand or fall. Its validity is, therefore, a matter of some importance and the case for it deserves to be presented in its classical form. In this form it is known as the theory of Association of Ideas. It was advanced by Hartley and James Mill; it was adopted by J. S. Mill—his account of the origin of virtue already described is a particular example of its application—and, as it presents fully and comprehensively the considerations which have hitherto been introduced casually and incidentally, I propose to give a brief summary of it as the theory which provides the most satisfactory account, within the framework of the subjectivist hypothesis, of the feeling of moral obligation, of altruism and of benevolence.

**The Theory of the Association of Ideas.** The following is the form in which the theory was enunciated by Hartley (1705-1757) in his book *Observations on Man*. Hartley's purpose is to reconcile a subjective utilitarian theory of ethics, according to which we call right those actions which promote our own pleasure, with the existence of a moral sense, with the divine creation of the universe, and the day-to-day influence of the divine creator upon men's souls. Hartley begins by accepting the hedonist premise that we desire only pleasant sensations and approve of whatever affords them to us. In course of time, however, we forget why we approved of the thing, whatever it may be, that affords the pleasant sensations and begin to approve of the thing in and for itself. As an

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 370, 371.

illustration of this process of transference of approval, the case of the miser is cited. The miser, like everybody else, begins by desiring money for the sake of the things that money can buy, which, in their turn, he desires for the sake of the pleasant sensations which their possession or enjoyment induce in him. He then begins to associate the pleasure given by the things bought by money with the money itself, and so, finally, he comes to desire the money because of its association with pleasure. This result is commonly described by the statement that he comes to desire money for itself. The miser's case is an illustration of a transference of emotion due to association which, in Hartley's view, is constantly occurring.

**Hartley's Hierarchy of Motives.** Hartley establishes what he calls a hierarchy of motives. In this hierarchy, the initial motive and the lowest, is the desire for pleasant sensations; prompted by this motive we perform those actions which we think will produce them. In course of time, through habitually performing those actions which we think will induce pleasant sensations, we come to forget why we were led to perform them. Our motive at this stage is to perform the actions in and for themselves. Thus we come to approve for their own sake of courses of conduct and types of character which we originally approved of because they promoted our pleasure.

This refining process, as Hartley calls it, goes a stage further. Passing through the phases of ambition, imagination and self-interest, it proceeds to the establishment of the three highest values. These are sympathy or care for others, the moral sense, and what Hartley calls "theopathy". Each of these highest values is now valued in and for itself; yet, originally, each was valued because of the pleasure which men derived from the activity or emotion which it evoked. Sympathy, for example, was valued because other people's suffering caused us pain; morality, because men derived pleasure from the contemplation of certain kinds of character, and profit from the

performance by others of certain kinds of action; and "theopathy", or feeling for God, because, since God is the source of all good things, every "association of pleasure" will have for its centre God's nature. Thus the love of God is implied at the very lowest stage of Hartley's hierarchy of motives in love of pleasure, and is in fact the love of pleasure made explicit. Each rung in this ladder of motives is, as it were, formed out of the preceding rungs, as a miser's motive, money for its own sake, is constituted from his motive, things which money can buy, which is itself constituted from the motive, pleasant sensations resulting from possession and enjoyment of the things that money can buy. Applied to the case of ethics, the analysis is put forward as a demonstration of the way in which, what are apparently ethical sentiments, love of virtue for its own sake, the feeling of moral obligation, or the approval of unselfishness, arise on the basis of a purely egoistical psychology.

#### *Books*

- HOBBS, THOMAS.** *Leviathan.*  
**MANDEVILLE, BERNARD.** *The Fable of the Bees.*  
**SPINOZA, BARUCH.** *Ethics* (Everyman edition), especially Parts III and IV.  
**HUME, DAVID.** *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals.*  
*Evolutionary Ethics.*  
**SPENCER, HERBERT.** *Social Statics. Principles of Ethics*, especially Part I, *Data of Ethics.*  
**STEPHEN, LESLIE.** *The Science of Ethics.*  
**WESTERMARCK, E.** *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas.*  
**HOBHOUSE, L. T.** *Morals in Evolution.*  
**HARTLEY, DAVID.** *Observations on Man.*  
**MILL, JAMES.** *An Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind.*  
**SAMUEL, SIR HERBERT.** *Practical Ethics* (Home University Library), is a good modern statement of the subjectivist point of view.

# CHAPTER XI: ETHICAL THEORY SURVEYED. DISCUSSION OF HEDONISM

**Plan of Ensuing Discussion.** The preceding exposition has been a lengthy one and has left a number of loose threads which, in the present chapter, I shall try to gather together. One of the most important is the question raised by the philosophy of Hedonism. Is pleasure the only object of desire, or, as it is sometimes stated, is pleasure the sole good? Or are both these contentions false? These questions have presented themselves on a number of occasions in other connections, and are now entitled to be considered on their merits. If there seem to be good reasons for thinking that other things are good beside pleasure, the question arises, what is their nature? The discussion in this chapter and the next will, accordingly, fall into three parts; first, a survey of the results of the examination of ethical theories in the preceding chapters; secondly, a discussion of Hedonism; thirdly, the outline of a positive theory of good, or, to use the term which I prefer, of value.

## I. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRECEDING SURVEY

### A. Criticism of Subjectivist Theories

It is, I think, clear that none of the theories hitherto considered is completely satisfactory. To begin with the subjectivist theories outlined in the last chapter, it can, I think, be shown that any subjectivist theory of ethics is exposed to serious objections. Of these I will mention four.

(a) THAT THE ONUS OF PROOF IS ON THE SUBJECTIVISTS. In the first place, the onus of proof lies throughout on the subjectivists. If I say, "This chessboard, X, is square" my statement may mean either (i) X has a certain property which causes sensation of squareness in most men who look at it, or (ii) most men will have the sensation of squareness when they look at X. What I certainly intend to assert is (i), although by means of a subtle philosophical analysis it can be shown that all that I am really asserting is (ii). In face, however, of my manifest intention to assert (i) and my strong belief that I am in fact doing so, the onus of proof is clearly laid on those who wish to maintain that what my statement really means is (ii).

Similarly, the assertions "X is a right action" or "X is a good man" may mean either (i) X has a certain property such that it will cause most people who consider it or him to feel a sentiment of moral approval, or (ii) most men will experience the emotion of moral approval when they consider X. Now there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that, when I say "X is a right action" or "X is a good man", what I mean to assert is (i); I mean, that is to say, to assert that X is characterized by a certain property of rightness which belongs to it, or by a certain property of goodness which belongs to him. If the subjectivists are right, I do not mean that X has this property, for I am not in point of fact making a statement about X at all. What I am stating is that most men in certain circumstances will experience a certain emotion.

Now I do not for a moment believe that I am, in fact, saying this. The onus of proof is, therefore, I repeat, on the subjectivist to prove to me that I am. This he does not do; indeed, most of the arguments that he gives in favour of his position appear to be faulty. In particular, he gives no good reason for supposing that, when I say "X is a right action" or "X is a good man", I am not making what I am certainly purporting to make, namely, some assertion about X, but am in fact talking about



something different, namely, the emotions which in certain circumstances will be experienced by a number of people. The subjectivist, in short, gives no good reason for his view that goodness is not an independent quality of things; he simply announces his own inability to perceive it. Thus in his book *General Theory of Values*, Professor Perry, a leading American exponent of subjectivist ethics, writes:

“There can be only one proof of the existence of a perceptual quality, and that is the perception of it. One who upholds this view of good must be prepared to point to a distinct quale” (quality) “which appears in that region which our value terms roughly indicate and which is different from the object’s shape and size, from the interrelation of its parts, from its relation to other objects or to the subject and from all the other factors which belong to the same context but which are designated by the words other than good. The present writer for one finds no such residuum.”

The question here at issue involves a straightforward test of observation. Professor Perry says that he can discover no such quality as good in any of the things which he experiences. I believe very strongly that I do; and so, apparently, do most people. If they do not, if they use the word “good” without any distinctive meaning, it is difficult to see why they should have invented it. Since, therefore, Professor Perry’s view challenges the common experience of mankind, he should provide us with good reasons for it. But beyond the report of his own observation, none is provided.

(b) THAT THERE IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN RIGHT AND WHAT IS THOUGHT RIGHT. The chief reason usually advanced in favour of subjectivist theories is derived from the relativity of moral notions. People in all ages have called different actions right and have bestowed moral approval upon different qualities and characters. What is more, what they *think* right, what they *call* moral, has, as we saw in the last chapter, a definite

and ascertainable relation to non-ethical factors. Thus I may and probably will call right the kind of conduct which, in general, is advantageous to me personally, which conduces to my pleasure, or which assists my survival; or, again, I may and probably will call that kind of conduct right which is advantageous to my class or my country or to the governors of my country; or again, since there is a time lag before moral notions catch up with social needs, which was *once* advantageous to my class or my country or to the governors of my country, and of which, after a long period of approval by my ancestors, I have an inherited instinct to approve as a part of my initial psychological make-up. The conclusion is that, when I say "X is right", I do not mean that X has an objective characteristic of rightness which is independent of my approval; I mean only that a certain person, or certain persons approve of it.

These arguments do not, however, establish the conclusion asserted. What they show is that people have always evinced a disposition to call some things right and some things good or moral, what they will call right, what good or moral, depending upon circumstances. The argument shows, in other words, that circumstances determine people's views about right and good and morality; it does not show that circumstances determine what is right and good and moral. Nor, unless we are to suppose that people's views on these matters are views about *nothing*, does it show that there are no such things as right and good and morality for people to have views about. If, indeed, there *were* no such things as right and good and morality, then in using such expressions as "this is right", "he is good", "that is moral" we should be making meaningless noises.

An analogy which I have already given<sup>1</sup> in another connection may help to elucidate the point. Let us suppose that I am trying to guess the temperature of a room; then the guess which I make will be dependent upon and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 161, 162.

relative to circumstances prevailing in myself. In other words, what I estimate the temperature of the room to be will be determined by personal considerations. But this fact does not show that the room does not possess a temperature in its own right; nor does it show that, when I make my estimate of it, my estimate refers to nothing at all. In other words, nobody would deduce from the fact that I guessed the temperature of the room to be 75° Fahrenheit, while somebody else guessed it to be 70° Fahrenheit, that we were both of us making statements about events that were taking place in ourselves and were not in fact saying something about the room and its temperature. Indeed, if the room had no temperature in its own right, it would be difficult to understand how we were ever led to make judgments about it. Similarly, the fact that my judgments of right and good are different from those of other people differently circumstanced, and the further fact that my judgments are obviously determined by conditions of time and place and country and class and culture, all of which are personal conditions, do not justify the conclusion that, when I say "X is right" or "X is good", I am in fact making a statement about myself, and am not saying something, whether true or false, about X and its ethical characteristics. Indeed, if there were no such things as ethical characteristics, it would be impossible to explain how we ever came to make judgments which postulated them and ascribed them to actions and persons.

(c) THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE ON A SUBJECTIVIST THEORY ADEQUATELY TO ACCOUNT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF MORAL NOTIONS. This leads to a further point. If Subjectivism is correct, "X is good" means "X produces a feeling of approval in me", or "X conduces to my advantage". It means, in fact, "X is pleasant", or "X is expedient", or "X is useful".

But if "X is good", or "X is right" means the same as "X is pleasant", or "X is expedient", or "X is useful",

how did the distinction between good and right, on the one hand, and expedient and pleasant and useful, on the other, ever come to be made? There is not the slightest doubt that in ordinary life we do habitually make this distinction. "This," we say, "is what I should like to do, because it is pleasant; but that is what I ought to do, because it is right." Or we say "X is a pleasanter companion, but he is not such a good man as Y." If what is good or right is, in the last resort, exhaustively analysable into what is expedient or pleasant or useful, it is impossible to explain how the distinction came to be made. It seems reasonable, then, to suppose that the words "good" and "right" stand for concepts which we specifically distinguish from those denoted by the words "pleasant", "expedient", and "useful".

*(d)* THAT THE MEANING OF THE WORD GOOD IS NOT THE SAME AS THAT OF ANY OTHER WORD. It is not difficult to show by a logical argument that the word "good" has not precisely the same meaning as any other word.

(i) Let us suppose that I hold that the word "good" means the same as the word "pleasant", or the word "expedient", or the word "useful", or the words "what is approved of by me". Then there will be nothing in the concept "good" beyond "pleasant", or "expedient", or "useful", or "approved of by me". Therefore, when the word "good" occurs in a sentence, I can substitute one of these other words without change of meaning.

(ii) Let us now consider such a statement as, "good is what is approved of by me". This statement, whether it is true or false, is at least meaningful, and being meaningful it is discussible. I am in fact discussing it at the moment.

(iii) Adopting the conclusion of (i), I will now write for the word "good" in the sentence "good is what is approved of by me" the words "approved of by me". The sentence then reads, "What is approved of by me is what is approved of by me." This sentence is not discussible,

since it is a tautology. Thus the sentence, "What is approved of by me is what is approved of by me" cannot mean the same as the sentence, "good is what is approved of by me". Therefore, good does not mean the same as what is approved of by me. By similar methods it can be shown that the meaning of good cannot be exactly equated with the meaning of any other word.

**That the Subjectivist Methods of Meeting Objections are Unsatisfactory.** (i) **HUME'S METHOD.** Subjectivists have endeavoured in various ways to meet the difficulties to which I have referred. Uneasy at the suggestion that they are making the difference between good and bad purely one of taste—good is that which I happen to approve of, if you happen to approve of something different, then that is good for you; good, therefore, means only "good for me" or "good for you"—they have endeavoured to modify the extreme subjectivist position by the introduction of some objective test.

One such endeavour, that of Hume, was mentioned in the last chapter. By a right action, Hume says, we mean one of which most men approve. This is not a purely subjectivist position, for it does not make the distinction between right and wrong purely a matter of taste; it makes it a matter of fact. If, on this view, the majority of those who consider an action X feel an emotion of approval for it, then X is right; if not, not. This is to reduce the difference between right and wrong to a question of statistics: we decide the issue by counting heads. Now it is, I think, clear that whatever may be the true account of the matter, this theory must be wrong. What I mean to assert, when I say of an action that it is right, is no doubt highly controversial; but I am perfectly certain that I do not mean to assert that I believe that a bare majority of those who consider it would be found to approve of it. I conclude that endeavours made on these lines to meet the objections brought against Subjectivism are unsuccessful.

(ii) **THE ARGUMENT FROM ORIGINS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF IDEAS.** Another familiar method of meeting the difficulties of Subjectivism is to argue from origins and the Association of Ideas. What is the kind of objection that the subjectivist has to meet? Most of us do undoubtedly honour a virtuous man apart from his usefulness to ourselves, and apart also from the way in which at any given moment he may happen to behave; we do feel that we ought to do our duty independently of the results of so doing; we do indubitably have experiences, when, for example, we acknowledge the pull of moral obligation, which are perceptibly different from the experiences involved in calculations of expediency. How, then, are we to account for these admitted facts of experience, of apparently distinctive experience, on a subjectivist basis? The usual line of argument is that which is based upon the Association of Ideas. Very briefly, the argument is as follows. It is admitted that there exist to-day what are called ethical sentiments, but they have developed from non-ethical sentiments in the past. Our ancestors performed a certain class of action, X, because they produced pleasant consequences to themselves, or contributed to the well-being of the community. They honoured a certain kind of character, Y, because courage, for example, or loyalty were useful to the tribe. In other words, they performed X and honoured Y, because X-like actions and Y-like characters were expedient or useful in the sense that they tended to produce pleasant sensations in most people. When, over a considerable period, people had performed X-like actions and honoured Y-like characters for these reasons, the disposition to perform X and to honour Y became stamped into the consciousness of members of the community, and presently began to appear as an inherited instinct. We now, therefore, have an inherited disposition to perform X-like actions and honour Y-like characters; we feel, that is to say, an obligation to do our duty for its own sake and an intuition of the intrinsic value of certain character traits, only because

we have forgotten the reasons, the non-ethical reasons, which lie at the basis of and justify our feelings of obligation and approval. Mill's treatment of virtue is a good example of this mode of reasoning<sup>1</sup>. The conclusion is that line of thought is not capable of direct disproof; two considerations may, however, be mentioned.

**Objections to Resolution of Ethical Sentiments into Non-Ethical Factors.** (i) The first was developed at some length in the discussion in a previous chapter of the various meanings of the expression "the nature of" a thing.<sup>2</sup> The conclusion of that discussion was briefly that there is more in a growing or developing thing than is to be found in its origins and that to give a full account of it we must, therefore, take into consideration its fruits as well as its roots. A thing, in short, is at any given moment of its development more than the sum total of the factors that produced it. If it were not, it would not be a *developing* thing.

What is the application to ethics? Let us suppose that it could be successfully demonstrated that our feelings in regard to duty and our respect for goodness are sentiments whose origin may be traced to non-ethical considerations of expediency and pleasantness. That does not prove that there is no more in these sentiments than expediency and pleasantness now. There is no evidence for the implied assumption that the mature state of a developing thing contains no more than its origins and is, therefore, exhaustively analysable into its origins.

(ii) But can we make the supposition? Can we, that is to say, countenance the assumption that our feelings in regard to duty and our respect for goodness do derive from non-ethical considerations; that, in other words, out of purely non-ethical elements we can obtain ethical compounds. The question at issue is analogous to such questions as, can we from a combination of non-coloured atoms and electrons obtain coloured objects? Questions of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 338, 339.    <sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30-34.

this kind belong to metaphysics rather than to ethics, and cannot be pursued here. It is, however, pertinent to point out that the assumption that ethical sentiments do arise out of entirely non-ethical considerations presupposes that there was a time when human beings acknowledged no ethical motives. It presupposes, that is to say, that there was a time when the distinction between "X is good" and "X is pleasant" or "X is expedient" was never made, for the reason that nobody ever judged disinterestedly "X is good". Now there must, on this assumption, have been a moment in the history of mankind when the distinction first came to be made. But why *did* it come to be made, if it is meaningless? If the arguments given in (c) above lead us to reject the view that the distinction is meaningless now, they are equally valid against the assumption that it was ever meaningless at any time. In other words, the argument from origins merely puts the awkward problem of accounting for the distinction between goodness and expediency back in point of time; it does not solve it.

The above are some of the reasons for rejecting the view that the statement "X is good" is ever exhaustively analysable into "X produces feelings of approval in certain minds". They are, that is to say, reasons for rejecting any completely subjectivist analysis.

## B. Criticism of Intuitionist Theories

Objective-intuitionist theories have already been criticized at length in Chapter VIII. Broadly, the criticism fell into three parts. First, the deliverances of the moral sense are too capricious and too arbitrary to afford a reliable guide to the difference between right and wrong. Moreover, they are usually determined by non-ethical considerations; in point of fact, by precisely those considerations upon which the subjectivist rightly lays emphasis, but which he falsely believes to justify a subjectivist interpretation of the *meaning* of right and wrong. Although the word "right" does not *mean* the same as "what some person



or persons approve of", what a man *calls* right will very largely depend upon what he does happen to approve of, and to approve of in the vast majority of cases for non-ethical reasons. We cannot, then, simply trust to people's intuitions of right and wrong to determine what is right and wrong, if only because, to do so, would be to admit that the same action can be both right and wrong at the same time. Secondly, if the faculty by means of which moral judgments are passed and the performance of duty is motivated is feeling or is akin to feeling, it is difficult to escape from the conclusion that its deliverances are determined. Moral freedom, is, therefore, an illusion and ethics falls to the ground.

Thirdly, if the deliverances of the faculty by means of which moral judgments are passed are to be exonerated from the charge of being purely arbitrary, the faculty must be credited with some admixture of reason. If it is to be reasonable in deliverance, it must be reasonable in nature. Now reason refuses to admit that we can isolate actions as the objects of ethical judgment. Reason judges about a whole situation including motives, actions and consequences. It insists, in particular, that consequences must be taken into account, if only because the political and legal systems of mankind would be rendered nugatory if we were to concede that motive was sufficient to establish ethical worth. As Dr. Johnson said when criticizing the views of Rousseau, who held that motive alone was the concern of moral judgment: "Sir, that will not do. We cannot prove any man's intention to be bad. You may shoot a man through the head, and say you intended to miss him; but the judge will order you to be hanged. An alleged want of intention, when evil is committed, will not be allowed in a court of justice. Rousseau, Sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years." In other words, actual consequences must be considered.

This is not to say that intended consequences, do not

count. Since, however, it is a man's duty to see that the results of his actions have some relation to what it might have been reasonable to expect, reason also insists that the good man must be, at least to some extent, a reasoning man. Therefore although intuitions may, and indeed do, lie at the bases of all *bona fide* ethical judgments, Objective-Intuitionism in its traditional form cannot be accepted.

### C. Criticism of Utilitarian Theories

(i) THAT UTILITARIANISM FAILS TO RECOGNISE THAT STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS MAY BE VALUABLE IN THEMSELVES. Objections to utilitarian theories have been indicated in Chapter IX<sup>1</sup>. They are broadly three. First, Utilitarianism makes no provision for the fact that some states of mind and the actions which proceed from them are accounted valuable, independently of their results, by the moral consciousness of mankind. While admitting the intuitions of the popular moral consciousness to this effect, utilitarians are inclined to explain them as the inherited versions of utilitarian principles whose justifications have been forgotten.<sup>2</sup> The attitude and behaviour of the resolute torturee<sup>3</sup> is on their view only approved now because a similar attitude and a similar behaviour once had, or were liable to have, socially beneficial consequences; they also insist that intuitions are not enough and that ethical issues must in the last resort be decided by reason.

These contentions involve a confusion between two different questions. The assertion that reason must be the arbiter in ethical matters may be accepted, if it means that it is to reason that, in the last resort, we must look to determine what ethical principles should be adopted and what ethical conclusions established. The raw material which the deliverances of the moral consciousness provide for

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 342-347.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 338, 339, Chapter X, pp. 374, 380-382, and the argument on p. 390 above.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 346, 347.

investigation can, in other words, be treated by reason just as the raw material of any science is treated by reason, the function of reason being to clarify this raw material, and to derive from it principles of conduct. But it does not, therefore, follow that the raw material or subject matter of ethical reasoning, that, in other words, about which reason reasons, is itself provided by reason. It does not even follow that it is in the strict sense of the word reasonable. The raw material of ethics is provided by the deliverances of man's moral consciousness; these are the subject matter for theorizing in ethics, just as the behaviour of matter is the subject matter for theorizing in physics. Consequently, we can neither ignore ethical intuitions, nor is there any court of appeal other than the deliverances of the moral consciousness of mankind to which we can turn for a decision on matters of conduct which are in dispute. The utilitarians do not in fact ignore intuitions. It is, for example, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> to the popular consciousness that they turn for their first premise that pleasure, and pleasure alone, is desirable.

(ii) THAT OBJECTIVE UTILITARIANISM MAKES USE OF UNAVOWED INTUITIONS. Hence, our second criticism of Objective Utilitarianism is that although it explicitly disavows them, Utilitarianism no less than Intuitionism, entails the acceptance of intuitions. The fact, explicitly recognized by the most clearheaded of the utilitarians, Sidgwick, is admitted grudgingly, or not at all, by Mill and Bentham, who look askance at intuitions as the source of lazy thinking and obscurantist conclusion. But if the validity of ultimate and, as I have ventured to call them, indefensible intuitions is to be admitted, what justification is there for limiting our intuitions to those which are explicitly or implicitly recognized by the utilitarians? I have just drawn attention to the existence of what appears to be a widespread intuition to the effect that certain attitudes of mind and the actions proceeding therefrom are valuable

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 344, 345.

independently of their consequences. But having opened the door to intuitions, we cannot now close it. For what account are we to give of the methods by means of which we assess the value of consequences? A right action, the utilitarians assert, is the one which, of all those which it was possible for the agent to do, has the best consequences. What are the best consequences? We can answer only if we are prepared to make some affirmation about what is good; good, that is to say, for its own sake and in itself. How are we to determine what is good in this sense? If the argument which was used to establish the existence of ultimate values in Chapter V is valid,<sup>1</sup> we can do so only by means of a direct intuition. The effect of Utilitarianism is thus to transfer the sphere in which intuitions occur from that of right to that of good.

(iii) THAT OBJECTIVE UTILITARIANISM FAILS TO GIVE AN ADEQUATE ACCOUNT OF GOOD. Hence our third criticism is that, except in Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*, there is no adequate discussion of the nature of good in the writings of the utilitarians. Bentham consistently, Mill inconsistently, maintains that the sole good is pleasure. Sidgwick, after a searching examination, comes to the same conclusion, but qualifies his conclusion by intuitions to the effect that the pleasure which we ought to try to promote is that of others, no less than of ourselves. Can this conclusion be accepted? Is it in fact true that pleasure is the sole ultimate good?

## II. STATEMENT AND CRITICISM OF HEDONISM

### A. Statement of Psychological Hedonism

Of the philosophy that maintains that pleasure is the sole good there are many variants. There is, first, the view (A) that we are so constituted that we can only

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 166-170.

desire our own pleasure; there is, secondly, the view (B) that we *can* desire other things, but that we ought only to desire our own pleasure, since only our own pleasure is good; and there is the view (C) that we ought to desire the greatest amount of pleasure on the whole or, alternatively, the greatest pleasure of the greatest number, on the ground that all pleasure is good. I have already tried to show<sup>1</sup> that views (B) and (C) are inconsistent with view (A), since, if we can only desire our own pleasure it is nonsense to say that we ought to do so, or that we ought to desire the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. I do not think, however, that any one of these three variants of the pleasure philosophy is tenable. Many of the objections to which they are exposed have already been indicated. I shall, therefore, here content myself with a summary statement before proceeding to criticism.

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF HEDONISM: THE SMALL GIRL AND THE MARTYR.** I will begin with the doctrine that men are so constituted that they can only desire their own pleasure. Of this doctrine which is usually known as Psychological Hedonism, there is, so far as I know, no logical disproof. Moreover, it can be rendered exceedingly plausible; how plausible can be shown by examining one or two cases in which people apparently act from motives which contradict the doctrine, and then analysing these motives on hedonist lines.

Let us, for example, suppose that two children, B a little boy, and G a little girl, are each presented with five shillings at Christmas. B, aiming only at his own immediate pleasure, spends his five shillings on sweets, gorges them, and is sick. Elderly relatives censure him for selfishness and read him homilies on gluttony. G, however, spends her five shillings on presents for the elderly relatives and is duly praised for unselfishness and willingness to put the pleasures of other people before her own. If her action can be taken at its face value, Psychological Hedonism

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 334, 335.

is obviously untrue. But can it? Assuredly, the hedonist would argue, it cannot; for (a) G, who is of a calculating disposition, anticipates a return in kind from the elderly relatives. They are richer than she is: therefore she is likely to obtain more benefits in the long run from propitiating them, enlisting their favour on her behalf, and putting them under the obligation to reward her, than from a direct expenditure of the five shillings on herself.

(b) Little girls are apt to be complacent; they are also given to priggishness. They enjoy the satisfactions of feeling virtuous, bask in the sunshine of others' approval, and delightedly snuff up the odours of good reputation. The implied contrast with B, a contrast which her elders cannot help but draw, is moreover not without its effect. Therefore G acts as she does, because she prefers the pleasures of social approval to those of sweet-eating.

(c) "If this explanation be thought too cynical," the hedonist may say, "let us begin by conceding that G is by nature unselfish and benevolent. Now we should normally describe an unselfish and benevolent person as one who likes to give pleasure to others. To gratify one's wishes is always pleasant; hence to gratify the wish to give pleasure to others may be a source of more pleasure to the self than the direct gratification of the more obvious appetites of the self. Or, should the short statement of the case be preferred, the giving of pleasure to others is the unselfish person's most direct form of gratification. Whichever of these explanations is adopted, G is aiming at her own greatest pleasure no less directly than B is aiming at his."

As another illustration of conduct, which at first sight appears to disprove the contentions of Psychological Hedonism, let us consider in a little more detail, with a view to an analysis on hedonist lines, the case of the hypothetical martyr already cited in Chapter II<sup>1</sup> who goes to the stake for his opinions. Admittedly, he does not at first sight appear to be aiming at his own greatest

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, p. 47.

pleasure. "But," says the hedonist, "appearances are deceptive. To begin with, most martyrs have been men endowed with a strong histrionic sense, and have accordingly derived the greatest possible pleasure from occupying the centre of the stage. Now a martyr is at least assured of the limelight, even if the limelight is hot as well as bright. Again, martyrs are notoriously men of iron determination or, as I should prefer to put it, of pigheaded obstinacy. All self-willed men like getting their own way; in fact, they like it so much that they insist on it, even if, in the course of doing so, they have to put up with the pain of being burned. When the pain actually begins, they probably realize their mistake; realize, that is to say, that they have made a mistake as to what will give them the greatest pleasure in the long run. But by that time it is too late to rectify the mistake.

"More important, perhaps, is the consideration that most martyrs have been men of strong religious convictions who believed that they would be eternally damned, if they proved false to their religious beliefs and bowed the knee to Rome or to Satan or to Baal, or to whomever or whatever happened at the time to be regarded as the symbol of wickedness and error. Consequently, the choice, as it appeared to them, was a choice between being roasted for fifteen minutes in an earthly fire and being roasted for eternity in an infernal one. To opt for the former was, therefore, merely common prudence. Finally, if these reflections be regarded as involving a too cynical view of human nature, I will put my case in the most straightforward manner possible by pointing out to you that the martyr, a steadfast and conscientious man, suffers more from betraying his most cherished convictions than from the pain of the fire; so at least he thinks, for it is in the nature of such men to rate spiritual pain as more grievous than bodily. Therefore, in opting for the stake, he is aiming at his own greatest pleasure or, what from my point of view amounts to the same thing, at avoiding his own greatest pain." On such lines the conduct of the

martyr can be interpreted consistently with hedonist premises. A similar analysis may be applied to any other case of apparently self-denying or self-sacrificing conduct.

### B. Criticism of Psychological Hedonism

**THAT WE MUST ALL HAVE STARVED IN INFANCY.** The most summary objection to the view that we are so constituted that we can acknowledge no motive to action except that of increasing our own pleasure, has been advanced by Canon Rashdall. If Psychological Hedonism is true, then, he points out, we must all have starved in infancy. For babies maintain life by taking milk at the breast. Now on the first occasion on which a baby sucks the breast his action cannot have been motivated by the desire to obtain pleasure, since, if it really *was* the first occasion, he would have no reason to suppose that pleasure would result from his action. Hence, if Psychological Hedonism were correct in asserting that the only possible motive of human action is to obtain pleasure, there would be no psychological hedonists to make the assertion, since none of us would have survived starvation in infancy.

**THAT WE OFTEN ACT UPON IMPULSE.** Rashdall's example is a particular illustration of a difficulty whose application is general. Psychological Hedonism postulates a much greater degree of rationality in human beings than their conduct in fact exhibits, for, in postulating that the sole motive for our actions is the motive of increasing our own pleasure, it postulates that we do in fact always have a motive for what we do. But we frequently act on impulse. That our bodily reflex actions, the swallowing of food, the shrinking from a blow, the closing of the eyelid at the impact of a fly, are not calculated but involuntary, will be generally agreed. But they are no more calculated, no less involuntary, than many of the actions which a psychologist would ascribe to the promptings of instinct or impulse. Men sing in their baths and enjoy it;



but they do not sing in order to enjoy it. They sing from pure lightness of heart, or to let off steam. Men swear when enraged and sometimes break the furniture; but they do not swear and break furniture because, after an interval of calculation, they have come to the conclusion that they will derive more pleasure from swearing and furniture breaking than from keeping silence and leaving the furniture intact. They are, it is clear, acting on impulse which finds vent in action independently of reflection. When a man rushes into the street to snatch a child from the wheels of a passing car at the risk of his own life, it is improbable that he first stops to calculate that by doing so he will obtain more pleasure, than by staying where he is, and probable that he acts from an unthinking impulse to save the child's life.

The line between actions proceeding from unthinking impulses and those whose motivation contains an admixture of rational calculation is not easy to draw. Consider, for example, the case of boasting. We boast partly because we have an instinctive disposition to do so, partly because we wish to make other people admire us. With this object, little boys boast unashamedly. But, as I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> we presently discover that the effect of boasting is not to cause people to admire us, but to cause them to despise and dislike us. It is difficult, therefore, to maintain that men boast *in order* to obtain pleasure, since most men have learned by bitter experience that the effect of boasting is only too often the contrary of pleasant. It is, nevertheless, true that they boast and that the act of boasting gives them pleasure.

**THAT HEDONISM PUTS THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE.** It is the fact that it does give pleasure which underlies the fallacy upon which Hedonism rests. This fallacy depends upon a confusion which was originally pointed out by Bishop Butler,<sup>2</sup> the confusion between the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 187-189, for Butler's analysis.

ownership of an impulse and its object. It is a fact that every impulse that I satisfy is my impulse. It is also a fact that the satisfaction of any impulse brings pleasure. It does not, however, follow that my object in satisfying the impulse is the pleasure which attends its satisfaction.

It is, Butler maintained, possible to distinguish those actions which proceed from the motive of increasing one's own pleasure from those which are prompted by the need to satisfy an impulse. Thus, to take an example, we can distinguish between a man's purpose in eating in the case in which he is seeking to allay hunger, and his purpose in eating when he is seeking to obtain pleasant sensations, as, for example, when a replete man eats a chocolate. To assert that, when I feel hunger and eat, I do so with the conscious motive of increasing my happiness, saying to myself, 'If I eat, I shall get more pleasure than if I refrain from eating; therefore I will eat' is psychologically incorrect. When I raise my fork to my lips, I am not conscious of any such motive: I am conscious only of a feeling of hunger, combined, if I think about the matter at all, which I usually do not, with the belief that food will satisfy my hunger. The hedonist makes the mistake of concluding that, because by eating food and allaying need I obtain pleasure, it was at the pleasure that I was consciously aiming when I raised my fork to my lips. But this is to put the cart before the horse. It is to suppose that, because pleasure (P) occurs when I obtain something (X) that I want, therefore, I only wanted (X) because of (P); but, if I had not wanted (X) for its own sake, I should not have experienced (P) on obtaining it. (P), in other words, only occurred because I wanted (X) independently of (P). Hence, that we should desire things other than pleasure is sometimes a necessary condition of our experiencing pleasure.

**THE BY-PRODUCT THEORY OF PLEASURE.** So far is it from being true that I am always motivated solely by the desire to obtain pleasure for myself, that a plausible

case can be made out for the view that it is only when I aim at something other than my pleasure, that I succeed in obtaining pleasure. Many moralists have pointed out that to pursue pleasure directly is to miss it. The kingdom of pleasure, they say, cannot be taken by storm any more than the kingdom of beauty can be taken by storm. Pleasure, which evades direct pursuit, sometimes consents to grace our states of mind when we are actively engaged in the pursuit and achievement of something other than pleasure. It tends, in particular, to be experienced when faculties which are fully developed are being called into the fullest activity of which they are capable. This is the gist of Aristotle's famous account of pleasure, in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as a by-product or something added.

If one of our senses is in a healthy state and is engaged in reporting to us the nature of an object of an appropriate kind, for example in the case of sight, an object which is easily visible, then, says Aristotle, the activity of that sense is necessarily pleasant. The same is true of the activity of thought when it is engaged upon a suitable object. In asserting that activities of this kind are pleasant, Aristotle emphasizes the fact that the pleasure completes the activity. Pleasure, in other words, perfects the activity which it accompanies, although it is not a part of the activity, nor is it its necessary condition. Aristotle takes a parallel from the case of health. When a healthy young man is engaged in an activity calling forth his fullest powers, there is a superadded completion or perfection upon his health which gives it a bloom. Now pleasure is of this character; like the bloom upon the cheek of a young man it is not aimed at, but is a something added, a sign that a healthy organism is functioning as it ought to do in relation to a suitable object.

The account of pleasure given by Aristotle is a statement of psychological fact rather than an exposition of philosophical theory; and, on the point of psychological fact, there is little doubt that Aristotle is right. The by-product

theory of pleasure renders intelligible, for example, that bitter lesson of experience which teaches that you cannot repeat a pleasure. You have gone, let us say, to a concert to hear a Mozart quartet and have heard it with passionate enjoyment. Ravished by the memory of intense pleasure which the beauty of Mozart's music engendered, you go to hear the quartet a second time, and, the second time, it is surprisingly unsatisfying. You come away disappointed, almost disillusioned. What is the reason for your disappointment? It is, the by-product theory of pleasure would suggest, that on the second occasion, you were aiming directly at pleasure. The motives which prompted your two visits to the concert were, in fact, different motives. On the first occasion you wanted to hear the music for its own sake; on the second, to re-experience the pleasure which you obtained from hearing the music on the first occasion. The motive for your action, in fact, on the second occasion, was not the desire to hear music, but the desire to experience pleasure.

**THE MORALISTS ON THE DIRECT PURSUIT OF PLEASURE.** There is, perhaps, no truth which men more habitually neglect than the truth that pleasure may not be pursued directly, and no neglect for which moralists have more persistently rebuked them. Most of the poets' admonitions on the subject of the vanity of human wishes are probably derivable from their intuitive perception of the mistake of direct pleasure seeking. The following speech by Mrs. Quarles in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* may be taken as a typical statement of the truth which the poets have discerned, conveyed with a moralist's habitual irritation at the folly of his contemporaries.

"I feel so enormously much happier since I've been here, with you," she announced hardly more than a week after her arrival.

"It's because you're not trying to be happy or wondering why you should have been made unhappy, because

you've stopped thinking in terms of happiness or unhappiness. That's the enormous stupidity of the young people of this generation,' Mrs. Quarles went on; 'they never think of life except in terms of happiness. How shall I have a good time? That's the question they ask. Or they complain. Why am I not having a better time? But this is a world where good times, in their sense of the word, perhaps in any sense, simply cannot be had continuously, and by everybody. And even when they get their good times, it's inevitably a disappointment—for imagination is always brighter than reality. And after it's been had for a little, it becomes a bore. Everybody strains after happiness, and the result is that nobody's happy. It's because they're on the wrong road. The question they ought to be asking themselves isn't: Why aren't we happy, and how shall we have a good time? It's: How can we please God, and why aren't we better? If people asked themselves those questions and answered them to the best of their ability in practice, they'd achieve happiness without ever thinking about it. For it's not by pursuing happiness that you find it; it's by pursuing salvation. And when people were wise, instead of merely clever, they thought of life in terms of salvation and damnation, not of good times and bad times. If you're feeling happy now, Marjorie, that's because you've stopped wishing you were happy and started trying to be better. Happiness is like coke—something you get as a by-product in the process of making something else.'"

The truth embodied in Mrs. Quarles's sermon has been admirably summed up in Shaw's epigram, "the only way to avoid being miserable is not to have leisure enough to wonder whether you are happy or not". Happiness, in short, is not a house that can be built by men's hands; it is a flower which surprises you, a song which you hear as you pass the hedge, rising suddenly and simply in the night and dying down again.

I feel that some apology is necessary for the note of moralizing which has crept into the foregoing passage.

It harmonizes, I am prepared to admit, but ill with the strain of austere exposition which is, or should be, the dominating motif of this book. I venture to put forward three considerations in my defence. First, this is one of the few passages in which I am permitting myself to air my own views. Secondly, there is some ground for thinking that the truth embodied in the by-product theory of pleasure is in an exceptional degree neglected by the age in which we live. Thirdly, since the truth upon which I am insisting is one which no man will take upon trust from his neighbour, but which each must discover for himself, and discover only through the boredom and disillusion which attend its neglect, my moralizing is not likely to be taken seriously except by those for whom it is superfluous.

REASONS FOR BY-PRODUCT THEORY OF PLEASURE. (1) *Schopenhauer's Account of Pleasure*. But, it may be asked, is this fact upon which I have insisted, the fact, namely, that pleasure must not be pursued directly, a purely arbitrary fact? If it is indeed a fact, why should it be one? Various explanations are in the field. There is, for example, the view, advanced by Schopenhauer, that pleasure is a state of satisfied consciousness which is necessarily dependent upon a preceding state of dissatisfaction. Schopenhauer is to-day chiefly known for his philosophy of pessimism, a pessimism which is directly derivable from his conception of the underlying principle of life as an unconscious urge or impulse, which he called the Will. Every individual is for Schopenhauer a particular manifestation or expression of the Will. The Will expresses itself in the individual's consciousness in the form of a continual succession of wants or needs, and it is the pain of want which causes the individual to take action which is designed to satisfy the want. When the want is satisfied, the individual feels pleasure, but feels it only for a moment, since, as wanting or needing is the very stuff of life, the satisfied want is immediately replaced by another. Since

the pleasure which attends the satisfaction of want is dependent upon the pre-existence of the want which it satisfies, we cannot obtain the pleasure of satisfaction without undergoing the preceding pain of want—we cannot, in short, feast unless we are first prepared to fast—and the attempt to enjoy the pleasure after the want is satisfied results only in boredom and satiety. It is for this reason that the devotees of the so-called life of pleasure, which aims at the continual enjoyment of pleasure without the intervening pain of want, probably enjoy themselves less than those who devote themselves to hard and unremitting effort.

Since the pain of need or desire is a permanent condition of living, and the pleasure of satisfaction is transitory, life, regarded as a commercial speculation with pleasure on the credit and pain on the debit side, must, according to Schopenhauer, be regarded as a failure. We cannot remain satisfied, try as we will, but are driven forward by the remorseless urge of life, expressing itself in a continuously recurring series of new wants and impelling us to make ever fresh efforts to satisfy them. These may or may not be successful, but the pleasure of success is precarious and short, while the pain of newly recurring need is certain.

(2) *Plato on Mixed and Unmixed Pleasures.* It is not necessary to accept Schopenhauer's general metaphysical view, or even the pessimistic conclusion which he derives from his ethical theory, to recognize the force of his contentions in their bearing upon pleasure. It is, however, difficult to resist the conclusion that he pushes them too far. Not all the pleasures are dependent upon pre-existing need; not all are conditioned by the pain of boredom or the spur of desire. Some pleasures, although not perhaps the most intense, are enjoyed for themselves. These Plato, in a famous passage in a Dialogue called the *Philebus*, entitled "pure pleasures".

Pure pleasures are distinguished from impure pleasures by reason of the fact that they contain no admixture of

pain. Many pleasures, Plato points out, are dependent for their pleasantness upon the degree of the preceding dissatisfaction to which they are relative. Thus the pleasure of the convalescent is dependent upon the fact of his preceding illness; of the resting man upon his preceding fatigue; of the water-drinking man upon his preceding thirst. These states and activities, convalescing, resting, water-drinking, are characterized by the sort of pleasure whose nature, when it is experienced in its crudest form, as, for example, in the form of relief from long and wearing pain, we all recognize for what it is. We recognize, that is to say, that the pleasure experienced on relief from pain owes its pleasantness solely to the fact that we are no longer suffering the pain which we formerly suffered. These, then, are impure pleasures and up to this point Plato agrees with Schopenhauer. There are, however, other pleasures which, Plato points out, are not dependent upon want or need. The smell of violets and the taste of chocolate, are simple examples of these. One's pleasure in a bright frosty morning in winter, or in the colours of the leaves on an October afternoon, are more complex examples of the same class. Pre-eminent in the class of pure pleasures Plato places the pleasures of intellectual and aesthetic activity. Nor, I think, can it be denied that the very real pleasures of listening to good music, of looking at good pictures, of solving a difficult problem, of carrying on an abstract discussion, of pursuing a difficult but valuable line of research, are in no sense determined by, or dependent upon, a preceding state of need, or a preceding experience of pain. We are not made miserable because we are *not* listening to music, although we may enjoy ourselves very much when we are.

(3) *That the Desire for Impure Pleasures Grows With What It Feeds on.* Plato has a further criticism to make of the impure pleasures. The need for them grows, he points out, with its satisfaction. Yet although, or, it may be, because it grows, it is ever harder to satisfy. The pain of the ever-growing need is greater, the pleasure of the



ever-diminishing satisfaction is less. Thus, if a man allows himself to be dominated by his appetites, he will find that he is in bondage to a tyrant whose demands grow ever more exacting, and who shows less and less gratitude when they are satisfied.

The case of cigarette smoking cited on a previous page<sup>1</sup> affords a good example of Plato's contention.

What is true in a small way of a small desire, such as the desire for cigarette smoking, is more significantly true of the more tyrannous desires; of the desire for heavy drinking, for sexual pleasure, or for drugs.

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-INDULGENCE.** In spite of these obvious considerations, there is a school of thought represented in every age, which identifies the good life with intensity of sensational experience. "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is," Walter Pater affirms, "the end." "Success in life" is, he continues, "to burn always with" a "hard gem-like flame, to maintain", an "ecstasy". The palace of wisdom lies through the gateways of excess, announced Blake, who also exhorted us to "damn braces" and "bless relaxes". In all ages men have seen in self-expression and self-development the ends of life. The body, they have urged, should be regarded as an Aeolian harp for the evocation of delicate harmonies of feeling and of sensation. Deliberately, by training and experience, the wise man tunes the harp, producing as a result harmonies of feeling still more exquisite, thrills of sensation still more intense.

This attitude to life, however eloquent the language in which it finds expression, is, nevertheless, exposed to a disabling defect, the defect which is illustrated by the example of excessive smoking, the defect against which Aristotle seeks to guard by his doctrine of the Mean, and which Plato has in mind when he criticizes the impure pleasures. Of the pleasures which result from the satisfaction of appetites, it is true (i) that the more of them

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 102.

you have, the more of them you will want, and (ii) that you will find it ever more difficult to obtain that of which you want more. Plato's general conclusion is that a small amount of pure pleasure is better than a large amount of mixed pleasure. Consequently, he commends even on purely hedonistic grounds the life which is devoted to the pursuit of wisdom and beauty as compared with that which is spent in seeking to satisfy the desires.

**DO WE EVER PURSUE PLEASURE AS AN END?** If it be granted that we can acknowledge motives for action other than the motive of increasing our own pleasure, the question may be asked whether we ever do act from the motive which the psychological hedonist asserts to be our sole motive? It seems doubtful. Hedonism assumes that there is a special kind of mental event which it calls a pleasure, and that it is at the production of this mental event that we invariably aim. Now, a highly plausible psychological view maintains that there are no such things as pleasures and pains conceived as separate events occurring in our psychological history; what we call pleasures and pains are, it holds, always qualities of other events. The subject is technical, and I cannot do more than indicate a conclusion which it would be beyond the scope of this book to defend. This conclusion is, broadly, that all mental events are primarily forms of cognition; they are, that is to say, ways of knowing something. Now most of our "knowings" are characterized by a quality which the psychologists know as emotional tone. Thus, if I see a tiger and am frightened, I should be said to be knowing or cognizing the tiger fearfully; if I see it behind the bars of a cage and am interested in observing its movements, I am cognizing it curiously. Now one of the qualities by which my cognitions are characterized is the quality of their hedonic tone, that is to say, the degree of their pleasurable or painfulness. If, for example, I am looking at a row of chocolates in a box in a shop window

and do not happen to be wanting chocolates, my cognition of the chocolates will probably be characterized by a neutral hedonic tone; if I am badly in need of chocolates but am unable to pay for them, it is probable that the hedonic tone which characterizes my cognition will be disagreeable. If, however, I buy them and taste them and enjoy them, I shall be cognizing the chocolates pleasantly. Now it seems improbable that we ever have an experience which has no qualities except its hedonic ones: it seems unlikely, that is to say, that we ever have an experience which is one of pure pleasure or of pure pain; for all our experiences, if I am right, are experiences of something, and it is that of which they are experiences which gives them their distinctive non-hedonic qualities. Thus when I say that an experience of excessive drinking, or of drug-taking, is pleasant but shameful, what I mean, if this analysis is right, is that I like it for its hedonic qualities, although I dislike it for its non-hedonic qualities; if I say that so-and-so is virtuous but disagreeable, I mean that the non-hedonic qualities which characterize my cognition of so-and-so are respectful, but that the hedonic qualities are unpleasant. This is probably what Mill meant by his ambiguous distinction between higher and lower pleasures.<sup>1</sup> If the foregoing is right, all hedonic qualities are qualitatively the same; they differ only in degree. The difference between the so-called higher and lower pleasures is, therefore, a difference between the non-hedonic qualities that characterize two states of mind which may be the same in respect of their hedonic qualities. To revert to the case of the chocolates, we should not say, on this view, that when I desire a chocolate, I am desiring pleasure. What I am desiring is the characteristic experience of chocolate eating, which happens to have a pleasant hedonic tone. Thus we need aim purely at pleasure; what we aim at is a state in which the hedonist would say that we are pursuing our own pleasure, is the enjoyment of a specific experience.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, p. 330.

which we expect to be characterized by a pleasurable hedonic tone. This analysis can be applied to those pleasures which Plato describes as pure, no less than those which he regarded as impure. It suggests that not even in the case of the pure pleasures is the motive for my action such as Psychological Hedonism asserts. It suggests that, when I enjoy smelling a violet, I am not enjoying a pleasure, but am enjoying a specific, cognitive, experience, the "knowing," of a violet, which I may have deliberately aimed at, which happens to have a pleasant hedonic quality. The conclusion of this psychological analysis is that it is never the case that the motive of an action is solely the wish to obtain pleasure for the agent. The motives of those actions which constitute the most plausible illustration of the hedonist's contentions will be motives to have certain specific experiences, which are distinguishable from all other experiences in respect of their non-hedonic qualities, but which share with them the common quality of being characterized by a marked degree of pleasant hedonic tone.

For the reasons given, I conclude that there is no good ground for supposing that pleasure, or that pleasant states of consciousness, or that pleasant mental events, are the only possible objects of human desire, and that the wish to have them is the only possible motive of human action.

### C. Statement and Criticism of Ethical Hedonism

THAT ETHICAL HEDONISM IS NOT CAPABLE OF LOGICAL DEMONSTRATION OR DISPROOF. There remains for consideration the view that, although I can desire things other than our own pleasure, I ought only to desire pleasure, since pleasure is the Good. This view, which may be entitled Ethical Hedonism, since it introduces the word "ought" has two forms, (a) that I ought only to desire my own pleasure since my pleasure is the sole good, or is the sole good for me, and (b) that I

ought to desire the greatest pleasure on the whole, or the greatest pleasure of the greatest number. These two forms of Ethical Hedonism are sometimes known as Egoistic Ethical Hedonism and Universalistic Ethical Hedonism. In the course of the foregoing discussions a number of arguments which militate against the acceptance of either view have been indicated. Here again, however, it is doubtful whether any logical refutation is possible. The nearest approach to one is afforded by the argument already used in this chapter<sup>1</sup> to show that the term "good" cannot be equated with any other concept whatever. If this argument is correct, good cannot be equated with pleasure.

Egoistic Ethical Hedonism has often been criticized on the ground that it is a vulgar and unworthy doctrine, and repugnant to the moral sense of mankind. If this objection means anything at all, it means that most people experience intuitions to the effect that some things other than pleasure are good in themselves, and are not good merely as a means to the increase of pleasure, the imputation of vulgarity arising from the proposal to value merely as a means to enjoyment that which is valuable in and for its own sake. That most people do experience such intuitions seems to be highly probable.

If it cannot be logically refuted, Ethical Hedonism cannot be logically demonstrated.

Of the proposition that pleasure alone is good, or is the Good, there is not, nor in the nature of things can there be, any proof. It rests, as I have tried to show, upon an indefensible intuition. It is not, therefore, surprising that when philosophers do endeavour to defend it, they should fall into inconsistency, as J. S. Mill fell into inconsistency when he sought to establish the fact that there were different qualities of pleasure, a higher and a lower.<sup>2</sup> Now it may be plausibly suggested that these attempted defences are prompted by their authors' unconscious recognition that the view that pleasure is the only good is at variance with the plain

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 388, 389.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX, p. 330.

deliverances of the moral sense, and it is the attempt to resolve the conflict between theory and experience that leads to inconsistencies which would not otherwise have passed the intellectual censorship of so acute a thinker as Mill.

Mill was not alone in failing to observe the flaw in the argument that seeks to establish higher and lower qualities of pleasure. Dr. Johnson was guilty of the same fallacy, as witness the following quotation from Boswell:

“‘Sir, that all who are happy, are equally happy, is not true. A peasant and a philosopher may be equally *satisfied*, but not equally *happy*. Happiness consists in the multiplicity of agreeable consciousness. A peasant has not capacity for having equal happiness with a philosopher.’

“‘I remember,” Boswell continues, “this very question very happily illustrated in opposition to Hume, by the Reverend Mr. Robert Brown at Utrecht. ‘A small drinking glass and a large one,’ he said, ‘may be equally full; but the large one holds more than the small.’”

**THAT THERE ARE NOT DIFFERENT KINDS OF HAPPINESS.** Now the argument outlined above<sup>1</sup> does, I think, convincingly show that it is not a greater capacity for *happiness* that the philosopher possesses, but a greater capacity for the appreciation of values other than that of happiness. That the state of the philosopher is more *valuable* than that of the peasant may be true, but there is not the faintest reason to suppose that he is, therefore, more capable of happiness of the same kind as the happiness that the peasant enjoys. Yet, if the arguments already given<sup>2</sup> are valid, there cannot be differences in kinds or qualities of happiness, but only in degrees of happiness.

The various attempts which have been made to show that higher, or more refined, or more elevated happiness is happier than lower, less refined, or less elevated happiness, are all guilty of the same error; they all, that is to say,

<sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 410-412.

fail to observe that in postulating the greater *value* of higher happiness, that is, of what Dr. Johnson calls the philosopher's happiness, they are admitting the existence of values other than happiness. I conclude that the view that happiness is the only good is not one which can be validly supported by argument.

Arguments are felt to be needed and are in fact put forward in its support, because it appears *prima facie* to conflict with the deliverances of the moral sense or, if the expression be preferred, to gainsay our intuitions to the effect that things other than pleasure possess value. Yet because these intuitions of value do in fact exist, because, that is to say, we do feel that some states of consciousness are higher and not merely more pleasant than others, inconsistency sooner or later creeps into arguments which are advanced to show that pleasure is the only value.

If the assertion that pleasure is the only value cannot be supported by argument, it must rest upon an unsupported intuition; but once the fact that it does so is realized, we have no grounds for resisting the admission of other unsupported intuitions of value.

The doctrine that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is a good and ought to be promoted, like the doctrine that pleasures can differ in quality, affords another illustration of the difficulty of maintaining the view that pleasure is the only good. In so far as we admit that we ought to seek to distribute whatever pleasures there are evenly, we are surely admitting that we consider justice and equality to be goods, and admitting therefore, that we ought to aim at them as well as at pleasure.

#### *Books*

*Books critical of Subjectivism and Naturalism.*

SORLEY, W. R. *The Ethics of Naturalism.*

BRADLEY, F. H. *Ethical Studies.*

GREEN, T. H. *Prolegomena to Ethics.*

*Discussions of Hedonism.*

- ✧ PLATO. *The Philebus*.
- ✧ ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X.  
BUTLER, JOSEPH. *Dissertation on Virtue*.
- ✧ SIDGWICK, H. *Methods of Ethics*, Book I, Chapter IV, and  
Book III, Chapter XIII.
- BROAD, C. D. *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, Chapter VI,  
especially pp. 180-240.
- MOORE, G. E. *Principia Ethica*.



## CHAPTER XII: A THEORY OF GOOD OR VALUE

**Introductory.** If I am right in assuming that pleasure or happiness is not the only thing which is good in itself, the question arises what else is good in itself? Hitherto I have been largely engaged in summarizing the views historically put forward by leading writers upon ethics. The expositions of Intuitionism, of Utilitarianism, both objective and subjective, and the criticisms of these theories, are such as will be found in most of the text books on ethics. The form which I have given to the exposition and criticism is my own, but the substance was derived from others. The theory of value which follows, although it owes much to other philosophers, and in particular to Plato, embodies views which are in part my own. In what follows, then, I am, for the first time in this book, advancing opinions which are backed by no better authority than that of the author. It is important that the reader should bear this fact in mind.

My object is to suggest the outline of a theory of good or value which embodies, or is at least compatible with, the results reached in the course of the preceding survey.

**Meanings of the Word Good.** It will have become apparent in the course of the preceding chapters that the word "good" is used in a number of different senses. It has also been argued that, in so far as "good" means something which is ultimate and unique, its meaning is indefinable, while, in so far as that which the word "good" means is analysable into meanings for which other words stand, the particular meaning which we assign to it will depend upon and be determined by our adoption of a particular ethical theory. Thus "good" may mean approved

of by me (subjectivist theory), or expedient for me (instrumentalist theory), or useful for me (utilitarian theory); or good may be equated with some other concept, for example with pleasure, as it is by the hedonists. For the purpose of the ensuing exposition it will be convenient to distinguish two senses in which the word "good" is frequently used; the first, to denote whatever is regarded as ultimately valuable in and for itself, and not as a means to any other thing; the second, to denote moral worth or virtue. I shall, so far as possible, abstain from using the word "good", and employ instead the expressions "value" and "moral virtue", when I wish to denote these two frequent meanings of "good".

## (I) SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS REACHED IN COURSE OF FOREGOING EXPOSITION

In the course of the discussions which have occupied Part II certain conclusions have been provisionally reached. I propose to enumerate such of these as are relevant to the present discussion.

(1) **Conclusion that Ultimate Values Exist.** There is the conclusion that, whenever a genuine ethical judgment is passed, the existence of an ultimate value, that is to say, of something which is considered to be valuable for its own sake and not as a means to something else, is entailed.<sup>1</sup> The qualification which is implied by the words "genuinely ethical" is important, for, if any form of subjectivist theory is true, no *genuine* ethical judgment ever is passed. In order that an ethical judgment may be genuine and not merely a disguised form of some non-ethical judgment—, in order, to take an example, that the judgment "X is good" may mean that X has a certain ethical quality, and not merely that X happens to be approved of by me, it is necessary that the universe should contain factors which possess ethical characteristics in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, pp. 166-170.

their own right; it is necessary, in short, that some things should be really good, others really bad, some things really right and others really wrong. Objectivist theories assert or imply that this is the case. On the assumption, then, that some form of Objectivism is correct, I have tried to show that, when any genuine ethical judgment is made, for example, the judgment that quinine is good for a cold, the existence of something that is considered to be ultimately valuable for its own sake and not as a means to something else, is implied.

(2) Conclusion that Since Ultimate Values are Unique No Account Can Be Given of Them. Secondly, there is the conclusion that whatever is ultimately valuable is unique, and that, because it is unique, no account can be given of it. For the uniqueness of ultimate values a number of reasons has been adduced. These reasons may be formulated in the type of argument which was instanced in the last chapter in criticism of subjectivist theories of good.<sup>1</sup> This type of argument seeks to show that the meaning of the word "good"—and I am here using the word "good" to denote whatever is ultimately valuable in and for itself—cannot be equated with the meaning of any other concept. If, for example, we are told that pleasure is good or is the Good, then, whenever we meet the words "good" or "the Good" in a sentence, we can substitute for them the word "pleasure". Now that pleasure is the Good is a discussible proposition, but that pleasure is pleasure is not a discussible proposition. Thus the two propositions do not mean the same thing, and pleasure cannot, therefore, be equated with good or the Good.

The same argument can be used with equal force against the attempted identification of good with any other concept. It follows that good, or rather, to use the word which in the interests of clarity of exposition I am proposing to substitute, value, is unique in the sense that it cannot be equated with, or exhaustively analysed into, anything else.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 388, 389.

Now whatever is unique is indescribable. Colour is unique, and any attempt to define or describe colour in terms of anything else will, therefore, falsify it. Thus we can recognize colour, but we cannot say what it is. Beauty, again, is unique, and we cannot, therefore, describe beauty; we can only recognize it. Similarly with any other form of value, and similarly, therefore, with that form of value which we know as moral virtue. Moral virtue also is unique and is also, therefore, indescribable. But the fact that moral virtue and beauty are unique and indescribable does not mean that we cannot recognize them, or that we do not feel impelled to pursue them.

If beauty and moral virtue, together with other forms of value are both unique and indescribable, we cannot, it is obvious, give any reasons for our appreciation of the one or of our effort to realize the other. This conclusion has already been indicated in the course of the arguments given in Chapter V for the view there called Ethical Silence. Since, however, it constitutes one of the fundamental contentions of the theory of value which I wish to put forward, I shall venture to elaborate it<sup>1</sup> in its application to that form of value with which Part II of this book is specifically concerned, namely, moral virtue.

Moral virtue is a characteristic of persons. The characteristic of being morally virtuous is one which we are able to recognize in others, and which we endeavour, as I shall try to show below,<sup>2</sup> to attain ourselves. My immediate purpose is to emphasize the fact that we are not in a position to answer the questions, "Why do we recognize moral virtue to be valuable and why do we seek to attain it?", that, in short, we are not in a position to give an account of moral virtue.

**DIGRESSION ON MODES OF DESCRIPTION.** The expression "to give an account of", when used in such sentences as "I believe that I am in a position to give an

<sup>1</sup> See Conclusion (3), pp. 422-426 below.

<sup>2</sup> See Conclusion (5), pp. 428, 429 below.

account of so-and-so," is a loose one. There are, it is obvious, several ways of giving an account of a thing. Broadly, however, they reduce themselves to one or other of three. We can enumerate the thing's characteristics; we can specify the conditions or circumstances which produced it; or we can point to and describe its effects.

Thus to give an account of a civilization is to enumerate the characteristics on account of which we consider ourselves entitled to describe a community as civilized: that, for example, its institutions are free and its laws humane; that its cities are wealthy, its government respected, its artistic output abundant in quantity and good in quality. To give an account of a civilization is also to specify the conditions in which it arose, pointing out, for example, that it succeeded an era of continuous warfare; that it was ushered in by an increase of material prosperity; that it depended upon a stable government and a contented population; that it was the product of security and freedom from fear.

Thirdly, to give an account of a civilization is to speak of its effect upon its members saying, for example, that the level of their moral behaviour is high; that in manners they are polished and urbane; that in religion they are free from superstition; that in action they are just and temperate; that they are prepared to tolerate those with whom they disagree, and in matters where the truth is not known, that they are willing to suspend their judgments.

Now when something of which we propose to give an account is unique, it will be found that only the second and third of these methods are open to us, the first being unavailable by reason of the fact that the characteristics of a thing which is unique cannot be described without falsification. They cannot, that is to say, be described in terms of something else without being misdescribed. If they could, they would not be unique.

Thus I can say that it is a characteristic of a father to be a begetter of children, but how am I to describe the characteristic of colour? I can say that colour is observed

when light rays of a certain wave-length and frequency impinge upon the retina of an eye, which is connected by a visual cord with a brain, which is part of a body which is animated by a mind. In other words, I can say (though the statement is ambiguous) that colour is caused by light rays of a certain wave-length and frequency; but this is to specify the circumstances in which colour is observed or the conditions upon which colour supervenes. It is, in other words, to give an account of colour by the second method. Again, I can say that when in certain conditions of light a coloured object is placed in a particular spatial relation to my line of vision, I shall have certain sensations, for example the sensation of seeing red; but this is to give an account of colour in terms of its effects. One of the effects of colour, I am now saying, is to produce certain unique sensations in a human mind which is in association with, or which animates, a body and a brain. I am, that is to say, now giving an account of colour by means of the third method. But if, having carefully ruled out accounts in terms of predisposing conditions, circumstances and effects, I am asked what are the characteristics of colour, I cannot think of any answer that I can give. I know what colour is in the sense that I can recognize it when I see it, but I cannot say anything about its characteristics.

(3) Conclusion that Moral Virtue is Unique. What is true of colour is, I am suggesting, true of value, in any of the forms in which the human mind apprehends it. Let me try to illustrate this generalization by reference to that form of value which I have termed moral virtue. Moral virtue, I am maintaining, is unique. Now, since it is unique, it will elude any attempt to describe its characteristics. Hence, when writers on ethics make the attempt, it is found that the accounts that they are giving of moral virtue, relate not to the characteristics of moral virtue, but to the circumstances and conditions in which it appears or to the effects which it produces. This generalization is

abundantly illustrated by some of the theories which have figured in the preceding survey. Thus subjectivist theories give an account of moral virtue in terms of its predisposing conditions. Let a certain class of conduct be expedient for a community in the sense that it conduces to its safety, or promotes its welfare; let the conduct in question be, as a consequence, inculcated as a duty in the members of that community and its performance rewarded by the esteem of the community; let the same conditions prevail over a number of generations in the course of each of which the conduct in question is praised and its performance encouraged; then, according to the theories in question, a generation will one day arise in whom the obligation to perform the conduct will be recognized as a duty, and approval of it when performed will be bestowed by a so-called moral sense.

THAT MORAL VIRTUE IS NOT DESCRIBABLE IN TERMS OF ITS PREDISPOSING CONDITIONS. It is broadly on these lines that subjectivist theories give an account of moral virtue, citing the predisposing conditions which cause the feeling of duty to arise, and concluding that conduct is right and characters virtuous simply because they are approved. I have already criticized theories of this type.<sup>1</sup> Here my purpose is to point out that, if the predisposing conditions which are cited are really efficacious in giving rise to the feeling of moral obligation and the sense of moral approval, then both the feeling and the sense are the determined functions of the conditions; they are, that is to say, as much the products of the factors which brought them into existence as red hair and freckles are the products of a certain combination of genes, or a fear of the dark of incidents in early childhood.

If we are not responsible for our conception of duty and our feelings of moral approval, then we are not free in respect of them. We cannot help doing our duty when

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 384-392.

we do do it, or of approving of the disposition to do it in others, any more than we can help having a good eye at games or disliking marzipan. Now ethics, as has been pointed out on a number of occasions, entails freedom, and moral virtue must be freely achieved, or else it is not moral virtue. In so far, then, as the subjectivist's account of moral virtue in terms of its origins and predisposing conditions is valid, it turns out that it is not what we mean by moral virtue that is being so accounted for.

**THAT MORAL VIRTUE IS NOT DESCRIBABLE IN TERMS OF ITS EFFECTS.** While subjectivist theories specify the conditioning circumstances from which moral virtue takes its rise, Utilitarianism looks to its results; when, that is to say, it seeks to give an account of what we mean by moral virtue, Utilitarianism adopts the third of the methods enumerated above. A right action, says the utilitarian, is one which has the best consequences, and a virtuous man is he who habitually performs actions which have good consequences. Moral virtue, then, has what is termed an instrumental value; it is valuable *because* it is instrumental in producing certain effects. If moral virtue is described as something which has a certain kind of effect, and is regarded as desirable *because* it has that effect, then it is being valued not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else, namely, for the sake of its effects. But just as, when we sought to give an account of moral virtue by specifying the conditions and circumstances in which it arose, it turned out that it was not moral virtue that we had described, since moral virtue entails freedom, and that which is a function of a set of conditions could not have been other than what it is, so it turns out that, when we try to give an account of moral virtue in terms of its effects, it is, once again, not moral virtue that we are describing, since, when we say of something that it produces something else and then proceed to attribute value to it for the sake of the something else which it produces, the something in question which



we are valuing for the sake of the something else is deprived of value in its own right. Now, if something which purports to be moral virtue turns out not to have value in its own right, then it is not what we mean by moral virtue.

Moral virtue may or may not exist; the expression "moral virtue" may or may not, that is to say, stand for a positive and distinctive conception. But if it does stand for such a conception, then it is entailed in the conception of it that moral virtue is valuable for its own sake. Popular usage supports this view. We should, it holds, pursue virtue for its own sake, because virtue is good; we should do our duty, even if the heavens fall. If, then, we try to do what is right for the sake of some result which will follow from doing right, because our conduct will bring us prosperity, or a desirable reputation, or a knighthood; if we do our duty for some ulterior motive, even if it is only to please God and win a place in heaven, then, although we may be quite admirable people, it is, nevertheless, not moral virtue that we have achieved, it is not the pull of moral obligation that we have acknowledged. In other words, if we are good for the sake of the rewards of being good, then, paradoxically, we are not really being good. The point is not an easy one to make, and I shall offer no apology for having recourse to Tolstoy to state for me what I find difficulty in stating myself. The following quotation, recounting a conversation between Lenin and a peasant which occurs at the end of *Anna Karenina* puts the point admirably:—

"Fyodor says that Kirillov lives for his belly. That's comprehensible and rational. All of us as rational beings can't do anything else but live for our belly. And all of a sudden the same Fyodor says that one mustn't live for one's belly, but must live for truth, for God, and at a hint I understand him! And I and millions of men, men who lived ages ago and men living now—peasants, the poor in spirit and the learned, who have thought and written about it, in their obscure words saying the same thing—we are all agreed about this one thing: what we

must live for and what is good. I and all men have only one firm, incontestable, clear knowledge, and that knowledge cannot be explained by the reason—it is outside it, and has no causes and can have no effects.

“If goodness has causes, it is not goodness; if it has effects, a reward, it is not goodness either. So goodness is outside the chain of cause and effect.

“And yet I know it, and we all know it.

“What could be a greater miracle than that?”

The truth which this passage embodies is that which Kant sought to express by his theory that, when we acknowledge the pull of moral obligation, we escape from the operation of the law of cause and effect, which governs the world of things as they appear.<sup>1</sup> I will try to state it in terms of the language used in the preceding paragraphs. If there is such a thing as moral virtue, then it is unique. Consequently, although we can recognize it when we meet it, we cannot describe its characteristics any more than we can describe the characteristics of any other thing which is unique, such as, for example, colour. If, however, we resort to one of the other categories of explanation, and seek to give an account of moral virtue in terms of its predisposing conditions or of its results, we find, when we have finished, that it is not, in fact, moral virtue that we have succeeded in describing, but something quite different. For it is inherent in the conception of moral virtue that it should not be a function of predisposing conditions, and that it should not be cultivated or valued for the sake of its results.

(4) **Conclusion that the Morally Virtuous Man Must Possess Good Judgment.** This conclusion emerged as a result of the discussions contained in Chapter IX.<sup>2</sup> (After the preceding insistence on the impossibility of describing the characteristics of moral virtue, the statement that moral virtue involves an element of judgment suggests

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 204–207.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 316–319.

a certain inconsistency. It may be that I am, in fact, being inconsistent, or it may be, as I hope and think, that in ascribing to moral virtue an intellectual element, I am enunciating a truth, which is true about moral virtue, rather than saying what moral virtue is. Thus it is true to say about an egg that if it is kept too long, it will smell; but the truth does not constitute part of the nature of the egg. The truth is only true because the nature of the egg is what it is independently of the truth.<sup>1</sup>)

Let us provisionally use the term "a right action" in the utilitarian sense to mean an action which produces the best possible consequences, that is to say, consequences which contain the greatest possible amount of value. (I shall endeavour during the ensuing discussion to use the word "right" solely as an epithet of action, and to use it always in such a sense that an action which I speak of as "right", is one which produces consequences containing the greatest possible amount of value.) Now although moral virtue cannot, as I have tried to show, be adequately described or interpreted in terms of its results, it cannot be divorced from them. There must, it is obvious, be some relation between moral virtue and right actions. What this relation is I shall try, in the latter part of this chapter, to indicate.<sup>2</sup> I am here content to invoke the testimony of the popular consciousness to the effect that a morally virtuous man cannot be one who habitually performs actions which have bad consequences. A morally virtuous man is usually regarded as one who is animated by good, or, as I should prefer to say, by "morally virtuous", motives, and, as we have seen, morally virtuous motives cannot be considered apart from the consequences which actions proceeding from these motives may be expected to produce.<sup>3</sup> Now it is admitted that we cannot *know* with certainty what the results of our actions will be;

<sup>1</sup> See, for a development of this view, the discussion and criticism of the axiom of internal relations in my *Essays in Common Sense Philosophy*, Chapter II.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 459-462 below.

<sup>3</sup> See discussion in Chapter VIII, pp. 292-295.

we can only forecast them with a greater or less degree of accuracy. The point that I have tried to establish is that a man who forecasted very inaccurately, so that, with the best will in the world, he was continually performing actions which had the most unfortunate consequences, would not be adjudged by the popular consciousness to be as morally virtuous a man as he who habitually performed actions which had good consequences. It seems, therefore, to follow that the possession of a reasonably good judgment in the matter of forecasting the consequences of one's actions forms an essential element in the popular conception of moral virtue. On this point, I think that the popular moral consciousness is right.

#### (5) Conclusion that Moral Virtue is Valued and Pursued.

Although we cannot describe moral virtue, we do nevertheless desire it and seek to attain it. Three arguments have been used in the foregoing discussions in support of this conclusion. First, there is Socrates's argument<sup>1</sup> that virtue is a form of knowledge, an argument which entails the assumption that we do all pursue what Socrates calls "the Good", and that vice is, therefore, ignorance of what "the Good" is. This argument was criticized on the ground that it makes no provision for the fact that, although we often recognize "the Good", we nevertheless perform "the evil".<sup>2</sup> But the fact that we do not always or even often, pursue "the Good" we see, does not justify us in concluding that it has *no* influence over us, even when we neglect it. On the contrary, there is a part of us which would always *like* to do what we conceive to be right, and would *like* to behave in the way in which we think that we ought to behave, although the part in question may be overborne by desires for specific ends, whose achievement entails conduct other than that which we think to be right.

Subsidiary arguments in favour of this conclusion which have been mentioned in the preceding pages are, first,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 48-50.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 212, 213.

that, other things being equal, we do what we think to be right and pursue what we think to be good without ulterior motive. When, however, we do what we know to be wrong, there is always an ulterior motive: we do wrong, that is to say, to promote a particular object or to gain a particular end. Secondly, there is the argument that evil is parasitic upon good<sup>1</sup> in the sense that it is only because most people do, on the whole, act rightly and try to do their duty, that it pays some people to act wrongly. Thus lying only pays some people because most people tell the truth most of the time. The conclusion that moral virtue is valued and pursued for its own sake will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to other forms of value, for example, to truth and beauty.

#### (6) Conclusion that the Motive to Act Rightly is Not Irrational.

This conclusion was reached in the course of the discussion of free will in Chapter VII. I there sought to show that the perception that a certain course of action is right and reasonable constitutes for the virtuous man an adequate ground for performing the action. This conclusion was based upon the premise that, when we pursue what is good and try to do what is right, the state of consciousness involved is not one of unmixed feeling or desire, but contains an element of reason. If it did not, it would not, I argued, be possible to maintain the existence of moral freedom.

If this conclusion is correct, the fact that we cannot give reasons for desiring "the Good" does not entitle us to conclude that the desire for it is unreasonable. Just as the perception that a thing is beautiful, or that a proposition is true is one which in the last resort we are unable to justify or support by reason, so we cannot by reason justify or support our perception that so and so ought to be done. So much must be admitted. I might add that in not being demonstrable by reason our perceptions of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 39, 40 and Chapter VI, pp. 208, 209.

value are like our sense perceptions; we cannot, after all, give reasons to justify our perception that this or that is red. The fact that our moral judgments cannot be justified by reasons does not, however, mean that they are not passed by reason. On the contrary, our reasons are involved not only in the making of judgments of value, but also in the desire for those ends which the judgments affirm to have value. Reason, as the psychologists put it, has an emotive and conative side. I do not wish to imply by this conclusion that reason is one thing, feeling another, desire another. Rather I should prefer to say that our judgments of value are expressions of our personality as a whole, and that every element in our personality is, accordingly, integrated in the making of them. Reason, therefore, is integrated in the making of them.

The conclusions just enumerated are embodied in the ensuing Theory of Value.

## II. POSITIVE STATEMENT OF THEORY OF VALUE

**That the Recognition of Value is a Universal Human Attribute.** I think that Socrates was right in holding that all men possess a capacity for recognizing value. We do, that is to say, on occasion recognize those things which are ultimately valuable when we are brought into contact with them, although we do not always recognize them, and often make mistakes in recognition, taking things to be valuable which are not. The questions then arise, what things do we recognize to be ultimately valuable; why do we make mistakes about them; and what are the reasons for our mistakes?

Before I try to answer these questions, let me endeavour to substantiate my first proposition that we do all possess a capacity for recognizing value.

**Digression on Universals and Particulars.** The main reason for asserting that we possess this capacity is that we

do, as I have tried to show, regard certain things as being valuable in themselves; that we approve of whatever manifests or exemplifies things which we regard as being valuable in themselves; and that we only desire and approve of other things in so far as we think that they will promote these ultimately valuable things, or, rather, in so far as they will promote the things which manifest or exemplify these ultimately valuable things. Thus we hold that morally virtuous characters are valuable in themselves, apart from the actions in which the characters are expressed, and we approve of whatever tends to promote moral virtue. We also, I think, consider happy states of consciousness to be valuable in themselves, and we approve, therefore, of whatever tends to promote happiness. Morally virtuous characters and happy states of consciousness are, therefore, examples or illustrations of things which we consider to be valuable because they manifest or exemplify the ultimate values or moral virtue and happiness. Now we could not recognize that a particular thing exemplified a certain principle unless we also recognized the principle. In other words, to know that something is of a certain sort entails that you know the "sort" in question.

I must here pause to make a distinction which will be familiar to those who have some acquaintance with metaphysics between particulars and universals. Cream, snow and sheets are all particular white things, but they all possess a common quality in virtue of which we call them white. This common quality of whiteness is different from any one particular white thing; it is also different from the sum total of all the particular things which happen to be white. It is usually known in philosophy as a universal, and the things which possess the property of being white are spoken of as particulars which manifest or exemplify the universal whiteness.

Plato, as I have already mentioned,<sup>1</sup> held that universals possess a being in their own right apart from that of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 57-59.

the particulars which manifest or exemplify them. I think that Plato was right in taking this view. The reasons for this opinion belong to metaphysics and cannot be given here; they are, however, presented at some length in my *Guide to Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup>

**That A Knowledge of Universals is Entailed by the Recognition of Particulars.** Plato maintained that all men possess by nature a *certain* knowledge of universals. If they did not, they would not, he held, be able to recognize that certain particulars exemplify them. In holding this view I think that Plato was also right. Let me take as an example the universal, whiteness, and ask the question, "How do we come to know of a particular thing that it is white?" The answer which would normally be given to this question is, I think, as follows. When a baby is learning to talk, a particular white thing is pointed out to it and it is told, "That is white." Presently, another white thing, different from the first, is seen and the baby is told, "That, too, is white." When a number of different white things has been seen, the baby is supposed to abstract the quality which is common to each of them, the quality, that is to say, of being white, to hold it, as it were, in front of his mind independently of the things which exemplify it, and so to form the general concept of whiteness. Whiteness does not, on this view, exist apart from the things that are white. Whiteness is merely a conception of the mind which has been formed by abstracting the quality which a number of white things have in common. Whiteness is for this reason often called an abstract idea or concept.

Plato would have demurred to this view for the following reasons. Let us go back to the first occasion on which a baby sees a white thing and is told, "That is white." Now either the expression "That is white" was for it a meaningless noise or it was not. If it was for the baby a meaningless noise, as meaningless as a grunt or a Greek polysyllable, it would leave no impression of meaning on its mind.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter X, pp. 262-270.



Consequently, on the next occasion on which a white thing was seen and the baby was told "That, too, is white," there would be no residue of meaning in the baby's mind for the announcement to call up; there would, therefore, be no link between this second occasion of knowing a white thing and the first. Thus the process which is said to lead to the formation of abstract ideas would never be begun, since the baby would never have any foundation on which to build. For if, on the first occasion on which the word "white" was mentioned to it, the word was meaningless, it would be meaningless on the second occasion also. Now all people do have a general conception of whiteness. The conception, therefore, must have been reached by some other method, and on Plato's view, it must have been known in some sense from the first.

Let us again revert to the first occasion on which a baby is told "That is white". If the expression "That is white" is meaningless for it, then, as we have seen, the process which ends in the comprehension of the general idea of whiteness could never have begun. Plato concludes, therefore, that on the first occasion on which the words "That is white" were addressed to the baby, they could not have been *quite* meaningless. There must, then, have been something in the baby's mind to which the expression "That is white" hitched on, and what can this something have been except a knowledge of what "being white" means? To know what "being white" means, is to have a kind of knowledge of the universal whiteness, and to have it from the first.

Plato generalizes this point as follows. Whenever we come to know something on what appears to us to be the first occasion, the fact that we *do* come to know it presupposes some original acquaintance with what is known. To put the point in another way, we cannot learn something new without already in some sense knowing what it is that we want to learn. Thus the thing learned turns out not to have been completely new, and the so-called learn-

ing of it is a rediscovery of what was in some sense known already.

**That Learning is a Process of Rediscovery.** This is brought out by a celebrated illustration in the Dialogue called the *Meno*, where Socrates cross-examines a slave in order to throw light upon the nature of his knowledge of mathematical propositions. The slave is placed before the figure of a square, and Socrates proceeds to question him as to the nature of the square whose area is double that of the original square. Can he, for example, give any information about the side of this double square? The slave is at first at a loss, and makes a number of false suggestions. He suggests, for example, that the side of the double square is double the side of the original square, but in due course sees his error from "the nature of the thing itself", that is to say, from a simple inspection of the geometrical figure. Finally, he perceives in the diagonal of the given square the side of the double square which he is seeking. He sees this suddenly and he sees it for himself; Socrates does not, that is to say, tell him the answer. Socrates's rôle is that of a cross-examiner whose object is to turn the attention of the examinee in the direction of an answer which he must see for himself or not at all. Evidently, therefore, Socrates concludes, the slave had in himself as an original possession the knowledge of which he is suddenly made conscious. Thus "teaching" is a process of directing the attention of the pupil to what he already knows. The teacher does not impart information to the pupil. He merely enables the pupil to convince himself of something which he sees for himself. Similarly, learning is a process by which the soul becomes re-acquainted with what it already knows, or knows, but has forgotten that it knows. Learning, then, is the apprehension of inborn knowledge. It is "to recover of oneself knowledge from within oneself".

**The Pre-History of the Soul.** Only on the assumption that learning is "a recovery of inborn knowledge"

can the process of coming to know what appears to be "new" be explained. As Plato sums the matter up, we cannot come by new knowledge; for, either we already know the knowledge which we wish to acquire, in which case the knowledge is not new, or we do not know the knowledge which we wish to acquire, in which case we cannot know when we acquire it. But if all the knowledge which we *appear* to acquire is already in some sense possessed by us, how are we to explain the fact of our possession of it? Plato's answer is to be found in his doctrine of anamnesis or recollection.

Briefly he supposes there was a time when, prior to its incarnation in the flesh, the soul of man enjoyed a complete and untrammelled knowledge of the universals, or, as Plato calls them, Forms. When, having entered the body, it subsequently comes across the manifestations of these universals as characteristics of particular things, it recognizes the characteristics in question as exemplifying the universals of which it already possesses knowledge. Let us follow Plato in his application of this general conception to the recognition of moral virtue.

**That Moral Virtue Cannot Be Taught.** One of the questions which is prominently discussed in the early Dialogues is whether moral virtue can be taught. If, as Socrates maintains, virtue is a form of knowledge,<sup>1</sup> then, it is pointed out, you would expect virtue to be capable of being taught like any other branch of knowledge, for example, geometry. In fact, however, there are no teachers of, just because there are no experts in, virtue. It is, moreover, noteworthy that popular assemblies desirous of obtaining a decision on some question of policy involving moral issues—what, Plato conceives them to be considering, is it *right* as opposed to *expedient* for us to do?—do not call in an expert, as they would do if some technical question of shipbuilding or fortifications were involved, but permit their discussions to be dominated and the issue

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 48-50.

to be decided by whatever demagogue may happen to catch the ear of the majority. There are, then, no experts in virtue and virtue, it would seem, is not teachable. But, if it is not, then presumably it must be innate, for, if we do not learn a thing and yet know it, we must have known it from the first. How, then, explain the evil that men do, the variations in moral codes, the frequent preference of expediency to right and the frequent confusion of expediency with right?

Plato answers these questions by invoking the theory of knowledge as an inborn possession of the soul, to which I have already referred. Virtue, which is knowledge of the Good, is, he argues, both innate and acquired. It is not innate in the sense that it is a conscious possession of every child at birth; there is not even an assurance that it will necessarily appear, as the child develops. It is innate in the sense that it is an inborn possession of the soul; it is acquired in the sense that whether that inborn possession is consciously realized, depends upon training and education. Its realization depends, that is to say, upon good moral instruction given in a right environment. Yet the virtue that results is not the creation of the moral instruction and the right environment, any more than the blossom on the plant in the conservatory is the creation of the conservatory. The blossom springs from the seed which was there from the first; the conservatory provides the environment in which alone the seed can blossom.

**That the Capacity to Recognize Value is Innate.** It is not necessary to accept Plato's metaphysical teaching with regard to the prior existence of the soul and the direct knowledge of universals or Forms, which it is conceived to have in its discarnate state, in order to recognize the strength of his position. The feeling of duty, the recognition of right are not, it is obvious, acquirements that we pick up from our environment as we grow and develop. Unless therefore, we are prepared to grant that there is in the human soul from the first a capacity to recognize and to

pursue the Good, it is impossible to account for the fact of moral experience. As I have already pointed out, an initial knowledge of good, an initial recognition of moral obligation, are presupposed in the distinction which we habitually make between the right and the expedient. Unless from the very beginning, we were endowed with the capacity to recognize the good and to distinguish it from the expedient, it would be impossible to account for this distinction. Nevertheless, it is also true that the capacity to recognize the good remains, like any other capacity, latent unless occasions are provided for its exercise. It is doubtful, that is to say, to revert to a familiar example, whether in a man deposited at birth on an uninhabited island it would ever develop at all, for the reason that it is doubtful whether a congenital Robinson Crusoe could be considered fully human.

Just as in some the capacity to recognize and pursue the good remains undeveloped, so in others its development is warped. In a bad environment a man's innate inclination to pursue what he takes to be good may be directed towards mistaken ends, so that he finds in money, place, or privilege, the slaughter of his kind, or the rapid movement of pieces of matter in space, the sufficient end of human existence. As Socrates would put it, when we have been improperly trained we may make misjudgments as to what is really good, taking to be good what is not. But the fact that we can make misjudgments about what is good does not alter the fact that we value it, and that it is our noblest qualities which are often enlisted in the cause of ignoble ends; thus war and the miseries and cruelties which, in pursuit of war, men have inflicted upon one another, have often been prompted by motives from which it is impossible to withhold our admiration.

Let me attempt to translate Plato's general conclusion into my own terms: value is a universal of which all men have an innate knowledge; all men, therefore, have an innate capacity for recognizing the forms which value assumes. Of these, moral virtue is one, beauty another.

They also have the capacity for recognizing those particulars in which the forms of value such as moral virtue and beauty are exemplified. If this were not the case, we should not know a good man when we meet him, any more than we should know a beautiful picture when we see it; nor would ethical imperatives based upon intuitions of value, for example, that we ought to do our duty, that we ought to tell the truth, that we ought not to make other people miserable, that we ought to keep our promises, any more than aesthetic valuations, for example, that this sonnet is better than that one, or that the Adagio of Bach's Double Violin Concerto is better than the song of a crooner, have any meaning for us.

**Relation of Knowledge of Universals to Recognition of Particulars.** It is only if we assume that there is innate knowledge of value and of that manifestation of value which is moral virtue, that we can explain our recognition of the goodness of a particular person, or of the obligation to perform a particular duty. A knowledge of the universal, moral virtue, must, in other words, precede the recognition that particulars exemplify the universal, just as a knowledge of redness must precede the recognition that a particular object is red. But activity of the mind that recognizes a particular does not terminate with the recognition of the particular; it is led to the apprehension of something beyond the particular, and achieves an enhanced knowledge of the universal. Every time we recognize a beautiful picture, every time we acknowledge a man's virtue, our aesthetic taste is refined, our moral sensibility increased. Every time we set our hands, however inadequately, to the making of a beautiful thing, every time we try in the face of temptation to do our duty, our knowledge of beauty is increased, our moral character strengthened.

How, Aristotle asked, does a man become good, and answered—in my view, correctly—by doing good acts. How, it may be asked, does a man come to have good taste. The answer, *mutatis mutandis*, is the same; by having

continual intercourse with beautiful things. Thus the recognition of particulars enlarges that knowledge of universals which is already presupposed in the recognition of particulars.

The process of character formation may, therefore, be described as follows. We start with an initial knowledge of moral virtue which is innate. In the light of this knowledge we recognize those characters which possess virtue and those actions which it is our duty to do and feel an obligation to perform them. On each occasion on which we recognize the virtue of others, on each occasion on which we acknowledge the pull of obligation upon ourselves, our knowledge of the universal is deepened and enriched. The process may be metaphorically likened to that of filling in the outlines of a sketch, or clothing a skeleton with flesh and blood. The same principle applies in the realm of aesthetics; it is because we have an innate feeling for beauty that we are able to recognize and acclaim beautiful things, while the repeated recognition of beautiful things deepens and enhances our knowledge of beauty. The process of forming good taste and of building up a good character is, from this point of view, that of coming to know the universals beauty and goodness, or rather of coming to know in "the flesh" something of which we had what may be termed "an academic" knowledge from the first.

**In What Forms does Value Reveal Itself?** We have now to ask what is the nature of this value of which, I am contending, we have an innate recognition, and in what particulars does it manifest itself? To take the second question first, the answer is, I suggest, one of fact. What are the things which men recognize to be ultimately valuable, in the sense that they desire and value them for their own sake, desiring and valuing other things only in so far as they are a means to these ultimates? The traditional answer is that they are three; goodness, which I am calling moral virtue, truth and beauty. I think that

this answer is correct, so far as it goes, but I would add a fourth value, happiness. Even if happiness is not the only value it is, as I have tried to show, something which is, in fact, valuable. Indeed, it seems probable that no state of mind can be wholly valuable unless it contains as an ingredient *some* happiness. If the traditional answer is, as I am suggesting, correct, then it will be true to say that all human beings do in the long run desire and value the same things: That they should do so, is not, on reflection, surprising. Human beings are the expressions of the same creative impulse; they evolve in the same environment; their natures are cast in the same mould. Running through all the differences between man and man is the element of their common humanity. Now the distinctive mark of our common humanity is, I am suggesting, that all men recognize truth, appreciate beauty, seek to attain virtue, and desire happiness. That all men do not do these things all the time is, of course, true. The reason for this failure I shall consider in a moment: for the present, I am content to make the point that, though our minds may be clouded by ignorance, our desires distorted by passion, our impulses led astray by bad training and education, we are all human beings, and that the fact of what I have called our common humanity, the fact that we are the products of the same process, are cast in the same mould, and react to the same environment, makes it plausible to suppose that we should, on the whole, evince the same basic tendencies, and that these tendencies are, other things being equal, tendencies to pursue and desire value.

**That Our Moral Notions are Never Purely Subjective.** The realization that our fundamental tendencies and propensities are, at least in part, a function of the response of the human spirit to what is, for all of us, fundamentally the same environment, provides an important argument against Subjectivism. Subjectivist writers, as we have seen, regard our notions of value as self-invented. The human spirit, conscious of its loneliness in a universe



which is alien from itself, invents personages and values for its assurance and comfort, and peoples with them the world outside itself. To primitive man the universe in some of its moods appears deliberately hostile. He creates, therefore, spirits, in his own likeness, bearded, jealous, angry and possessive, projects them outside himself, gives them a position somewhere above the clouds, and then solicits their intervention in his favour. The scientist substitutes the vast impersonality of astronomical space and geological time for the all-too-human deities that inform the savage's little world. The scientist's universe, if less hostile, is more lonely, so lonely, so remote, that man cannot tolerate the thought of its otherness and his insignificance. And so he invents the values goodness, truth and beauty, projects them into the world without, insists that something worthy of reverence must be at the heart of things, and proceeds to revere the shadows which he has cast upon the empty canvas of a meaningless universe.

The explanation is plausible rather than convincing. Subjectivism is the ethical creed appropriate to the standpoint of science, whose tendency is to classify man as an inhabitant of the natural world and to study him as a product of the natural order. Produced by the forces which determine the movements of the physical universe, exposed to the stimuli of a physical environment which has moulded him and to which he reacts, man's nature cannot, if regarded from the point of view of the scientist, contain within itself any elements save what, if I may so phrase it, the physical environment has put there, or manifest behaviour save such as its physical environment has evoked in it. This will be no less true of man's spiritual aspirations and his intuitions of value than of his sexual desires and his physical movements. His spiritual aspirations and his intuitions of value cannot, then, be completely meaningless in the sense that they own no counterpart in the external world, for, since they too are but one of the forms of man's reaction to a world outside himself, they cannot but reflect the factors in the external world

to which they are reactions. Thus the very view which insists upon man's wholly *natural* origin and the consequent determination of all the processes of his being, mental as well as physical, by those forces which operate universally in the physical world, is precluded by this very insistence from giving a purely subjectivist account of any of the expressions of man's nature, and is precluded, therefore, from giving a purely subjectivist account of his intuitions of value. These cannot be quite arbitrary; there must be *something* in the physical universe to account for their existence, to respond to their intimations, and to correspond to their deliverances since, otherwise, it would be impossible to account for the fact that we do all possess them. For if man's intuitions are the reflections of nothing whatever outside himself, then we must credit him with precisely that power of spontaneous creation which the naturalistic view denies.

If, however, in spite of the foregoing considerations it is still insisted that our intuitions of value are purely subjective, then, as I have already pointed out in the chapter on free will,<sup>1</sup> our intuitions of truth will be no less subjective than our intuitions of other forms of value, and we shall have no ground on which to claim validity for any argument. There is, then, no ground for the claim to validity advanced on behalf of subjectivist arguments.

**That Each Form of Value Manifests Itself in a Specific Medium.** The conclusion of the foregoing is that the fact that we recognize and respond to value is most readily explicable on the assumption that value exists and is objectively real. The question, what things are recognized and responded to as being valuable, is, as I have already suggested, one of fact. To answer it, we must turn to history and ask what things people have in the past regarded as valuable in and for themselves, and to psychology and ask what things people now regard as being valuable in and for themselves. I have accepted

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 273, 274.

the traditional answer to these questions, which is that the ultimate values are truth, moral virtue and beauty, to which I have added a fourth, happiness.

These values, I affirm, are manifested in particular things, but in different sorts of particular things, each value choosing, as it were, an appropriate medium for its manifestation and exemplification. Thus moral virtue is manifested in the characters and dispositions of persons. We recognize it when it is present in others, and realize its presence in ourselves when we acknowledge the obligation to do what we call our duty, and are motivated to pursue for its own sake what the Greeks called the Good. Beauty is manifested in physical things, in paint and stone and sound and landscape, or, more precisely, in particular forms or arrangements of physical things; truth in propositions, happiness in states of consciousness.

**That the Value, Moral Virtue, is the Same in all its Manifestations.** The quality of value is always the same—the dogmatism of these statements must be pardoned; I have tried to give reasons for them at length elsewhere<sup>1</sup>—a value does not, that is to say, vary with variations in the medium in which it is manifested.

To amplify this statement in its bearing upon ethics, I mean that it is the same moral virtue which is present as a common element in all the so-called “virtues”, and it is by reason of the presence of this common element that we value them. What determines the particular form of the manifestation of the value which is moral virtue, whether, for example, in the “virtue” of courage, or of unselfishness, or of kindness, is the nature and disposition of the person in whom the value is manifested, the circumstances with which he is confronted, and the training which he has received.

The Greeks distinguished four cardinal virtues, insight or wisdom, courage or resolution in face of danger, the

<sup>1</sup> In my *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapters VI–X, and in my *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, Chapters X and XI.

restraint of the satisfaction of impulse, and justice or regard for the claims of others. But it was, they affirmed, the same Good that was manifested in all of these, the nature of its manifestation being dictated by the circumstances. Thus the circumstance of war evolved a manifestation of the Good in the form of courage; the problem of the satisfaction of desire evoked its manifestation in the form of temperance or restraint; the claims made upon us by others in that of justice, while wisdom or insight into the nature of the circumstances which confront us is called for in all the chances and changes of life. But just as it is the same whiteness which appears in snow and cream, so it is the same moral virtue which appears in all the "virtues". And if we proceed to ask why a man has one virtue and not another, why one man, for example, is brave but cruel, and another kind but cowardly, the answer is because the medium in which the value, moral virtue, is manifested, namely, human character and disposition, varies from individual to individual. The factors which determine these variations between one human personality and another are heredity, environment, training and, we may add, innate personal differences between man and man. To invoke a simile, if a piece of cloth is placed in front of a light, the light will shine through here more clearly, there less clearly, as the texture of the cloth varies from place to place, and the places of greatest and least intensity of illumination will be different from those in a broadly similar piece of cloth because of innate differences of texture between the two pieces.

**The Boundary between Ethics and Theology.** It is, I think, clear that the line of argument which I have been following admits, nay, more, it demands an extension. If, whenever I perceive common qualities, I deduce a universal which is manifested in the particulars that exhibit the qualities, postulating a universal whiteness to account for the common quality which is exhibited by all

white things, and a universal beauty to account for the common quality possessed by all beautiful things, am I not required by the logic of the argument to postulate a universal value to account for the common quality possessed by all those things that are recognized as being valuable in and for themselves, that is to say, as being absolutely valuable? I am not referring here merely to the common quality possessed by all virtuous characters, since, for this, I have already postulated the existence of an absolute value, which I have called moral virtue; nor am I referring to the common quality possessed by all beautiful things, or by all true propositions, for which I have postulated the existence of the absolute values, beauty and truth. What is now in question is the common quality possessed by moral virtue, by beauty and by truth, the quality, by reason of their possession of which I have been led to affirm that they are, indeed, absolute values; and what the line of argument I have been following demands is that I should now postulate a further universal to account for the common quality possessed by these three absolute values, moral virtue, beauty and truth, a universal which must be denoted by some such expression as "value as such". What, then, is "value as such"? We cannot say, since, save perhaps in religious experience, we know "value as such" only through its manifestations in moral virtue, beauty, truth and happiness. Theology, however, knows it as God, and speaks of truth, goodness and beauty as the attributes of God, or the forms in which God is manifested, or the aspects under which He is made known to man. At this point we reach the boundary of ethics and enter the confines of religion, and beyond this point, therefore, I cannot go. It is sufficient for my present purpose to draw attention to the need for some unifying universal value, which is the source of the common quality possessed by the absolute values, as they are the source of the common qualities whether of beauty, of truth, or of moral virtue possessed by the particulars in which they are manifested, a need which has been acknowledged by all those who have

followed this line of thought. Socrates called this unifying value the Good; Plato, the Form of the Good. Nor can it be doubted that, when Socrates announced that virtue is knowledge, knowledge, that is to say, of the Good, he meant by the term "the Good" not moral virtue, but that universal value, which is at once the source of, and the common element in, the particular, absolute values truth, moral virtue, beauty and happiness. To avoid confusion, I propose to call the universal value, which is the source of the common quality exhibited by the other values, "first order value". Then beauty, moral virtue, truth and happiness, which I have hitherto called ultimates, will be "second order values", and virtuous characters, the actions in which virtuous characters find their habitual expression, beautiful pictures, true propositions and happy states of mind will be "third order values."

**Summary Statement of Theory of Value.** It will be convenient to summarize the argument up to the point now reached. I am maintaining that the universe is, or rather that it contains—for I do not think that everything that is, is valuable or partakes of value—a unique and independent factor which I am calling first order value. First order value which may be identical with what the theologians know as Deity, manifests itself in the form of second order values, moral virtue, truth, beauty and happiness. The mind of man, I am further suggesting, possesses an innate knowledge of these second order values and, accordingly, recognizes their manifestations as third order values in particular persons and things, and is moved to appreciate, to approve and to pursue what it recognizes. At the present stage in the evolution of our species this capacity for recognition, approval and pursuit is intermittent and precarious; but there seems reason to think that it grows, albeit slowly, as the evolution of mankind proceeds. Indeed, it may not be too fanciful to suggest that the object of the evolutionary process is so to perfect and refine human consciousness that it becomes

capable of unerringly, instead of imperfectly, recognizing these values, and of continuously instead of, as at present, intermittently pursuing them. If I may be permitted again to resort to metaphor, the faltering and uncertain character of our moral and aesthetic experience may be likened to the perception of a place where there is light by those whose eyes are as yet not fully open. Every now and then there shoot down from the place where the light is flashes and gleams which dazzle and blind their faltering vision, so that they cannot tell what they have seen, or even be sure, if they have seen at all. Sometimes their senses are almost entirely sealed, so that they pass their lives unaware of the shining of the light. Nevertheless, the place where the light is is a real place, and it is by reference to their increasing ability to catch the gleams, so that they may in the end become continuously aware of the light, that their progress is to be measured.

The subject of this book is the theory of ethics and politics and not theory of value. I cannot, therefore, further elaborate the theory here outlined. Two questions, however, remain, about which something must be said. First, since at the level of evolution which we have at present reached, value is, indeed, recognized, albeit intermittently, and pursued, albeit falteringly, why is its recognition intermittent and why is its pursuit faltering? Why, in fact, to put the question in its ethical form, do we not always do what is right and pursue what is good? Secondly, there remains the question which has presented itself on a number of occasions in the course of earlier discussions, what, on the view here outlined, do we mean by right actions, and what is their relation to moral virtue?

## (1) REASONS WHY THE GOOD IS NOT ALWAYS RECOGNIZED AND PURSUED

The Influence of Training and Environment in Promoting or Obscuring the Perception of the Good. To the first question there are two answers. The

first, an answer in terms of social ethics, stresses the obvious influence of training and environment. All human beings, I have suggested, possess a natural tendency to approve of certain characters as moral and of certain forms of conduct as right; but what characters they will approve of, what actions they will call right, depends very largely upon their environment and training. As Plato insisted, the ordinary man does not make his morals any more than he makes his politics or his religion for himself; he takes them ready made, as he takes his boots and his clothes, from the social shop. If he is born in Balham, he thinks it wrong to have more than one wife, and looks upon Mahommedans as heretics; if in Baghdad, he considers it right to have four wives, provided he can afford their maintenance and believes that Allah is God and Mahommed is His prophet; if in contemporary Russia, that Capitalism is wicked, that there is no God and that Karl Marx is His prophet. To this extent and in this sense morality is topographical, what a man will think right and good depending on the latitude and longitude of the house in which he happens to be born.

Where there are so many conflicting opinions about right and good, they cannot, it is obvious, all be correct; some of them, at least, must be mistaken in the sense that they will take to be good that which is not and ignore the good which is. These mistakes of insight are often due to faulty training and to bad environment. As Aristotle pointed out, it is impossible to be a really good man in a really bad State,<sup>1</sup> if only because the content of one's morality comes to one so largely from the community to which one belongs.

Nor is it only for mistakes of insight that social-environment may be responsible. As I have several times had occasion to point out, the ethical problem is a double one; not only may a man fail to see his duty, he may fail, through weakness of will, to do the duty that he sees. Now the will can, it is obvious, be strengthened by right

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 91, 92.



training and assisted by a good environment. Aristotle, it will be remembered<sup>1</sup>, distinguished virtues of character from virtues of intellect, and held that the former could be inculcated by right training and fostered by a good environment. Experience bears out his view. If a child is indulged from its earliest year, permitted to gratify every whim and encouraged to shirk every difficulty, when it reaches maturity, it will be found deficient in powers of will and of concentration. Our species has evolved by means of struggle and endeavour. Those who are exempt from the necessity for struggle, those who have no incentive to make endeavours, will fail to develop the specifically human qualities of will-power and resolution which struggle and endeavour have engendered. Thus the failure to do the right which we see, no less than the failure to see what is right, may be in large part the result of faulty training and bad environment.

But this answer, adequate so far as it goes, does not take us very far. It only puts the problem further back. For if faulty insight and deficient will power are due to wrong training and bad environment, we have still to ask, why is training wrong and why is environment bad? For, clearly, those who are responsible for the training and the environment, the educators and legislators and rulers, who determine the character, mould the traditions and set the standards of a community, must, if the character is bad, the traditions misleading, and the standards low, be themselves open to censure. They too must have failed to see the Good or to pursue the Good which they saw. Thus the same problem presents itself in another form, why did they fail?

**That Evil is Real and Objective.** We come here to the second answer to our first question, an answer which bases itself upon the presence in the universe of evil. Evil has not hitherto been mentioned in these pages. The reason for this omission is that evil occupies a comparatively small

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 105, 106.

space in the works of writers upon ethics. Ethical writers have tended to look askance at evil; they have even produced treatises which have ignored it altogether. When they have treated evil, they have generally sought to explain it away, representing it as something negative, the absence or deprivation of the good that there might be, or as something illusory, an appearance due to the limitations or defects of human vision.

Any such treatment seems to the present writer to falsify the nature of our ethical experience. To me it seems clear that evil is a fact as real, as definite and as recognizable as good. The subject raises metaphysical issues and can only here be treated in the most cursory way. I propose, however, to offer a number of brief observations in support of the view just expressed, that evil is a real and independent factor in the universe. I shall also try to show why the attempts to explain it away, or to analyse it in terms of something else which is not evil, must necessarily fail.

If I am right in holding that evil no less than good, disvalue no less than value, is a real and independent factor in the universe, and that the idea of it like the idea of good is simple, indefinable and unanalysable, it will follow that any view which seeks to define evil in terms of anything else, as being, for example, the deprivation of good, or as a necessary condition for the manifestation of good, or as pain, or as sin, must be rejected. To say that evil is pain, or is a necessary condition for the manifestation of good will be, if I am right, to make an affirmation about the sort of things that are evil but not to define evil. I will try as briefly as I can to defend this view. First, I will discuss its bearing upon the theistic hypothesis.

**The Reality of Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis.** Owing to the difficulty of reconciling the reality of evil with the existence of a creative deity who is *both* beneficent and omnipotent, many writers try to show that evil is in some sense unreal, or is an illusion.

The main reason for this endeavour is, it is obvious,

the desire to preserve the ethical virtue of the character of a deity who is conceived to be omnipotent and to have created the universe. Even, however, if we admit that evil is unreal or is an illusion, we do not achieve the desired result. For, if evil is unreal, then error is real. There is no doubt that *we think* that we suffer pain and that *we think* that men do us evil. We *think* also that the pain which we suffer and the evil which is done to us are real. Either this belief of ours is a mistake, or it is not. If it is not, pain and evil are real. If it is, then the error we make in thinking them to be real is a real error (if it were an unreal error, then we should not *really* be making a mistake in thinking pain and evil to be real, and pain and evil would be real). Therefore, the character of the deity is such as to permit us to labour under a real error which, if He chose, He could remove. Nevertheless, He does not remove it but allows us to be deceived as to the real nature of pain and evil. But an omnipotent being has not the need, a benevolent being has not the wish to deceive.

I conclude, then, that, since the view of evil as being in some sense unreal does not have the desired consequence of vindicating the moral character of a creative deity who is conceived to be omnipotent, the main incentive for holding it is removed.

**That Evil Though Real is Indefinable.** What, then, are the arguments for the view that evil is, like good, a real and independent principle, which is also unanalysable and indefinable?

The best way to realize the unanalysable and indefinable character of evil is to consider the attempts which have been made to define it in terms of some other character or combination of characters.

(i) Evil might, for example, be defined as what one ought to try to avoid. This substitutes the indefinable "ought" for the indefinable "evil". But the notion of "evil" is far wider than what we ought to try to avoid. We can only try to avoid the things we know. But there is no reason to

suppose that there are not many evils of which human beings have and can have no knowledge. Such evils would still be evils although human conduct could have no reference to them.

(ii) A subjective definition of good is, as we have seen, "what is desired"; on this view evil would be "what is not desired". Such a definition makes evil purely subjective, and, since A's suffering, which may not be desired by A, may be desired by B, it will follow that the same thing will be both good and evil at the same time. There is no logical refutation of this view, but it is pertinent to point out that it destroys the possibility of ethics and transforms it into a branch of psychology.

It is thus exposed to the objections which belong to any form of Subjectivism.<sup>1</sup>

(iii) There is one general argument, which has already been used in another connection, by which the view that evil is definable in terms of something other than itself can be refuted. If this argument is valid, it disposes of any definition of evil in terms of pain or of sin, or of disobedience to the will of God; these things may be evil, but they are not what evil *means*. The argument is as follows. If anyone affirms that evil is X, we consider the proposition and either assent or dissent. In either case our assent or dissent is determined by considering what we know about X and about evil, and, when we do so, we think of them as two different things. Let us contrast this with a case of true definition. If a person says that a quadrilateral is a figure with four sides, we do not consider what we know about quadrilaterals and then agree or disagree. We accept the definition at once, knowing that it gives us information not about quadrilaterals, but merely about the way in which the word quadrilateral is used. A true definition in fact always applies to words, and is the sort of thing one finds in a dictionary. But when we are told that evil is X, we realize that what is being communicated is not merely a dictionary definition but an important philosophical

<sup>1</sup> For an account of these see Chapter XI, pp. 384-389.

generalization about the nature of things. If it were in fact the case that the meaning of evil and the meaning of X always applied to the same things, and that there was no case of the one applying and not the other, then one would have hit upon an important truth, and it would be an important truth just because we should already have a definite (though unanalysable) meaning for the word evil in our minds, which we could compare with the known meaning of X and recognize to be identical with it. In other words the proposition "evil is X", whether right or wrong, is a significant and not merely a verbal proposition. It is not a statement to the effect that two words are being used in the same sense. Hence though the proposition may in fact be true, it does not give us the meaning of the word evil, and it does not do this for the reason that there is no word X such that the meaning of it is identical with that of the word evil.

It follows that statements like "evil is disobedience to the will of God", or "evil is absence of good", are not dictionary definitions like the definition of a quadrilateral, but are affirmations about the things that are evil. This, indeed, seems in any event probable from the number of different and incompatible definitions of evil that have in fact been suggested. There have never been two *incompatible* definitions of the word "quadrilateral".

### That Evil is Not the Deprivation or Opposite of Good.

(iv) A word may be added with regard to the particular definition of evil as "the absence of", or "the deprivation of", or "the limitation of good," a view which, for reasons already given, is often put forward on theological grounds.

On this view, whatever is, is good; starting from this assumption philosophers have endeavoured to prove that the world is all good. Spinoza, for example, says "by reality and perfection I mean the same thing". Now this view, in so far as it asserts that evil consists not in the existence of something which is bad, but only in the non-existence of something which is good, equates the meaning of

the term evil with something else—X in this case is “the absence or limitation of what is good”—, and falls under the criticism stated in (iii) above.

This particular view contains, however, a latent implication which is worth disentangling. The implication is that good and evil are opposites, and opposites of such a kind that the presence of the one means or is equivalent to the absence of the other. This, at least, is thought to be true of the absence of good, although I do not know whether some people would also be prepared to maintain that good is or is equivalent to the absence of evil.

There seems to be no reason to suppose that good and evil are opposites of this kind. In order that it may be seen that they are not, it is necessary to make a distinction between types of opposites. There are opposites such that the presence of the one involves the absence of the other. The opposites “emptiness” and “fulness” are examples of this type; in proportion as a container is not full, in precisely that same proportion is it empty. The same may be said of the opposites “dryness” and “wetness”. But there is another type of so-called opposites such that the absence of the one does not entail the presence of the other. Black and white are usually regarded as opposites; yet it is not true that, if a thing is not white, it must be black; it may be red. Nor is it even true that, in proportion as white is absent from it, black must be present in it.

Now it seems to me that the “oppositeness” which good and evil exemplify is of this latter type. I can see no reason whatever for holding either that a thing must be good or evil, or that, in proportion as good is absent from it, evil must be present in it. Many things and most actions seem to be ethically neutral. It seems fantastic to assert of such an action as that of moving one finger of my left hand an inch to the right of this paper upon which I am writing with my right hand, that it is either good or bad. But if it is possible for good to be absent without evil being in any way involved by its absence, it follows that evil does not mean the absence or limitation of good.

The above are some of the reasons which lead me to conclude that evil is a real factor in the universe. I would further suggest that it is the presence of evil which in some unexplained way accounts for our failure to pursue the Good which we see, or to perform the duty which we recognize.

## (2). THAT RIGHT ACTIONS ARE THOSE WHICH PRODUCE "BEST CONSEQUENCES"

It remains to say something of the relation between moral virtue and right action. First, with regard to the meaning of the expression "right action", the utilitarians are, I think, correct in holding that this must be sought in the consequences of the action. A right action is, in fact, that one which of all those which it is open to the agent to do has the best possible consequences. I have, however, suggested that the utilitarians were wrong in assessing "best consequences" solely in terms of quantity of pleasure. If there is any truth in the theory of value outlined above, not pleasure only, but beauty, truth and moral virtue are all valuable in themselves. "Best consequences" will, therefore, be those that contain the greatest amount of, or are most conducive to, the promotion of happiness, beauty, truth and moral virtue.

While any consequences that include or promote the manifestation of any of the four values are good, I do not wish to suggest that the "best consequences" are those that contain equal amounts of each of the values. The extent to which the values should be mingled in the good life, is a question upon which it is rash to venture a dogmatic opinion. It may be the case that, as the Greeks thought, the best life is an all-round life in which all forms of value are in some degree embodied and blended. It may be that different men ought to pursue these values and embody them in their lives in different degrees, so that one man will realize what the Greeks would have called his proper end in the creation and appreciation of beauty, another in the search for truth, another in the

achievement of moral virtue. Plato and Aristotle were, I think, wrong in supposing that there were at most two kinds of good life to be lived by men. The Christian doctrine of vocation suggests that there may be several. What is essential—and the greatest debt that we owe to modern liberal and democratic thinking is that we should have come to realize that it is essential<sup>1</sup>—is that each man should be permitted and enabled to choose for himself the kind of good life best suited to him; permitted, that is to say, by his fellows, and enabled by his training and education. So far as the present discussion is concerned, I am disposed to hazard the view that, while good consequences will be those which contain or promote some one or other of the four values, it is probable that the best life will contain or promote something of them all. I do not know how to support this view. Values are, as I have tried to show, intuitively perceived, and the proportions in which they should, in an ideal life, be mixed, may well be the subject of another intuition.

**Moore's Intuitionism of Ends.** The conclusions just outlined are in many respects similar to those reached by Professor G. E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica*, from which, indeed, they are largely derived. Intuitions to the effect that certain actions are right or wrong are, he holds, for the reasons given in a previous chapter,<sup>2</sup> untrustworthy. To this extent Professor Moore is a utilitarian, who demands that the worth of actions must be assessed by reference to their consequences. But the value of consequences can, he points out, only be established by intuitions in regard to what is good, and he agrees that goods, or as I have called them, values, may be of more than one kind although the word "good" stands, he thinks, for a unique conception.

**The Nature of Happiness as a Value.** Between the four values I have postulated, there is one important difference.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 741 and 750-752, for a development of this view.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 295-301.



Two of them, truth and beauty, are independent both in themselves and in their manifestations of human consciousness. The function of human consciousness in relation to these values is limited to recognition of the first and appreciation of the second. The other two values, however, happiness and moral virtue, do belong to human consciousness, are, indeed, as many would say, states of human consciousness. Of the mode of manifestation of these two values, which belong more particularly to the sphere of ethics, something more must be said.

If the criticism of Hedonism contained in the preceding chapter<sup>1</sup> is valid, happiness differs from the other values by reason of the fact that it cannot, or rather that it should not, be made the object of direct pursuit. Happiness, I have suggested, is of the nature of a by-product which enriches the consciousness of a healthy organism whose energy is fully engaged in an activity appropriate to the organism. What is meant by "an activity appropriate to the organism", and what, if any, is the generic characteristic of those states of consciousness which happiness enriches?

All states of consciousness are, I suggested in the last chapter,<sup>2</sup> directed upon something and derive their distinctive qualities, including their feeling tone, from the nature of the object upon which they are directed.<sup>3</sup> An appropriate activity of consciousness is, then, one which is keenly directed upon a worthy object, which absorbs its interest. What is a worthy object?

Amid the apparently embarrassing variety of answers with which the great moralists of the past have presented us, there can be detected a certain underlying unanimity. Happiness, I am maintaining, is a sign of the worthy employment of our conscious faculties; conversely, boredom and apathy will be a sign of their unworthy employ-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 400-406.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 410-412.

<sup>3</sup> For an elaboration of this view which belongs to theory of knowledge, see my *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, Chapters IV, V and VI.

ment. The question, "How is boredom to be avoided," is one that has particularly intrigued the moralists, and their answer has been, "By hard work." Pointing out that work is the only occupation which mankind has been able to tolerate except in very small doses, they have recommended unremitting effort as a recipe for the good life. "A man is seldom so harmlessly occupied," said Dr. Johnson, "as when he is making money."

**Recipe for Happiness.** The answer is in accordance with the teaching of evolutionary ethics. It also embodies the conclusions of the by-product theory of pleasure.<sup>1</sup> But, while providing for the absorption of the activity of consciousness—for, when we work hard, our consciousness is intensely engaged—it offers no suggestions as to the nature of the object upon which the activity of consciousness may be most fruitfully directed; and surely, it may be said, some objects of conscious activity are better than others. What objects? Spinoza comes nearest to the answer which I am suggesting in this chapter, when he tells us that "happiness or unhappiness depends on the quality of the objects which we love. Love towards a thing eternal and infinite fills the mind wholly with joy and is unmingled with any sadness." The word "love" in this quotation is, I think, important. We are never bored or unhappy when we are planning or endeavouring for someone whom we love, or for a cause for which we care. To love one's work is also a sure basis for happiness. Spinoza, however, specifies more particularly things "infinite and eternal". Now these, in the terms of the foregoing theory of value, will be the absolute values, truth, goodness and beauty. From this point of view, it is highly significant that nobody is unhappy when he is trying to make something that is beautiful, or is engaged in the research that is inspired only by the wish to find out what is true. This is perhaps what Goethe meant when he said: "He who has science and art has also religion." Such pleasures are, says

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 402-406.

Spinoza, "unmingled with any sadness". They are also the pleasures which Plato described as pure.<sup>1</sup>

We can, then, give a further meaning to the statement, happiness is the by-product of an appropriate activity of consciousness, and add that happiness is something which graces and completes activities of consciousness, which are engaged in the pursuit or realization of some one of the other three values. Thus the enjoyment of the value which is happiness is a sign of the presence, or perhaps I should say, of the quest of one of the other three values. This conclusion may be put formally by stating that happiness should be regarded not as a substantive, but as an adjective. For happiness, as I tried to show in the last chapter<sup>2</sup> is not, strictly speaking, a state of consciousness at all. It is an adjective of quality of states of consciousness as tone is a quality of a sound, or colour of an object. Some states of consciousness possess a pleasant hedonic tone; others an unpleasant one. The quality of the hedonic tone of a state of consciousness will be largely determined by the nature of the object upon which it is directed. States of consciousness which are directed upon truth or beauty, or which achieve moral virtue, will have a pleasant hedonic tone; so, also, will those that result from the satisfaction of our impulses. The paradox of happiness is thus a double one; first, though it is itself a value, it eludes direct pursuit and occurs as a by-product of states of consciousness which are directed upon objects other than happiness. Secondly, no state of consciousness which does not contain some happiness, or which is not, as I should prefer to put it, pleasantly hedonically toned, can have value.

**Twofold Relation Between Moral Virtue and Right Actions.** The value, moral virtue gives rise to certain complications. The first introduces a question at which we have already glanced, the relation between moral virtue and right action. Some writers on ethics have denied that there is any such relation. For example, in his book, *The*

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 407-409.   <sup>2</sup> See Chapter XI, pp. 410-412.

*Right and the Good*, Dr. Ross affirms that "moral goodness is quite distinct from and independent of rightness", his point being that the value, which I am calling moral virtue, and what the utilitarians call a right action are two different kinds of ethical fact between which there need be no connection. It is difficult to accept this view. Although I am maintaining that moral virtue is a form of value, and that, as such, it is in the last resort unanalysable, the conception of moral virtue includes, it is obvious, a willingness to do one's duty. And to do one's duty is to do what one conceives to be right. As Professor Moore, to whose views I have already referred, puts it in his *Principia Ethica*, "a virtue is a habitual disposition to perform actions which are duties or which would be duties, if a volition were sufficient on the part of most men to ensure their performance". In other words, moral virtue is a disposition to perform those actions which are deemed to be right, and which it falls within the competence of most men to perform.

If this is agreed to, the following complication arises: a right action I have defined as one which produces the best consequences on the whole; the best consequences are those which contain or promote the greatest quantity of those things which are valuable in themselves, namely, beauty, truth, happiness and moral virtue. The actions which a morally virtuous man conceives to be right, and endeavours, accordingly, to perform, will sometimes, although not always, coincide with those which actually *are* right in the sense just defined. We reach, then, the position that the morally virtuous man will wish to act in such a way as to promote, among other things, an increase of moral virtue. This result has a circular appearance, but the circle is not, I think, vicious. There is no paradox in conceiving of the good man as one who wishes to increase the amount of goodness in the world, and it is a commonplace that he does in fact increase it. That the way to make people trustworthy is to trust them, lovable to love them, conscientious to rely upon them—all the great

moralists and religious teachers have agreed. Thus moral virtue is not only valuable in itself, but possesses also an instrumental value in the sense that it tends by its very nature to promote a general increase in the manifestation of values in the world, and to promote, therefore, an increase in the manifestation of the particular value which is moral virtue.

Moral virtue is, I think, the only value which has this instrumental characteristic. Beauty does not itself increase or create beauty, nor does truth increase truth; happiness in oneself does no doubt conduce to happiness in others, but the fact that it does so seems to be accidental and not, as in the case of moral virtue, an expression of the nature of the value.

**The Distinction between Right Action and What is Thought to Be Right Action.** The relation between moral virtue and right action raises, however, a further complication, and one which gives rise to some of the most difficult problems of ethics. The morally virtuous man, we have agreed, will try to the best of his ability to do his duty; he will try, that is to say, to do what he believes to be right. But what he believes to be right may differ from what is in fact right, and it may be the fact of this difference which has led such writers as Dr. Ross to conclude that there is no necessary connection between moral virtue and right action. The complication arising from the difference must now be examined.

The morally virtuous man is actuated by a certain sort of motive. Now motives, as I have tried to show<sup>1</sup>, cannot be divorced from the consequences which the actions prompted by the motive are intended to produce. It may, however, be the case (1) that the consequences which do in fact follow from the morally virtuous man's actions may, owing to his faulty judgment, be habitually different from those which he intends, and (2) that, though

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 289-293.

the consequences which he intends may in fact follow, they may be other than the best consequences, in the sense in which I have defined the word "best", owing to his mistakes in valuation. In the first case, the morally virtuous man, the man who wants to do his duty, will want to produce the best possible consequences by his actions, but will make mistakes about how to produce them; his error in fact will be one of calculation. In the second, he will not make mistakes about how to produce what he wants to produce, but he will make mistakes about what he ought to produce; his error will, that is to say, be one of valuation. The first case is the man of good intentions who lacks foresight; the second, that of the man of good intentions who lacks insight.

**That Moral Virtue includes the Duty of Improving the Practical Judgment.** With the first case I have already dealt.<sup>1</sup> It is a man's duty, I have suggested, to take such steps as are possible to find out what the effects of his actions are likely to be. Patience and care, for example, are required in the collection of adequate data, and good judgment for the making of accurate estimates on the basis of the data. The duty of good judgment requires us to include in the concept of moral virtue an intellectual factor. The question arises whether, in respect of the possession or lack of this intellectual factor, a man is free. The answer involves questions already discussed in the chapter on free will. A good native intelligence, like a good eye at games or a good sense of perspective, certainly seems at first sight to form part of our natural endowment; but so, it may be said, does a strong will, passions that are easily controllable, and an indifference to the cruder temptations. Is it ever the case, I asked in Chapter VII, that a man can escape complete determination by his native endowment? Can he ever take moral credit for the strength of his controlling will, or incur moral blame for the strength of his uncontrolled passion?

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 316-320.

I concluded<sup>1</sup> that such an escape from complete determination was possible, provided that we were prepared to agree that there was an element of reason in willing, and that impulse and desire are not the *sole* springs of our actions. If reason includes a conative element, so that it is by virtue of our reason that we are free to *will* to act rightly in spite of the solicitations of passion and impulse, then it is also by virtue of our reason that we are free to will to reason better. If, in other words, we are free to do our duty, we are free also to use our reasons to find out what our duty is. And just as the will may be strengthened by process of freely willing, so the reason may be strengthened by process of freely reasoning, so that a man can improve his power of judgment no less than his strength of willing. To put the point more concretely; I may throughout my life use a good native intelligence in the investigation of purely abstract subjects and refuse to apply it to the problems of conduct, in which case I shall have given myself no practice in accurately judging the results of my actions. I may even deliberately abstain from acquiring the necessary practice. And the point which I am making is, first, that it is my duty to apply my reason to the problems of conduct and, secondly, that I am free to will to do my duty in this respect as in others, provided that it is admitted that the will contains a rational element.

**Summary.** The foregoing argument is complex and a summary of its conclusions may be useful. The second of what I have elsewhere called the two main problems of ethics, the problem of finding out what our duty is, turns out on analysis to be the problem of correctly estimating the probable consequences of our actions. This is a problem of rational calculation. The full conception of moral virtue entails, then, a certain element of accurate reasoning as well as the more obvious elements of strength of will and virtuous motive; and it entails an element of accurate reasoning because we require to know what our duty is,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 267-271.

as well as to will the duty that we know. Furthermore, in regard to this requirement of discernment, no less than in regard to the requirement of willing, we are free; we are free, that is to say, within the conditions laid down in Chapter VII, to improve and perfect our natural endowment in the matter of intelligence no less than in that of will.

**That Moral Valuations are Relative to Social Need, Circumstance and Status.** The second case, that of the man with good intentions who lacks insight has, it is obvious, important social implications. A man, I have suggested, may want to do what is right; he may also possess good judgment and form an accurate estimate of the consequences of his actions. Yet the consequences he desires, intends to produce and does in fact produce, may not be such as are valuable. In other words, the actions which he thinks right may not be those which, according to the definition of rightness already given, are in fact right.

Now it has been conceded to the subjectivists that what a man thinks right and what a man thinks valuable will depend very largely upon the standards of the community in which he happens to live. Most men, as the objective intuitionists point out, possess intuitions in regard to what is right and wrong which owe nothing to reflection, moral principles or estimates of consequences. As a consequence, they have in all ages judged certain things to be right, certain things to be wrong, without being able to give reasons for their judgments. Now what they judge right, what wrong, is almost always determined by the moral code of the community to which they happen to belong. On those occasions on which the plain man does consciously take consequences into account and seeks to justify his judgment of the rightness or wrongness of an action by appealing to them, his valuation of consequences will be no less dependent upon a moral standard which has been formed for him by his environment and not by him as a result of independent reflection.



Much has been said in previous pages with regard to the variations in the deliverances of the moral sense in different communities. The conclusion was reached that these variations were not purely arbitrary, but stood in a specific relation to the needs of the society to which the individual happened to belong.<sup>1</sup> And not only to the needs and circumstances of his society but also to those of his class within society. Thus the moral valuations of a slave will be different from those of a free man, and qualities of independence and leadership, which are valued in a member of the English public-school class, will tend to be condemned as upstart impudence and unprincipled ambition when they appear in the Communist worker, who devotes his energies and his talents to leading and organizing his fellows. Now, the needs of classes in a society vary. Hence, a certain course of action by a member of class X, which will seem right to another member of that class, will seem wrong to a member of class Y, but would have seemed right to him, if it had been taken by another member of class Y. In a word, moral valuations are relative to social need, circumstance and status.

In most societies that have existed there has been a marked divergence between the conduct that men called right, and which a morally virtuous man felt it, therefore, to be his duty to do, and that which was in fact right. In other words, the conduct which a morally virtuous man has felt it to be his duty to do has often, has, in fact, usually, produced consequences which contained a smaller amount of absolute value than would have been contained in the consequences of other actions which it was open to the agent to do, but which he did not consider to be his duty.

**How is the Divergence between what is Thought Right and What is Right to be Adjusted? How is this divergence to be adjusted? How, in other words—for this and nothing else is involved—is a man to be induced to wish to do what is *really* right and to desire and to pursue what is**

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 301-303.

*really* valuable? The question is the most fundamental question of ethics, and no satisfactory answer to it exists. Let us survey the materials that have been collected for an answer.

I have suggested that value has the power of attracting man's consciousness and evoking the desire to pursue it. I have argued, in fact, with Socrates that all men naturally desire the Good, but I have admitted that they are also free, and that the power of good over them is far from amounting to compulsion. I have suggested also that evil is a real and positive factor in the universe, which clouds men's judgments, so that they mistake for good what is not, and weakens their will, so that they do not wish to do the good that they see.

The thinkers of the Middle Ages, the moralists of the nineteenth century, pictured the soul of man as a battleground on which the forces of good and evil struggled for victory. Their conception seems to me to have been on the whole the correct one. It symbolizes the view that I have been trying to put forward, that value exists and that on the whole we wish to pursue it, but that some factor in the universe, which is also in ourselves, prevents us, or rather can prevent us, if we let it. Whether we shall let it prevent us or not, depends in the last resort upon ourselves. In this sense and to this extent we are free. Yet though in theory and in the last resort our choice of action is free, it is to a very large extent determined by our environment.

The question of environment brings me back to the relation of a man's individual morals to those of his community, and at this point I come to the borderline between ethics and political theory. In the light of the preceding survey three conclusions may be suggested.

**Formula for Progress in a Society.** First, it is extremely difficult to be a good man in a bad community. Since the form of our moral judgments is determined by our environment, a member of a bad community will hold actions to be right which are not right, and judge consequences

to be valuable which are not valuable. Admittedly, he may be morally virtuous to the extent that he may try to do the good that he sees, but, if his community is bad, he will lack that faculty of right valuation which enables him justly to appraise the value of the consequences of his actions. Moreover, actions which he might have expected to turn out well will turn out ill, because of the perverting effect of the environment in which they are performed. Secondly, communities change and, it may be, progress, and the moral insight of the individuals who compose them changes and progresses as the community changes. Such changes are almost always in the first instance due to the original genius of some one or more individuals whose insight into the nature of value is keener than that of the rest of the community,<sup>1</sup> and who persistently advocate changes in the law and custom of the community which will lead to a greater embodiment of value in men's lives, and a clearer perception of it by men's consciousnesses. In due course the community as a whole moves, or may move up to the level of the insight of its moral pioneers, laws and custom are changed, and a gain in morality is thereby achieved. Thus the morals of the Old Testament become the morals of the New, the Christian condemnation of slavery is accepted among civilized peoples, with the result that slavery is abolished, while, prior to the war of 1914-1918, there was an increasing realization that individuals should be treated as ends and not merely as means. But the process whereby the moral insight of a community advances is not a necessary one, and it may be interrupted or reversed.

Thirdly, an ideal community may be defined as one in which everybody wishes to do what he thinks right, and everybody thinks right what is in fact right; it is, in other words, a community in which the actions which people think right and habitually try to do are those which produce the best consequences, namely, those which contain and embody the greatest amounts of the values

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 308-310.

beauty, truth, moral virtue and happiness. In so far as the members of one community approximate more closely to this ideal in their desires, willings and valuations than those of another, that community is the better of the two. Our survey of ethics thus enables us to suggest a formula for political progress, according to which the best communities are those whose citizens habitually judge and act in such a way as to bring about an increase in the manifestation of absolute values in the community. I now turn to the political questions which will occupy us in Part III.

*Books.*

The views expressed in this chapter are to a large extent the author's. Works from which some of the conclusions reached in the Chapter have been derived are:

PLATO. *The Meno; The Republic.*

MOORE, G. E. *Principia Ethica.*

DICKINSON, G. LOWES. *The Meaning of Good.*

RUSSELL, BERTRAND. *Philosophical Essays*, especially the essay entitled *The Elements of Ethics.*

HARTMANN, N. *Ethics*, especially Volume III, contains a full and comprehensive statement of a theory of value more particularly in its application to Ethics.

**PART III**  
**POLITICS**



## CHAPTER XIII: THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SOCIETY

**Introductory Note.** In Part III I propose to consider theories of the nature of the State and of the relation between the State and the individual. Some of these theories are concerned with the question of fact, others with the question "ought". Theories of the first class ask, "What is the nature of political organizations"? Theories of the second, "What ought it to be"?

It is possible and also desirable to treat logic and metaphysics without reference to time and circumstance. The laws of logic, to take an extreme case, are not affected by the circumstances of the period and place in which they are apprehended and discussed. In the case of ethics the divorce between theory and circumstance is not so marked, and in my treatment of ethical theories in Part II, I have found it necessary on occasion to introduce a reference to the historical conditions in which the theories were put forward. Many would hold that these references should have been more frequent than I have made them.

When, however, we come to theories of politics, it is no longer possible to maintain a separation between theory and circumstance. Topical considerations insist on intruding themselves, for the reason that topical considerations both set the questions with which political theorists concern themselves, and suggest the lines of the answers. Hence views such as, for example, that which Hobbes expresses on the impossibility of revolt<sup>1</sup>, which strike us as being both illogical and fantastic, become at least comprehensible when they are seen in their historical setting. This is a book of philosophy and not of history; it is

<sup>1</sup> See below pp. 474, 475.

concerned with the exposition of ideas, not with the circumstances in which the ideas were put forward. I shall, therefore, reduce my references to time and place to the barest necessary minimum. It is, however, well to warn the reader at the outset that none of the theories which figure in the ensuing Part can be seriously regarded as making claims to absolute truth, or as being universally applicable at all times and places and in all circumstances. In this respect they differ from logical and metaphysical theories and also, to some extent, from the ethical theories considered in Part II.

**The Social Contract Theory.** In the Introduction to Parts II and III, I sought to show how the influence of Christianity had led to a separation between the studies of ethics and politics. If man in his true nature is an immortal soul, he is not in his true nature a participating citizen; if his real purpose is to attain salvation in the next world, it is not to achieve the millenium in this one. Man's membership of society being omitted from the account, when the true nature of man is being discussed, society tends to be explained as an artificial growth springing from a set of particular circumstances. What are the circumstances, and how did they come to generate society? The answer to these questions is to be found in a theory which obtained wide currency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is known as the Social Contract theory. Advanced by a number of different thinkers, it was used to support a number of different conclusions. Hobbes (1588-1679) invoked it in support of absolute monarchy; Locke (1632-1704), of representative democracy; Rousseau (1712-1778), of extreme democracy. Of these various forms of the Social Contract Theory and of the conceptions of society in which they issued, some account must now be given.

**Hobbes on the Social Contract.** I have already<sup>1</sup> described in outline Hobbes's egoistic psychology, a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 358-355.



psychology which presupposes that self-interest is the only motive for conduct. I have also indicated the bearing of this psychology upon ethical theory; good, on Hobbes's view, becomes that which a man happens to desire, while virtue is success in maintaining and asserting the self. I mentioned also Spinoza's agreement with this egoistic psychology, and his distinctive view that all organisms strive to intensify their existence and to enhance the fullness of their being, irrespective of the wishes or feelings of others. Finally, I indicated the support which a purely egoistic theory of ethics derives from the doctrine of evolution, which postulates the struggle for survival as the fundamental law of man's being. Psychological and ethical theories of this type will, it is obvious, have important political implications, and Hobbes's political theory shows us, perhaps more clearly than any other, what these implications are.

A being guided only by self-interest will naturally prey upon his fellows in pursuit of his natural satisfactions. Hobbes, therefore, depicts the initial condition of man as that of a creature living in a state of nature conceived broadly on the lines laid down by Glaucon in the *Republic*.<sup>1</sup> In the state of nature men were, Hobbes holds, in constant conflict. Each man's hand was against his fellow's, and, since men are by nature equal, no man was weak enough not to be an object of fear to his neighbours, or strong enough to be immune from the fear which his neighbours inspired. In a state of nature so conceived, there was no property, law, justice or right, and the life of man, in Hobbes's classic phrase, was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". To put an end to such an intolerable state of affairs, men formed society. Society was thus found to be necessary because of man's naturally egoistic and amoral disposition, and its purpose was to give him security.

Hobbes also cites a further factor which plays its part in the establishment of society, a factor which derives

<sup>1</sup> Chapter I, pp. 20-22.

from his solipsistic theory of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Completely enclosed within the circle of his own states of mind, man is lonely and his loneliness drives him to congregate with his fellows in order that the possibilities of communication, which a common language affords, may provide him with a means of escape from himself. But man being what he is, a mere agreement to live peaceably together in society is not sufficient, since any man would break the agreement when he saw a chance of doing so to his own advantage. There must, then, be "a common power to keep them in awe and to direct their actions to the common benefit". This "common power" is brought into being as the result of a compact by the terms of which every member of the community gives up his natural rights and powers to a man, or to a body of men, in whom the united power of all is henceforth vested. Each man, that is to say, gives up his own right of self-government on condition that every other man does the same. The repository of all these individual powers is conceived of as a new individual person endowed with supreme power. "He that carrieth this person," writes Hobbes, "is called sovereign and hath sovereign powers; and everyone besides, his subject."

**Consequences of Hobbes's Doctrine: Theory of Sovereignty.** Since men came into society in order to obtain security, and since the maintenance of the common power of the sovereign over them all is the condition of their security, the power of the sovereign may not be challenged or modified. Revolt in a society is, therefore, to be regarded as impossible, not so much on practical, as on psychological grounds. For, so long as the sovereign is absolutely supreme, he is fulfilling the purpose which led men to vest their individual powers in him, the purpose, namely, of giving them security. Since our decisions are determined for us and not by us, and since the desire for security is a law of our being, we cannot, Hobbes maintained, desire to do anything which will infringe the condi-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, p. 353, for a reference to this.

tion under which alone security can be guaranteed. We cannot, therefore, desire to revolt against the sovereign, or even to weaken his power. There is, then, no right, there is even, Hobbes seems to say, no possibility of disobedience. For, once again, men appoint a ruler that they may have security; in order that he may give them security, his authority must be unquestioned, and to question it is to negate the object with which society was constituted and a ruler appointed.

To put the point in another way, the sovereign's right to rule derives from his ability to fulfil the conditions and to realize the purposes which led men to vest their powers in him. His right, in fact, resides in his might, and his might is the measure of his right. Thus the sovereign possesses what Hobbes, if he were to make use of ethical conceptions, might call a moral right to rule his subjects in so far as, and only in so far as, he has power to rule them.

So long as his ability to give security persists, the sovereign is supreme; his subjects cannot modify his powers, or depose him and substitute another sovereign—for that would be a breach of the covenant upon which they have entered—nor can they dissent from his decisions, nor refuse to obey his edicts—for that would be to put themselves outside the community and the reign of law which the community establishes, and back into the state of nature, in which anybody would have the right to destroy them. On the other hand, the ruler cannot himself forfeit or abuse his powers, since he himself is outside the covenant which brought him into being and there is, therefore, no covenant for him to break.

Since the community exists in and through the power which has been vested in the sovereign, the sovereign is both its representative and its agent. All the acts which the community does, or which any member of the community does, are his acts, and *vice versa*. "A *commonwealth*," writes Hobbes, "is said to be *instituted* when a *multitude* of men do agree, and *covenant, every one with every one*, that to whatsoever *man*, or *assembly of men*, shall be given by the major

part, the *right* to *present* the person of them all, that is to say, to be their *representative*; everyone, as well he that *voted for it*, as he that *voted against it*, shall *authorize* all the actions and judgments of that man, or assembly of men, in the same manner as if they were his own."

It follows that all the acts of the sovereign are such as members of the community must approve of and consent to. Even if he puts a member of the community to death he is, according to Hobbes, expressing and carrying out that member's own will to be put to death. For example, Hobbes writes, "If he that attempteth to depose his sovereign be killed, or punished by him for such attempt, he is author of his own punishment, as being by the institution, author of all his sovereign shall do." Since by virtue of the contract which results in the formation of society and the conferment upon the sovereign of absolute powers, the sovereign's acts are authorized beforehand, he cannot act unjustly or illegally. He is, therefore, above the law, irresponsible and unpunishable.

**Powers and Functions of the Sovereign.** The sovereign being the community's agent has supreme power in the matter of war and peace. He is the sole judge of the measures necessary for the community's defence, the sole arbiter of rewards and punishments, the sole appointer of ministers and judges. He also is alone responsible for determining what opinions shall be taught in the community, how its members shall be educated, and by what laws its people shall be governed. The sovereign may delegate some or all of these rights, but he cannot dispossess himself of them without breaking the covenant upon which society rests, and this, as we have seen, is the one thing which he cannot do. For it is the law of nature that "men keep their covenants made" and the covenant is, therefore, eternal on both sides. Hobbes does not actually assert that the sovereign whose powers are so defined shall be one man; yet he is anxious to show that, so far at least as England is concerned, the king

alone is sovereign. His book, the *Leviathan*, was widely acclaimed in support of the Stuart doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, which it was deliberately written to sustain.

Although, however, Hobbes is careful to show that the sovereign power cannot be divided, there is nothing in his doctrine to preclude it from being vested in a number of persons, or even in a sovereign body. This possibility he does not, however, explore and his theory is usually regarded as a defence of absolute, autocratic government vested in a single person.

**Hobbes's Theory of Sovereignty and Natural Law.** The foregoing theories cannot but seem to the modern reader fantastic. Pushing logic to its extreme, they appear to reach conclusions which no contemporary mind could possibly accept. A brief reference to historical circumstances may serve to explain how to Hobbes's generation they could at least appear plausible, for Hobbes's theory of the absoluteness of the sovereign was the product of circumstances and the child of a particular historical situation. Let us for the moment consider it within the context of the conditions from which it took its rise. The form of the Social Contract theory which was current in the early seventeenth century represented it as a contract between the people, on the one hand, and the king on the other. This currently accepted view of the contract was associated with the theory of natural law. The theory of natural law asserted that all men, high and low, king and people alike, were subject to natural law, which was also divine law. In England natural law was identified with the Common Law of the land. It was natural law that provided the necessary moral basis for the contract which resulted in the formation of society. Once this contract had been made, the king was obliged to abide by it no less than the people; if the king violated it, the people had a right to rebel. This theory of the contract underlay the constitutional theory of monarchy which

was challenged by the Stuart doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings.

Hobbes dissented from this theory on the ground that there must be a sovereign in society, that sovereignty implies being above the law, and that, so long as the king is regarded as being subject to the law of nature and as being himself, therefore, bound by a contract formed on the basis of the law of nature, the king could not be sovereign. In other words, so long as the theory of natural law binding on king and people alike is accepted, there can be no real sovereignty in the State. The Stuarts sought to overcome this difficulty by the theory of the Divine Right of Kings; but Hobbes was a secularist, and was concerned to find his justification for absolute sovereignty in this world and not the next. This he does by introducing modifications into the existing theory of the Social Contract. Dispensing with the idea of natural law and of natural justice, he implies that law and justice arise only in the State. They are not the presupposition of the contract; they are its consequences. This being so, no contract between king and people is possible, since there is no external standard by reference to which to determine when the contract is being kept, and when it is being violated. Consequently the contract, as Hobbes conceives it, is one which is made between the various individuals who compose society, and not between individuals and king. The king, then, is outside the contract; the king, therefore, is sovereign, and, as sovereign, he is outside and above the law which he creates and enforces. It is on these lines that Hobbes is led to endow the sovereign with the absolute powers which appear to us excessive and unjustified.

### Criticism of Hobbes

(1) ON HOBBS'S PREMISES THE CONTRACT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN FORMED. The criticisms to which Hobbes's political philosophy is exposed are in part those which apply to any form of Social

Contract theory. These criticisms have already been indicated in Chapter I in connection with the similar view advanced by Glaucon and Adeimantus in the second book of Plato's *Republic*. Briefly, there is no evidence for a pre-social condition of man and Hobbes's state of nature is, therefore, a fiction. Hobbes might perhaps be prepared to admit this, while at the same time maintaining that the admission did not invalidate his theory, for 'the operation of some form of implied Contract is', he might say, 'a logical presupposition of the maintenance of any society formed by beings who acknowledge no motive save that of self-interest, and this is all that I ever meant to assert'. Whether people are in fact purely self-interested is a question for ethics, and in the criticisms of Psychological Hedonism and of Subjectivism contained in Chapters XI and XII, I have ventured to suggest doubts as to whether a theory of universal Egoism is logically maintainable. Here it is sufficient to point out that, if people do in fact acknowledge no motive except that of self-interest,—and Hobbes is at once the most extreme and the most consistent of all those who hold this view,—then it is impossible to account for that degree of co-operation and trust which are required for the formation of the Contract. Men come together, Hobbes says in effect, in order to form society. But the coming together entails a willingness to co-operate on the part of those who come, and a willingness to co-operate implies a social sentiment in the form of a recognition of the need for rules, and a social disposition which is prepared to observe them. These cannot, therefore, be as Hobbes maintained, exclusively the product of a contract to form society; they must in some degree have pre-existed such a contract. Man, in other words, as Plato and Aristotle saw, must be regarded as having been in some degree a social animal from the first.

(2) THE POWER OF HOBBS'S RULER NOT UNLIMITED. Secondly, it is impossible on Hobbes's premises to justify the unlimited character of the power

with which he endows his ruler. The contract, says Hobbes, once made is irrevocable, and the powers with which the ruler is invested are, therefore, since they flow from the contract, inalienable. He can delegate them, but he cannot relinquish them or be deprived of them. But why can he not? Because, says Hobbes, men have contracted to obey him, realizing that, only if they do, can they be assured of that security, for the sake of which they formed society. For his subjects to disobey the ruler or for the ruler to relinquish his power is, therefore, to break the contract and to bring society, which derives from the contract, to an end.

This conclusion seems to be open to two objections: (a) the premises upon which it is based are unsound; (b) the conclusion does not follow from the premises.

(a) That Hobbes's premises are unsound has already been suggested. It is not the case that men are purely self-interested or that they are concerned only to pursue their own pleasure; nor is it the case, as Hobbes seems to think, that the desire for order and security dominate them to the exclusion of all other desires. The most casual study of history should have convinced him that this was not the case. History shows that there are many things for the sake of which men will abandon security. There are evils which seem to them so appalling that they will break the peace in order to be rid of them; injustices which they will fight and die to remove. The whips of despotism, says Hobbes, are always better than the scorpions of anarchy, and, knowing this, men will put up with the whips. But this would not necessarily be true, even if they thought that the alternative to the despotism was anarchy, and in fact they never do so think. Hobbes, in short, overlooks the obvious consideration that men who are persecuted or feel themselves to be victims of injustice may revolt. It is this simple psychological error which makes nonsense of his contention that the power of the ruler is inalienable and cannot be withdrawn.

If Hobbes is right, justice, the will of the ruler, and the law of the State are one and the same thing. Hobbes does



in fact explicitly accept the identification, as do the Totalitarian States of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> But it is just because they are felt not to be the same thing, because, in other words, men recognize a law to be unjust, however strong the power behind it, that they are at any time liable to revolt in the hope of getting rid of the sovereign who, they conceive, is guilty of the injustice. The fact seems obvious, and one is inclined to wonder how Hobbes could have brought himself to overlook it. The answer is once again to be found in a reference to historical circumstance. Hobbes set himself the difficult task of proving that, while the last revolution, resulting in the restoration of Charles II in 1660, was justified, the next would be unjustified; unjustified because, given his view of the Social Contract, security is the one thing for the sake of which men formed society, and the one thing which they cannot be allowed to jeopardize by successful rebellion. Successful rebellion, then, is the one thing which, in the interests of security, must be excluded; yet it is also something which, on Hobbes's egoistic premises, cannot be excluded. Confronted by this difficulty, what, in effect, Hobbes does, is to retain the dogma of the impossibility of revolt and to abandon his egoistic premises. Men, he says, will not revolt because of the moral obligation which they recognize to "keep covenants made". We may regard this inconsistent invocation of morality as a surviving remnant of the influence, from which Hobbes never quite won free, of the natural law theory of politics.<sup>2</sup> Belief in natural law is the basis of Locke's political philosophy,<sup>3</sup> but it has no logical place in that of Hobbes, who uses arguments which are inadmissible in logic to reach a conclusion which is repugnant to common sense.

(3) (b) THE CONCLUSION THAT THE CONTRACT IS IRREVOCABLE DOES NOT FOLLOW. I insist at this point upon the inconsistency of Hobbes, because

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 625 and 646    <sup>2</sup> See pp. 477, 478 above.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 484, 485 below.

Hobbes is often praised for his logic. Given the premises from which he starts, then, his admirers have said, there is no way of avoiding his conclusions. I cannot myself see that Hobbes is a very logical thinker. Let us for the moment assume that his premises are correct; that man is motivated only by self-interest and that he prefers security to all other goods. Now a person who is motivated only by self-interest, can have no other motive than that of self-interest for keeping the contract, by virtue of which society is formed and the powers of all are vested in a single absolute ruler. There cannot, that is to say, be any feeling for the sanctity of covenants, any loyalty to a pledged word to bind those who know no motive but self-interest. Hobbes agrees that there cannot. "The opinion that any monarch receiveth his power by covenant, that is to say, on condition, proceedeth from want of understanding this easy truth, that covenants being but words and breath, have no force to *oblige*, contain, constrain, or protect any man." Owing no basis in morality or in law, the contract must be based partly upon force, a conclusion which Hobbes explicitly accepts—"Covenants, without the sword," he writes, "are but words, and have no strength to secure a man at all"—and partly upon self-interest—"Justice, therefore, that is to say, keeping of covenant, is a rule of reason, by which we are forbidden to do anything destructive to our life: and *consequently* a law of Nature." All this may be true; it is at least consistent. But how, if it is true, are we to justify Hobbes's insistence upon the irrevocability of the contract, his announcement of the omnipotence and irresponsibility of the sovereign, his denial of the right of revolt, and his assertion that the sovereign always represents all his subjects whether they like it and know it, or dislike it and do not know it?

That the contract is irrevocable is not true; for if people are purely self-interested, they can and will back out of it, and as soon as it ceases to serve the purpose for which they formed it. That the sovereign is irresponsible and omnipotent is not true; he has power for just so long as

a sufficient number of his people feel disposed to obey him. That people have no right to revolt is not true; they can and will revolt directly they think that their interests will be better served by getting rid of the existing sovereign and establishing another, than by maintaining him. What is more, directly enough people do think this, the revolt will succeed. As Hobbes himself very properly points out, "The obligation of subjects to the Sovereign is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth by which he is able to protect them"; he might have added, "or as long as they find their interests better served by maintaining than by deposing him."

That the sovereign represents all the acts and wills of his subjects and is, therefore, authorized to do whatsoever he pleases is not true. If they revolt against him, it is nonsense to say that the will with which they revolt is the sovereign's own will to be revolted against, or that the will which actuates the sovereign to suppress the revolt is their own will to make the revolt unsuccessful. Finally, if I am guided only by self-interest, I shall consent to regard another man as representing me, only for so long as I believe that it will serve my interest that he should do so.

**Summary of Hobbes's Political Theory.** The distinctive and sensational features which are largely responsible for the celebrity of Hobbes's political theory do not, if the above criticisms are valid, follow from his psychological premises. Indeed, they are for the most part inconsistent with his premises. Stripped of these features, Hobbes's political philosophy reveals itself as consisting of little more than the commonplace assertion that order and security in a community are best safeguarded by a strong government, and that a government not subject to popular control is liable to be stronger than a popularly elected democratic government. These assertions may be true but they are not very novel, and they constitute an exiguous foundation for the formidable edifice which Hobbes erected upon them. On the ethical side it is, I

think, clear that self-interest can afford no moral obligation permanently to obey a ruler or anybody else. Self-interest constitutes an obligation to obedience only in so far as we think (a) that the ruler's authority will be impaired by our disobedience, and (b) that the continuance of his authority is likely to make for our happiness on the whole. Directly we cease to think these things, we shall cease to obey; for where the only recognized motive is self-interest, there can be no duty except to promote it, nor shall we feel constrained to obey a ruler except in so far as we think that obedience will conduce to our advantage.

**Locke on the Law of Nature.** The philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), whose political work is contained in two *Treatises of Government*, is altogether less sensational. Except for the fact that the king is no longer, as in the earlier tradition, regarded as being one of the parties to the Contract, Locke's theory may be regarded as a return to the original Social Contract tradition (a tradition from which Hobbes<sup>1</sup> had departed) according to which the Contract was based on the law of nature. Although he assumes a pre-social condition of mankind, Locke, believing in the law of nature, finds no mutual antagonisms among men in the state of nature, but a disposition to be reasonable and a desire for peace. Men in a state of nature were in "a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man." What is Locke's ground for conceiving of man in the state of nature so mildly? In the last resort it is theological. God who created the universe, created man and established the law of nature which He made binding upon all men. In each man was implanted a spark of the divine nature by the light of which he was able to discover the law of nature and the principles of right conduct.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 478 above.

The law of nature was primarily a law of reason. That they should obey reason and seek to do what is reasonable is, therefore, a basic law of men's nature, the originator of which is God. It is his subjection to reason which accounts for the natural mildness and sociability of man.

The following quotation summarizes the fundamentals of Locke's philosophy:

"The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are made to last during His, not one another's pleasure." The corollaries are (1) that all men are by nature equal and independent, and (2) that every man possesses initially certain rights, rights, namely, to the preservation of life, liberty, health, and goods, which he brings with him into society and of which he cannot be deprived.

**Locke and the Origin of Society.** What need, it may be asked, has this so amiably conceived creature to form a society? He forms it, Locke answers, mainly for the sake of convenience. A thorough-going pragmatist, Locke does not seek to lay down any ethical basis for the State; his concern is not with right but with convenience. A system, or lack of system, under which everybody was judge in his own cause, was found to be a nuisance; moreover, there are some matters in which uniformity is essential. Ethically it is of no importance whether the traffic goes to the right of the road or to the left; what is important is uniformity; if, for example, the rule of the road is that traffic should go to the left, it is essential that nobody should be permitted to go to the right. Moreover, says Locke, although men are on the whole reasonable and as a general rule

obey the law of nature, they do not always do so; passion or self-interest, may lead them to violate it. One man, again, may try to impose his will upon another, thus destroying the other's right to freedom. Hence arises a state of war between A who desires to preserve his right and B who would seek to deprive him of it. A state of war is a state in which impartiality becomes impossible, the victim of aggression no less than the aggressor being led under stress of emotion to violate the law of reason. It is at this point that the necessity for an impartial judge arises. In a state of nature each man is judge in his own cause and executor of his own justice. Hence the primary need of society is the need of an impartial superior, who will mete out justice to all without fear or favour. In order, therefore, that the law of nature, which is also the law of reason, may be impartially enforced men make a covenant to establish a society. Certain corollaries follow from this account of the formation of society which assume importance in subsequent political theory.

### Consequences of Locke's View of the Origin of Society:

(1) Men bring their natural rights with them into society; society, indeed, is only a contrivance to enable people to enjoy their natural rights more fully. The only natural right which men resign is the right, in cases of dispute, of judging for themselves and executing their own justice. This right they resign to the community.

(2) Locke was the apologist of the Revolution of 1688, and his constant anxiety is to prevent a recurrence of absolute monarchy in England. In opposition to Hobbes, then, he insists that the king holds his power merely as a trustee. He is subject to the law and liable to be dethroned if he breaks it. There is, in fact, in Locke's society nobody who is above the law, and if sovereignty is taken to mean—as by most of those who use the expression it is<sup>1</sup>—power which is above the law, there is no sovereignty in Locke's State. Even the legislature is not, Locke holds, above the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 514

law, since its activities are always subject to the law of nature which its legislation seeks to interpret.

(3) The State, as we have seen, is instituted for the special purpose of giving men a judge; the State is not, however, to be identified with the whole of society. In making this distinction Locke is concerned to establish two rather different points which he does not succeed in keeping wholly distinct. First, society is not to be identified with the particular form of government which happens at any given moment to hold authority in the State. It is, therefore, possible to change the government without dissolving society. Secondly, there is a distinction between the rules and obligations which are binding upon men as members of a particular community, and those which they acknowledge in virtue of their common humanity. The law of nature, being binding upon all men, pays no regard to territorial and racial considerations and demands of men allegiance to a morality which transcends national obligations. "The keeping of faith", as Locke puts it, "belongs to men as men, and not as members of society." Locke was the first modern political thinker to look beyond the bounds of the nation-state and to insist that all men, to whatsoever community they may happen to belong, have rights because they are men, and that every man has obligations to his fellow because they are men. On both these points Locke is at variance with Hobbes. For Hobbes, the State and society were identical, so that to alter the government was to dissolve society. For Hobbes, again, the state of nature is one of war, and since States are not bound to contracts formed between one State and another, the relation between them is the relation which obtained between men in the state of nature, that is, a relation of war. Locke, on the other hand, envisages a national society in which the government is removable at will, and an international society in which the relations between States are not necessarily, or even naturally, those of antagonism. On both points Locke was clearly right and Hobbes wrong.

(4) The government must represent the people whose contract to live in society makes government possible, and, as soon as it ceases to do so, it must be superseded by one which does. The powers conferred by the contract upon the government are not, in other words, inalienable, as they are according to Hobbes's political theory. They lapse so soon as the government fails to fulfil the purpose for which it exists, namely, that of fulfilling and interpreting the law of nature. The law of nature is that men are "equal and independent" and that they ought not to be allowed to harm one another in respect of their "life, health, liberty or possessions". In Locke's conception of society the state of nature is not left behind when society is formed; on the contrary, the law of nature is carried on, as it were, into society and enforces in society those ideal conditions of the state of nature which are unattainable in the state of nature. Hence the object of government is, for Locke, the establishment of the conditions under which the rights which the law of nature prescribes may be realized; it is, in other words, the establishment of the conditions under which liberty may be preserved, health maintained, wealth acquired, and life well lived according to the conception of it which seems good to the liver. This may be taken as the classical statement of the function of government, as conceived by democrats during the last two hundred years, and forms the basis of the view, put forward in Chapter XIX,<sup>1</sup> of the functions of the State and the relation between the State and the individual.

(5) REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT BY CONSENT. Government must be by consent. The functions of government just outlined, are derived directly from Locke's conception of the nature of man, that is to say, of man in the state of nature. Since men are rational by nature, they are able to form a right judgment in regard to the policy of their government; since they are by nature possessors of rights, they have an interest in seeing that the government preserves

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 772-782.



their rights and provides opportunities for their exercise and enjoyment. It follows that the government exists and governs by the consent and goodwill of the people. Every legislature, as Locke puts it, is "pursuant to a trust", and if it does not fulfil its trust, its *raison d'être* disappears. Since the object of society is to guarantee men's rights, men have a right to rebel if the government fails to make good the guarantee. Finally, instead of being, as in Hobbes, itself the law, the will of the government is, in Locke, bound by law; if the government breaks the law, the people have a right to depose it and substitute another.

(6) Government so conceived must, it is obvious, be representative. Absolute monarchy is declared by Locke to be incompatible with consent, and aristocracies are excluded as incompatible with majority representation. For it is the majority which, in Locke's view, has the right, through its chosen representatives, to decide the policy of the State. It follows that the government must be a democracy, composed of elected representatives of the people, or, rather, of the majority of the people. To ensure that the government is really representative various safeguards are suggested. There are also proposals for focusing the will of the people upon the government during its period of office.

(7) **THE LEGISLATURE AND THE EXECUTIVE.** It is with the object of securing that the legislature does in fact represent the people that Locke makes an important distinction between its functions and those of the executive. This distinction was the origin of the celebrated doctrine of the "Separation of Powers", upon which both the French revolutionaries and the founders of the American Constitution insisted as a necessary bulwark against tyranny.<sup>1</sup> The law of nature, Locke agreed, requires to be interpreted; it must, that is to say, be formulated in its bearing on particular situations as they arise. It also requires to be

<sup>1</sup> Both the French revolutionaries and the American founders looked to Locke, and both misinterpreted him..

enforced. Formulation and interpretation are the task of the legislature; enforcement of the executive. But while the need for formulation is intermittent and arises only on particular occasions, the need for enforcement is permanent. Hence the body of representative legislators should sit only occasionally and, since the task of formulation is quickly accomplished, for short periods, while the executive will be permanently in office. Locke regarded the separation of the legislature from the executive as one of the greatest safeguards against tyranny. If those who make the laws are the same as those who are responsible for their enforcement, there will, he says, always be a danger that the legislators "may exempt themselves from obedience to the laws they make and suit the law, both in its making and its execution, to their own private wish, and thereby come to have a distinct interest from the rest of the community, contrary to the end of society and government".

Provided that the law of nature is properly interpreted, provided, that is to say, that the government does in fact carry out the will of those who elect it to interpret the law of nature for them, it is the duty of the people to obey the laws and to co-operate in the running of the State. So soon, however, as a government infringes or fails to provide for the exercise of the individual's rights as prescribed by the law of nature, there is a right of rebellion. Rebellion, however, is only justified, if the majority desire it; or, to put the point in another way, it is only justified when the government becomes unrepresentative. Against a government that represents and carries out the wishes of the majority, there is no right of rebellion. The only weapon which a minority is entitled to use is persuasion with the object of bringing the majority round to its way of thinking. From this discussion of the rights of majorities and minorities in a State, ethical conceptions are again rigidly excluded. The question whether the majority is right is never discussed; it is sufficient for Locke that it is a majority.

**Comments Upon and Criticism of Locke's Views.** From the foregoing, it will be seen that power is vested by Locke in the people. Power is delegated by them, or rather by a majority of them, to a government for the special purpose of preserving the rights which each individual possesses by nature and brings into society. In order that it may fulfil the function with which it is entrusted, the government is required from time to time to make laws and to enforce them. If at any time it acts contrary to the wishes of the majority, the people have the right to withdraw from it the powers which they have delegated to it and to delegate them to another government. Just as Hobbes's philosophy afforded an admirable basis for the political doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, so Locke's two *Treatises of Government* could be invoked to justify the revolution of 1688. Published in 1690, the *Treatises* were in fact designed with this object.

Although, however, it is with the people as a whole, or rather with the majority of the people, that power rests, such power is never for Locke absolute; it is always subject to the over riding governance of the law of nature: "A government", he writes, "is not free to do as it pleases. . . . The law of Nature stands as an eternal rule to all men, legislators as well as others." The law of nature is directly derived from the belief in the omnipotence and benevolence of a creative God. Granted the assumption that such a law exists and that it is an expression of God's will, Locke's detailed development of the implications of the assumption, is, except in one respect, both logical and convincing. The one exception is his adherence to the dogma of the Social Contract.

**Doctrine of the Social Contract Superfluous.** One of the most admirable features of Locke's philosophy is the distinction which he introduces between society and the government. Having admitted this distinction, Locke should logically have proceeded to abandon the Social Contract theory of the origin of society altogether; for

the distinction between society and government entails, as we have seen, that, if the government is abolished, society still endures. But the Social Contract theory, in the form in which Locke maintained it, requires us to suppose that the abolition of government involves man's relapse into a pre-social condition. This admittedly would be a condition of peaceable and sociably disposed persons, but it would not be the same as the condition introduced by society, since it is the establishment of government which puts an end to this condition and establishes the condition of society. Such, at least, are the contentions of the Social Contract theory, as Locke states it. It is difficult in the light of these contentions to see how society could survive the abolition of government; yet that it does so, is precisely what Locke, in making his distinction between society and government, maintains. The Social Contract theory is, however, in no sense essential to Locke's political philosophy.

**Praise of Locke.** The virtues of this philosophy are many and great. It is Locke's political philosophy which, more fully than that of any other writer, is embodied in the principles and applied, albeit intermittently, in the practice of the government of this country. It is, therefore, natural that, having lived for over two hundred and fifty years under a democratic constitution which owes so much to Locke, we should have come to take as self-evident the principles upon which that constitution is founded, and for granted the conclusions which follow from the principles. It is only to-day that they are being challenged. Reflecting upon this challenge, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the circumstance that a growing refusal to adhere to the principles of Locke's philosophy by the rulers of contemporary European countries is found to synchronize with a decline, which may shortly become a collapse, of European civilization, is in no sense accidental. The greatest merit of Locke's political philosophy is what we should now call the prag-

matic spirit which pervades it. For him there is nothing sacrosanct about the State; it is merely a contrivance for guaranteeing the rights and, as we should now say, carrying out the wishes of the people. Equally, there is nothing sacrosanct about what the majority in a State decides. Locke is content to point out that, as a matter of fact, more people will get more of what they want if the majority is the source of effective power, than they will do under any other system. The question, whether they are right to want what they do is not raised, except in so far as Locke retains in the background of his philosophy a respect for the over-riding law of nature, which is also the law of God. Thus though the basing of Locke's doctrine on the Social Contract is an accidental by-product of the thought of his time, the doctrine itself embodies truths which are valid for all time.

Locke may be regarded as the father of democracy in another and perhaps less meritorious sense. Among the rights which a man possesses by nature there is, he holds, a right to the ownership of property. The postulation of a right to property is an important source of the *laissez-faire* theory of economics, according to which the State, while protecting private property and upholding contracts, is recommended to leave the conduct of the economic life of the community to individual enterprise. There is thus a close connection between the idea of democracy—people should be free to make what private arrangements, including what private economic arrangements, they please, without let or hindrance from the State—and the *laissez-faire* theory of economics, which derives in part from Locke's insistence on man's natural right to property.

**Rousseau's Version of the Social Contract.** A third and no less celebrated version of the Social Contract theory of society is that contained in Rousseau's book, the *Social Contract*, which appeared in 1762. With Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau accepts the pre-social state of human nature. His psychology, modelled on that of Hobbes and Spinoza,

is egoistic and hedonistic, and he invokes the contract, as Hobbes does, in order to account for the existence of society. Men in a state of nature, being animated purely by egoistic motives, care only for self-preservation, and it is their desire to preserve themselves which leads them to make the compact from which society takes its rise. Moreover, Rousseau agrees with Hobbes, it is only in so far as it does in fact secure the ends of preservation and security for which it was designed, that the contract is valid. On the assumption that human beings are by nature egoistic, the existence of society, and of all that society entails in the way of subordination and restraint of self in the interests of others, constitutes the problem which Rousseau's political philosophy takes as its starting point. Rousseau states the problem as follows: "Since each man's strength and liberty are the primary instruments of his preservation, how could he pledge them without injuring himself and neglecting his duty to himself?"

The solution of the problem, he holds, will be reached if we can "find a form of association which defends, with all the common force, the person and property of every member, so that though he unites himself to all, he yet obeys nobody but himself and remains as free as before". Self-interest, in other words, sets the problem, and the investiture of all the members of a community with rights of control over each one of them solves it. It is this solution which the Social Contract, if properly carried out, is designed to achieve. It achieves it by establishing as sovereign, not a single individual in whom all men's powers and rights are vested, not even a number of representatives to whom they are delegated, but the members of the community as a whole. The only valid contract, writes Rousseau, is "the complete submission of each member with all his rights to the whole community. For since all make this complete submission, the conditions are the same for all, and consequently none can have any interest in making them hard for the others".

A number of important consequences follow from this conception of the contract.

**Consequences: Denial of Representative Government and Assertion of Extreme Democracy.** First, there is a denial of representative government. It is only when the whole body of citizens keep the legislative power in their own hands that they will be guaranteed against oppression. Rousseau concedes that it will be necessary to appoint individuals to carry out the people's will; there must, that is to say, be an executive appointed by the people. But the actual legislative powers must, he holds, remain with the people. It follows that it is only in a small City-State on the Greek model, where the number of citizens is not too large to meet in common assembly and decide questions affecting the community by show of hands, that Rousseau's conception of democracy is practical politics. Rousseau accepts this conclusion.

**Introduction of the Conception of the General Will.** It follows that an individual who revolts against the decisions of society, since he is revolting against an authority which his will has brought into being and of which he himself is a component part, is in fact revolting against himself. Now freedom consists in the determination of one's own actions by one's own will. The will of the revolting individual is, therefore, divided against itself. As Rousseau puts it: "Each individual may, as a man, have a private will contrary to the general will he *has* as a citizen. His private interest may conflict with the common interest." Rousseau, however, lays it down that in such a case true freedom is to be found in obeying that aspect or part of one's will which is concerned, not with one's immediate interest or satisfaction, but with one's good on the whole and in the long run. This "will" must be "the general will he *has* as a citizen", and the good on the whole and in the long run which it wills for the individual will be such as conduces to the maintenance

and welfare of the society to which the individual belongs. Indeed, it was in order to secure the individual's good in the long run that society was formed, and the individual consented to its formation. Therefore, when obeying that aspect of his own will which is manifested and expressed in the edicts of society, the individual is realizing his own true freedom. Rousseau's conclusion is that he who refuses to obey the general will of society shall be made to do so; that is to say, he shall be "forced to be free".

But what is this common or "general will" which the individual "has as a citizen"? The answer to this question brings us to the most celebrated feature of Rousseau's political philosophy, his conception of the General Will. The conception is both difficult and important; the difficulty is inherent in the doctrine itself, but it is increased by Rousseau's confusing and inconsistent manner of expounding it; the importance arises from the influence which the doctrine of the General Will has had upon subsequent thinkers and, in the twentieth century, upon events.

Rousseau is led to introduce the doctrine with the object of justifying his view that, in completely submitting himself to all, each is nevertheless guaranteed against oppression, "since none can have any interest in making" the conditions of society "hard for the others". Rousseau continues, "since each only surrenders himself to *the whole* and not to any individual, and since he acquires just the same rights over every man as he yields to him over himself, all gain exactly as much as they lose and also increased power to preserve their possessions". This desirable consummation might conceivably be realized in a society in which each individual is a member of the government, and in which the government is always unanimous. In a tyranny, an oligarchy, or even in a democracy based on representative government it is obviously totally unrealizable. Rousseau has, however, already ruled out all these forms of constitution. He envisages, it will be remembered, an extreme type of democracy in



which all citizens are members of the legislative assembly. But even in an extreme democracy there may be a more or less permanent majority which overrides the wishes of the more or less permanent minority. Can it, then, be said of members of the minority "they all gain exactly as much as they lose", or gain as much as members of the majority, as a result of the contract to live in society? *Prima facie* they do not, and it is to meet this difficulty that Rousseau puts forward his doctrine of the General Will. This he states as follows: "Each of us puts his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the *general will*. . . . The act of association instantaneously substitutes for the particular personality of each contractor a moral and collective body . . . which by this very act receives its unity, its common self, its life and its will."

Granted the existence of this General Will, we are asked to believe that a law-abiding minority obeys not merely the will of the particular majority which happens at the moment to be determining the laws and policy of the State, but also its own will, in so far as its own will is "general".

**Elaboration of the Doctrine of the General Will.** Rousseau's account of this General Will, which is also the will of each citizen, is far from clear. He makes the following statements about it:

(1) Since it is a will for the common and not for any sectional interest, it is always right in the sense that it is always disinterested. "Why," he asks, "is the general will always right, and why do all invariably will the happiness of each? Because the general will, if it is to deserve the name, must be general in its object as well as in its origin, it must come from all and apply to all." Not only is the General Will always right, but there are apparently aspects of generality and, therefore, of rightness. "The most general will is always the most just, and the voice of the people is, in fact, the voice of God."

(2) Since in regard to every question which arises in the State there is always a disinterested and public-spirited

point of view, even if nobody happens to express it, and since, in relation to every emergency which may occur, there is always a right course of action, even though there may be nobody to take it, a General Will always exists in relation to every issue which presents itself for decision in a community, even when nobody is actually willing it, and it is the will to adopt *this* view and to take *this* action. When nobody happens to be thinking or willing disinterestedly, Rousseau insists that the General Will is not, therefore, "exterminated or corrupted . . . it is always constant, unalterable and pure; but it is subordinated to other wills which encroach upon its sphere".

(3) Although every individual may, as we have seen, "have a private will contrary to the general will he *has* as a citizen", he does, nevertheless, also participate in the General Will. Even if he does not consciously will in accordance with the General Will on a particular occasion, he nevertheless does so potentially.

The General Will, that is to say, the will to take such action as is beneficial to society as a whole and, therefore, to himself as a member of society, is, indeed, always present in him.

(4) Rousseau rather negatives this last suggestion by laying it down that the General Will only manifests itself in relation to matters of general import—"the general will", to repeat, "must be general in its object as well as in its origin"—in regard to which it is possible for the interests of the community to coincide. "What generalizes the will," Rousseau adds, "is less the number of votes than the common interest which unites them." He concludes that in regard to issues on which the interests of individuals are opposed, the decision must be declined by the General Will and taken by the executive. Why, then, one wonders, should the citizen on these occasions obey the executive, since the action of the executive is, at any rate in relation to these issues, not embodying the General Will. Rousseau's answer is, because the executive is appointed by the General Will to determine contentious

issues and the individual's will, in so far as it is general, is embodied in the decision to appoint and obey the executive. This last provision seems rather to destroy the peculiar significance of the doctrine by restricting the manifestation of the General Will to those occasions on which people are unanimous. But, if they *are* unanimous, there is, one would have supposed, no point in introducing the doctrine of the General Will.

In fact, however, Rousseau does not mean that the General Will is the same as the unanimous will of the people, for (5), he introduces a distinction between the General Will and the Will of All. "There is often," he says, "a great deal of difference between the *will of all* and the *general will*; the latter takes account only of the common interest, while the former takes private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills." In order to throw this distinction into relief, let us envisage a situation in which all the members of a particular society are willing, and willing selfishly for the promotion of individual or sectional interests. We will, however, also suppose that on a particular occasion there is an accidental harmony between these individual selfish interests, so that all those who are willing are unanimous. In such circumstances Rousseau would say that, although the Will of All was expressed, the General Will was not, for the reason that the interests embodied in the willing were selfish.

Without pressing Rousseau too closely we may say that the General Will always exists, that it is always present in each one of us, that it is always right, and that those matters which equally concern all the members of the community constitute the realm of its expression.

Finally, (6), Rousseau maintains that, in so far as the General Will is expressed, it is the will of an entity, which is society. "The body politic," he says, "is also a moral being, possessed of a will, and this general will, which tends always to the preservation and welfare of the whole and of every part, and is the source of the laws constitutes f

all the members of the State, in their relation to one another and to it, the rule of what is just or unjust."

### Criticism of the Concept of the General Will

(1) THAT IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH ROUSSEAU'S EGOISM. Rousseau's doctrine is, it is obvious, exceedingly confusing. Moreover, in whatever form we choose to state it, it is open to serious objections. One of the most important of these has already been urged in various forms in criticism of subjectivist theories of ethics. Briefly, it is to the effect that, if the nature of man is fundamentally egoistical, and if his desires are exclusively hedonistic—and Rousseau, as we have seen, has recourse to the explanation of human nature in terms of its origins,<sup>1</sup> insisting that in a state of nature man is both egoistic and hedonistic—it is impossible to account for the existence of man's altruistic emotions and sentiments in general, and for his capacity for willing disinterestedly in particular. Yet the distinction between the Will of All and the General Will presupposes that he *can* will disinterestedly, for it presupposes that human beings can be actuated by motives other than that of personal or sectional advantage and disinterestedly desire the common good. I have already pointed out, both in this chapter and in Chapter I,<sup>2</sup> that it is impossible to explain the formation of society, if the egoistical account of human nature in the state of nature is true. I now add that on this assumption it would be equally impossible to account for the continuance of society, for the continued functioning of society implies that people *can* sometimes will disinterestedly and *do* sometimes care for the common good.

(2) THAT IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE THEORY OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT. A further question which arises in this connection is the relation of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 478, 479 above and Chapter I, p. 36.

the doctrine of the General Will to the theory of the Social Contract; for how, it may be asked, is the doctrine reconcilable with the theory? The theory of the Social Contract, if it means anything at all, means that men are bound to obey the Government. Admittedly, it provides for the possibility of revolt, for—and it was precisely on this point that Hobbes's version of the Social Contract theory was found to be most obviously open to criticism—people cannot be obliged either in morals or by law to put up with tyranny. There is a limit to men's willingness to tolerate oppression, and people are prepared to fight and to die when the limit is overstepped. But so long as the government persists, they are presumably bound to obey it, if only because, as Hobbes would put it, the effective functioning of government is a condition of order and security in the community, and it was to achieve order and security that men are supposed to have made the contract from which society results. Now Rousseau explicitly tells us that the actions of the government may be very far from embodying the General Will. The government, he points out, may be dominated by a particular sectional and selfish interest, and its acts may represent the interest which dominates it; or, again, its policy may be the expression of the will of most or even of all the people, yet that will may represent an accidental harmony of selfish interests, in which case it is not the General Will. Yet, Rousseau tells us, the General Will should always be followed in preference to any other. It seems to follow that a strict adherence to the doctrine of the General Will would in practice entail frequent revolts against most governments.

(3) THAT THE GENERAL WILL CANNOT BE ASCERTAINED. Thirdly, it may be asked, "How in practice is the General Will to be ascertained?" Rousseau makes a number of inconsistent statements on this point. He says (i) that the General Will emerges as a result of the cancellation of the differences between different wills, when these different wills are animated by different

private or sectional interests. But he also says (ii) that the General Will only emerges when each person votes not for what he personally happens to want, but for what he thinks that the common interest demands; that is, for the course of action which he happens to think embodies the General Will. Now statement (ii) is clearly inconsistent with statement (i).

Statement (i) taken alone would suggest that the General Will is merely the mechanical resultant of the conflicting pulls of a number of different wills. If, for example, A, B and C are members of a committee and A wills X, B, Y and C, Z, then the course of action eventually decided upon may be neither X, nor Y nor Z, but M, M being a compromise reached by acting in accordance with the highest common factor of the three conflicting wills. In the same way, if three mechanical pulls are brought to bear upon an object O, the direction in which O actually moves will not be the direction of any one of the pulling forces, but will be the mechanical resultant of all three of them. Now there is no reason why the course of action represented by M, when M is the compromise reached by a committee on which A, B and C are each willing differently, should be the course best calculated to promote the common good. Moreover, M, by hypothesis, is not the course of action which any single member wills. Rousseau's second account (ii) must, therefore, be preferred to his first (i). It is only on the basis of this second account that it is possible to conclude that, when people are trying to will what they believe to be the common good, the General Will has a chance of being affirmed. If, however, proceeding on the basis of this second account, we *do* draw this conclusion, we encounter the difficulty that the individual has no means of knowing what the common interest actually is. On such a question he can only have opinion; he can never have knowledge. What is more, his opinion may be diametrically opposed to that of his neighbour. Two persons may, therefore, be both willing disinterestedly and yet be in opposition. It is not clear, then, by what method the General

Will is to be disentangled from a multitude of different, though disinterested, individual willings.

(4) THAT A WILL MUST BE THE WILL OF A PERSON. If we overlook these difficulties and inconsistencies and ask what Rousseau's meaning really was, the answer is, I think, that he probably meant what the utilitarians meant, namely, that the object of State action should be to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people; that everybody has an equal interest in promoting this greatest happiness; that people do on occasion wish to promote it; that when they do so wish, their wishings and consequent willings manifest the General Will; and that the General Will may, therefore, be identified with the sum total of the wills of all people when they are all willing for the common good, that is, for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It is some such doctrine as this that we are, I think, entitled to suppose that Rousseau was advocating. But, if this is in fact his doctrine, his statement of it seems to be exposed to two serious difficulties. First, why should it be supposed, as Rousseau certainly does suppose, that it is possible to discover by voting what course of action embodies the General Will, and what course of action, therefore, promotes the greatest happiness of the greatest number? The suggestion that a decision reached by voting will embody the General Will reveals itself on examination as being tantamount to the assertion that the majority is always public-spirited and is always right. Secondly, it may well be asked whether there is any sense at all in postulating a will which is not the will of a person. Willing implies that there is a mind which is that of the person who wills. Rousseau's General Will, is not the will of any single mind belonging to any single person. We can only, therefore, make sense of the doctrine by supposing that society has a communal mind, or that society has a personality or being of its own. Rousseau, as we have seen, does in fact suggest that it has. The doctrine, that society has a being or personality of its own, was later

developed by Hegel, and is the central feature of the Hegelian theory of the State,<sup>1</sup> which constitutes one of the foundations of modern Fascism.<sup>2</sup>

**Psychological Background of Rousseau's Theory of the General Will.** The reader may be tempted to wonder why a doctrine combining inconsistencies so gross and falsehoods so obvious should ever have been put forward by a competent thinker. The explanation will, I would suggest,<sup>3</sup> be found in a reference to circumstances. The relevant circumstances are not, as in the case of Hobbes and Locke, political, but personal.

One of Rousseau's outstanding personal characteristics as revealed in his *Confessions* was a sense of personal guilt or sin, a sense inherited from his Calvinist forebears and confirmed by the circumstances of his own upbringing and character. From this sense of guilt there were two modes of escape; the first by a denial of reason and morality and a return to the supposedly instinctive life of the savage; the second by moral redemption through the agency of some external authority. Rousseau dallied with the first method, but in the main chose the second. Where, however, was he to look for an external authority to be the agent of moral redemption? Not to the Church, not even to religion, but to a secular institution, to society; and the form of social organization which he describes in the *Social Contract* is in effect a description of the ideal society which would be capable of effecting the moral redemption of its members. Redemption by society is rendered possible by reason of the presence in most men of what Rousseau calls a sentiment of sociability. This sentiment is described by Rousseau as a mixture of reason, will and emotion. From the element of reason in the sentiment, he derives the concept of the General Will which, from this point of view, may be termed a rational desire for the common good. The General Will is then treated as being at once the uniting agency and the

<sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup> See Chapters XV, pp. 587-593, and XVI, pp. 645-652.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted for this suggestion to my friend Dennis Routh.



moral authority of a society which is capable of the moral redemption of its members; the uniting agency, because, Rousseau holds, in so far as men are moved by a rational desire for the common good, they will all come to the same conclusions and desire the same ends; the source of moral authority capable of redeeming the members of the society in which it is embodied, because, though it is the will of society, it is also the individual's own will, so that in obeying it the individual is obeying himself.

Rousseau, then, thinks of society—and in this respect his political philosophy constitutes an advance upon that of Locke—as an organization imbued by a definite moral purpose. Locke, it is true, writes much of the common good and of the part which society should play in promoting it, but his conception of society remains fundamentally that of a police State existing for the purpose of protecting the rights of property.<sup>1</sup> Locke's State, in fact, confers rights but does not exact duties. Rousseau, however, conceives that a man may have duties to the State. He has, for example, the duty of obeying the General Will; he has also the duty of willing in accordance with it, of willing, that is to say, the common good. It is in virtue of the fact that society does exact these duties, that it performs the office of redeeming its members by calling them to the pursuit of altruistic ends.

**Truths Embodied in Rousseau's Conception of the General Will.** The foregoing considerations will serve to introduce the first of the important political truths which Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will embodies.

(1) The very fact that the morally redemptive factor in society, the General Will, is conceived as a will, commits Rousseau to what may be called a dynamic conception of society. His community is one in which laws are constantly being made, if only because his community is one in which it is constantly being *willed* that so and so should be done. Prior to Rousseau, the view that society should actively

<sup>1</sup> See p. 493 above.

improve itself by legislative activities on the part of the government was virtually unknown. The Common Law, which was the formularized version of natural law, was held to cover all the relations between man and man in society, such legislation as might from time to time be passed being regarded in the light of a series of judicial decisions interpreting and defining the provisions of Common, that is to say, natural law. Locke, for example, has little or no interest in legislation and makes perfunctory provision for it in his constitutional proposals. Rousseau escapes from the influence of the conception of natural law, of which the Common Law is deemed to be a faithful transcript, sufficiently to realize the necessity of actually *creating* the law which is to regulate the affairs of the community. Law-making is necessary because the needs of a community change and the moral sense of a community develops, but the new laws are not necessarily contained, or even implied in the old. They may have to be conjured, as it were, from the void by the mind of man. Now creative legislation demands an act of will and, in the absence of legislation by God, any law made by man or by a group of men will be partial and, therefore, anti-social. Hence Rousseau demands, and rightly demands, that the creative legislation of a community should be such as expresses and embodies the General Will. Rousseau is thus the first to emphasize the need for continual law-making in a community, and he adds the safeguard that the laws must be both such as the people want and such as will provide for the people's welfare.

(2) There is, it is obvious, a sense in which in relation to any and every issue that presents itself for collective decision there is a course of action which it is right for the community to follow, if by the word "right" we mean what the utilitarians meant, namely, calculated to promote the common welfare conceived in terms of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

(3) "Right action" so defined will not produce benefits for some one sectional interest as compared with some other

sectional interest. It is not likely, therefore, to be advocated by any one sectional interest in opposition to another. In so far, therefore, as it is advocated at all, it will tend to be advocated only by those who have at heart the communal interest.

(4) The communal interest is the same for all. Therefore, when I will the communal interest, what I am willing will be identical with what my neighbour is willing, when he too wills the communal interest. While, therefore, my will, and that of my neighbour will be apt to diverge in so far as we are concerned with our own particular sectional interests, they will coincide when he and I will the common interest.

(5) On a committee or other public body opposed sectional interests are liable to cancel out. Thus, if X wants A and Y wants B, and the number of those who support X is equal to the number who support Y, neither A nor B will be decided upon. Even if there is a majority in favour of X, the existence of opposition may lead to concessions being made to the opposing minority. It is not, therefore, X in its original integrity which is decided upon, but X shorn of certain controversial features, or X diluted with elements derived from Y. This is the most usual result reached on a committee where interests are opposed, and is called compromise. When, however, everybody is willing the same thing, the necessity for compromise does not arise. There is, therefore, a tendency for what Rousseau would call the General Will to find expression on a committee, just because it is the one will which everybody may be supposed to have in common. Thus where sectional wills cancel out, the General Will may prevail.

It is, however, at least as likely that the course of action which the committee decides to adopt will represent a mechanical resultant, in the sense of resultant defined above,<sup>1</sup> of the conflicting sectional wills of all its members. If this happens, the committee's action will represent nobody's will. This result is the one most commonly reached

<sup>1</sup> See p. 502.

on democratic bodies which, in seeking to concede some part of what everybody wants, rarely succeed in carrying out all of what anybody wants.

**Errors in Rousseau's Theory.** Rousseau, however, reads far more into his doctrine of the General Will than these rather commonplace truths. First, he infers from the fact that individual sectional and selfish interests tend to cancel out, that the process of voting in assembly will disclose a will which is directed towards the common good. This, however, is very far from being the case. The course upon which an assembly decides may be a compromise which, while it represents nobody's selfish interests, may yet not be the course best calculated to promote the public interest; or it may express a straightforward decision by the majority to over-ride the minority. Secondly, starting from the assumption that on every issue that presents itself for decision and action there is a right course, in the sense of the word "right" defined above,<sup>1</sup> Rousseau infers that somebody or something actually wills this course. But the assumption does not justify the inference. To put the point in a different way, it may be admitted that, if I will the common good, my will will be identical with that of my neighbour who is also willing the common good; the fact that it will be identical is, indeed, obvious. But it does not follow that my will and my neighbour's will for the common good somehow exist. Yet this is precisely what Rousseau proceeds to maintain. It is, however, nonsense to say that a will exists, if nobody is willing it; it is also nonsense to say that in some sense my neighbour and I both regularly will the common good, even when we are not conscious of doing so, or even when we are actually conscious of doing the opposite. It is quite conceivable that we may never consciously will the common good at all.

**In what Sense, if Any, has the Community a Personality and a Will?** The point is important because

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 497, 498.

the conception of an unowned common will, which Rousseau introduced into political theory, inevitably produces a demand for something to which this floating will may be attached. It is the need for an anchor or owner for an unexpressed common will which constitutes one of the main sources of the idealist theory of the State to be considered in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> In this connection two important truths are again invoked as the basis for an erroneous conclusion. The truths are (1) that, as I have already tried to show in an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> there is a sense in which some wholes are more than the sum of their parts. Among these wholes are living organisms, and there is some reason for thinking that among them are also those wholes which are societies or communities.

(2) That there is a sense in which a mob or a crowd may be said to have a personality of its own, which is brought into existence by the coming together of the separate personalities of its individual members, but is nevertheless other than any one of these separate personalities. Thus people use expressions such as "the instinct of the herd", "the mood of the crowd", or even "the mass-soul". There is also some reason for thinking that a meeting or assembly, even if it is only a meeting of a committee, may engender such a communal soul. That such communal entities are generated in committees is, however, dubious, for the mass-soul, if indeed there be such a thing, is chiefly manifested in moments of emotional excitement, and its existence is more doubtful, as its manifestation is certainly less discernible, when the emotional atmosphere is calm.

These two truths are combined to support the conclusion that the State is a whole which is more than the sum of its members and is endowed with a life and personality of its own. If the State has a life or personality of its own, it is not difficult to suppose that it has a will of its own. Such a will may well be supposed to will the interests of the State as a whole, and not the interests of any section of it,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, p. 587.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 52-54.

and such a will, if it existed, would fulfil most of the requirements which Rousseau specifies for the manifestation of the General Will. Thus in the idealist theory of the State to be described in a later chapter, Rousseau's General Will becomes identified with the Will of the State, the State being conceived as a living organism, which is a whole or unity, and which stands to its constituent members in the relation in which the whole or unity which is a living human body stands to its constituent organs.

**Some of the Consequences of Rousseau's Doctrine of the Will.** The consequences of this doctrine are in the highest degree formidable. Because the General Will is always right and always disinterested, it is argued that the State is always right and always disinterested. The will of the State is, therefore, held to be morally superior to that of any individual, and it is urged that the individual's will may justifiably be subordinated to it. Again, the living organism is, it is obvious, more important than its component organs; their function is to promote its welfare, and their sole excellence consists in promoting its welfare as fully as possible. Therefore, by analogy, the State is more important than the individuals who compose it; their excellence is to be found in its service and their *raison d'être* in the promotion of its interests. This principle is familiar in the Nazi philosophy which dominates Germany to-day. The individual, Nazis maintain, belongs from birth to death to the State; the individual's private interest must, therefore, be subordinated to the interest of the State, which is not only an end in itself, but is the synthesis of all ends, moral and spiritual. Such, broadly, is the conclusion of the line of thought which, starting from Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will, culminates in the idealist theory of the State and finds one of its expressions in the practice of National Socialism in contemporary Germany.

There is, I would suggest, another strand in the rope which bridges the gap between Rousseau's political theory and the doctrines of modern Totalitarianism.

Rousseau lived in an age in which Christianity seemed to be losing whatever pretensions it might once have had to be a universal religion. Not only were educated men under the influence of the Encyclopædists exchanging Christianity for Deism, but the acid of doubt was already eating into the body of faith and doctrine which had for so long satisfied the religious aspirations of the masses. Yet it was essential, if spiritual health was to be maintained, that men should acknowledge some purpose outside themselves. Where was this purpose to be found save in the promotion of the welfare of society? Such at least seems to have been Rousseau's view. It is with the disinterested service of society, such as is rendered to-day by the best of the English Civil Servants, that he seems at times to identify the end of man. So serving, the individual both expressed the General Will in himself and assisted its concrete realization in the institutions of society. Hence, in a time of religious doubt, the service of the State may become a substitute for the service of God. Herein is to be found one of the psychological bases of the modern religion of nationalism, a religion which Rousseau, perhaps more than any other political philosopher, assisted through his doctrine of the General Will to promote. We may, however, take leave to doubt whether Rousseau would have regarded with favour the process described in Chapters XV and XVI whereby the service of society becomes the worship of the State. It is, indeed, one of the ironies of history that Rousseau, whose pretensions are those of an avowed democrat, should be the spiritual ancestor of Hegel and Fichte and through them of Fascism.<sup>1</sup>

**Rousseau's Democratic Pretensions.** For Rousseau was, it will be remembered, a psychological hedonist. For him, therefore, the actions of individuals could have no motive except that of bringing pleasure to their agents. Rousseau admittedly does not consistently maintain this doctrine. But he never forgets that a government

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 645, 646, for an account of this development.

must be judged by its ability to promote the welfare, conceived in terms of pleasure, of its individual subjects. Hence the political question which he sets out to answer is, what kind of government will most effectively carry out this purpose, and, because of its success in doing so, have a justifiable claim upon the obedience of individuals conceived as exclusively self-interested persons? Rousseau's answer is, a government in which the sovereign legislative power remains in the hands of the citizens, although it may be delegated by them for special purposes to an executive. This is the answer of an extreme democrat, and it was because he gave it that Rousseau's thought was an important factor in generating the French Revolution. Nevertheless, through his doctrine of the General Will Rousseau is also the political father of those who have advocated the subordination of the individual to the State, on the ground that the State's interests transcend those of the individuals who compose it. Rousseau would, I think it may safely be said, have regarded such a doctrine with horror.

### *Books*

- × **HOBBS, THOMAS.** *Leviathan*, especially Parts I and II.
- LOCKE, JOHN.** *On Toleration and Civil Government.*
- × **ROUSSEAU, JEAN JACQUES.** *The Social Contract; Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.*  
    (Both contained in *Everyman Edition*).
- CARRITT, E. F.** *Morals and Politics*, Part I.



## CHAPTER XIV: SOVEREIGNTY, LIBERTY AND NATURAL RIGHTS

The views of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau have an importance in the history of political theory which justifies detailed summary. This cannot be said of subsequent political thinkers, with the exception of Marx and possibly of J. S. Mill. I shall, then, from this point adopt a different mode of treatment and select subjects rather than thinkers for exposition. The Social Contract Theory outlined in the last chapter formulated a number of questions which provided the framework for discussions of political theory during the ensuing hundred and fifty years. Of these, three are of outstanding importance: the theory of Sovereignty, the principle of liberty, and the doctrine of Natural Rights. All three are related, and in this chapter I shall try to summarize the more important views which have been held in regard to them.

### I. SOVEREIGNTY

**Nature of Questions Discussed.** The theory of Sovereignty, as it is called, has played an important part in the history of political theory, and, although the discussions to which it has given rise seem academic now, it is necessary to give some account of the matters under discussion.

The conception of Sovereignty was originally introduced into political theory by the French thinker Bodin (1530-1596). The question which interested him was primarily one of fact. In every form of government, whatever its nature; there must, he pointed out, be some ultimate repository of power, some authority which is the source

of the authority of all the other persons or institutions who or which possess authority, but which itself derives its authority from nobody and nothing. The possession of such ultimate power Bodin calls Sovereignty, and the possessor of it in a State, the Sovereign.

Two questions have been historically discussed. First, who or what is the Sovereign in a community? Secondly, who or what ought to be the Sovereign, or rather, who or what does a particular writer think ought to be the Sovereign? These questions are, it is obvious, separate questions: nevertheless, they have frequently been confused. Machiavelli, for example, confines himself to the question of fact. Power in a community is, he maintains, as a matter of actual fact vested in the Prince. The actions of the Prince must frequently run counter to what appear to be the interests and wishes of the people, if he is to keep the community together; but, since it is in the interests of the people that the community *should* be kept together, when the Prince appears to be thwarting their interests on a particular occasion, he is not doing so in reality.

Hobbes is concerned with the question of "ought". He does not maintain that all power in a community does in fact reside in the ruler; he says that it ought to do so, if society is to fulfil its primary purpose of giving security to its members.

**The Views of Locke and Rousseau.** Locke, as we have seen, holds that Sovereignty ought to belong to the majority. Whether the majority is right is irrelevant; what is right is that the majority should decide, and in a properly constituted community the majority would in fact do so. Rousseau maintains that Sovereignty belongs to the people as a whole. While he was prepared to allow to the government of the day and to the executive special powers for particular purposes, powers which were to be exercised subject to the law, the whole object and intention of his writings is to prevent the arrogation of Sovereignty by any one governing body, whether executive,

legislature or judicature. Subsequent critics have found difficulty in believing that Rousseau meant what he said; difficulty, that is to say, in crediting the fact that he really envisaged Sovereignty as belonging to the assembly of the whole people. But when it is borne in mind that Rousseau was thinking of a community not larger than a Greek City State, a community, that is to say, in which not more than 100,000 adult citizens at most were entitled to vote, there is nothing particularly outrageous about his view. It does, however, give rise to a problem which becomes acute, so soon as we are concerned with a community larger than the Greek City State. If we take the view that it is with the people as a whole, or at any rate with the majority of the people, that power in a community resides, or ought to reside, how, it may be asked, is this power to be exercised or made effective in the modern nation-state, where the majority of the people are too numerous to form a practicable legislative body?

**Political Proposals of Bentham.** This is one of the problems with which Jeremy Bentham concerns himself in his *Fragment on Government*. Bentham followed Locke in holding that the majority in a community should decide. To him it seemed self-evident that what the majority wanted would be, if not "right"—a word which, as we have seen, had no unique meaning for Bentham<sup>1</sup>—at least conducive to the general happiness. But, more plainly than Locke, Bentham discerned the problem which, in a large community, the demand for representative government presented. For in a large community the majority must, it is obvious, express its wishes through representatives. These would in accordance with Bentham's psychological views,<sup>2</sup> be guided by self-interest, albeit enlightened self-interest. How, then, were they to be induced to act in such a way as to carry out the wishes of the majority, that is to say, to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number?

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 325-327. <sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX; pp. 328, 329.

In answer to this question Bentham put forward a number of suggestions with the object of bringing the pressure of public opinion continuously to bear on the government. First, there must be universal suffrage; thus every man and woman should have a chance of making his wishes felt. Secondly, the legislative body must be re-elected annually in order to ensure that the representatives of the people would be kept in touch with public opinion. Thirdly, Parliament should be regarded as a body of delegates rather than of representatives, delegates, appointed for special purposes, being conceived to be more directly under the control of those who appoint them than representatives who, elected for a term, may during their period of office "go as they please" without reference to those whom they are supposed to represent. Upon a governing body which is in essence a delegate body the King, the House of Lords and the Established Church are excrescences and Bentham, therefore, advocated their abolition. His ideal form of government is, then, a republic consisting of one House of delegates who are required to present yearly accounts of their delegacy to those who appointed them.

Bentham's conception of Sovereignty as residing in the majority of a community leads to a number of other consequences. Among the most important of these is his repudiation of Locke's proposal for a separation of legislature and executive. If the Sovereignty of the people is to be maintained the executive must, he insisted, be directly under the control of the parliamentary assembly of delegates, who were themselves subject to popular control. He recognized, however, that the executive must be large and would inevitably tend to grow larger. Bentham was one of the first to conceive of the function of the governing body in a community as that of regularly and continuously making laws; for, if the object of government is to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number, fresh legislation will need continuously to be passed with a view to bringing in to being an ever greater

amount of happiness. Increase of legislation means increase of administrative machinery, and Bentham was accordingly led to envisage the creation of an extensive Civil Service. Although he was prepared to endow the Civil Service with great and growing powers both administrative and executive, he never lost sight of the importance of subjecting the exercise of these powers to the control of the sovereign people. Bentham went continuously in fear of the dangers of bureaucracy: he knew how audacious elected and appointed persons are apt to become; and he accordingly devised a series of safeguards to provide for the control of the officers of the State by the sovereign people. Among these was a provision that any public functionary could be dismissed by direct petition of the people to Parliament, and a proposal for the appointment of the Minister of Justice by the electorate and not by Parliament. By these and similar devices Bentham hoped to secure the constant control and supervision by the sovereign body of its delegates and executives.

**Latent Contradiction in Bentham's Theory of Sovereignty.** I have outlined Bentham's proposals in some little detail because they provide a good example of the logical working out of the implications of an extreme democratic theory of Sovereignty. There are, nevertheless, indications of another strain in Bentham's thought. Normally, as we have seen, he regarded Sovereignty in a community as being vested in the majority of its members. What ought to be done in a community could, he held, be discovered by the simple process of counting heads and in the ideal community the press, the church and the government could be regarded as the channels through which the will of the majority expressed itself. Occasionally, however, Bentham raises a question whose importance, familiar to-day, must have been less obvious a century ago, the question, namely, "Who is it who forms public opinion, who, in fact, controls the mob?" The answer, as we can now see, is, "Those who command the avenues through which

the mass mind is reached and moulded, these in the twentieth century being the press, the radio, advertisement, and the cinema." In the early nineteenth century the ostensible avenues through which the mind of the people could be reached were, presumably, the pulpit and the press. To these Bentham added certain vaguer influences less easily discerned. Those who form the moral code of a community; those who determine the nature of the punishments to be inflicted upon transgressors of the code; those who prescribe the penalties for offences against the law; those who are responsible for the formulation of beliefs; those who set the standards of taste; those, in a word, who make the mental and spiritual environment in which the minds of the masses of men move and have their being—all these he tended to regard as benevolent dictators, determining the ways in which the mob should exercise its sovereignty in the interests of its own greatest happiness.

But if we accept the full implication of these suggestions, it is surely with the benevolent dictators of public opinion and not with the majority that Sovereignty rests.

**Mill's Development of Bentham.** It was this aspect of Bentham's thought that his disciple John Stuart Mill chiefly developed. I have already indicated the modifications which Mill, nurtured by his father in the strict doctrines of Benthamite Utilitarianism, introduced into the ethical doctrines which he had inherited.<sup>1</sup> Of these one of the most important was the distinction between qualities of pleasure. Bentham, it will be remembered, declared that quantity of pleasure was the sole standard of value; Mill maintained the superiority of a small quantity of high quality pleasure over a large quantity of low quality pleasure. High quality pleasure for Mill consisted broadly in the pleasures of the intellect.

Mill introduced a similar modification into Bentham's political theory, a modification which transformed the theory into which it was introduced even more radically

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 326-334.

than the distinction between qualities of pleasure. Sovereignty, Bentham had said, is, or at any rate ought to be, vested in the masses. Sovereignty, Mill maintained, ought to be, but is not, vested in the intellectual *élite*. In order that the nature and significance of this transformation of Bentham's doctrine may be fully grasped, it is necessary to give an outline of the arguments and conclusions of Mill's *Essay on Liberty*, returning later to the problem of Sovereignty.

## II. LIBERTY

**Mill's Liberty.** Mill's *Essay on Liberty* is a work of first-rate importance. It draws attention to political and ethical values which are widely neglected to-day, and, in opposition to the over-riding claims of the nation-state, it maintains with the greatest persuasiveness and force the integrity of the individual, his right to self-development and his claim to be considered as an end in himself. *Liberty* is in the strict sense of the word a "readable" book which rises on occasion to heights of noble eloquence. It is disingenuous for a writer to pretend to impartiality in regard to matters on which his feelings are strong and his views clear. I had better, therefore, say at once that the case which Mill seeks to establish in his *Essay*, the case for individual freedom and its corollary, the value of individual variety, seems to me to be both unanswered and unanswerable. The neglect of the truths which Mill states is, I hold, in some part responsible for the distresses of contemporary Europe.

Mill's case for liberty falls into two parts. There is, first, a series of arguments for freedom of thought, whether expressed in speech or writing or enjoyed in reading.

These arguments are derived from Mill's utilitarian principles. Socrates had defended liberty on the ground that it was valuable to society, and Mill, taking Socrates's hint, bases his defence not upon any abstract right to liberty which the individual may be hypothetically supposed to possess, but upon "utility, in the largest sense, grounded

on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being". Assuming that it is desirable that human societies should progress, Mill proceeds to point out that, if they are to do so, liberty must be accorded to their members to propound, to receive, and to discuss any and every sort of opinion.

Now, the opinions which those in authority have been chiefly concerned to suppress are those which challenge authority. The challenge of these opinions may be direct, they may, that is to say, take the form of an open denunciation of government; or it may be indirect, as in the case of opinions embodying a criticism of popularly received views on some matter of political, social or religious dogma, views which authority reflects and which it exists to foster.

On what grounds, then, Mill asks, may the free expression of these resented opinions be not only defended but demanded?

**Mill's Claim for the Free Expression and Discussion of Opinion.** Mill points out that novel opinions will be either true or false, or partly true and partly false. If they are true and authority suppresses them, authority has robbed mankind of truth. Authority usually defends itself by saying: (i) We could not tell at the time whether it was right or wrong, but it seemed to us to be wrong, and, because wrong, harmful. (ii) We are surely right to forbid the propagation of harmful opinions. (iii) Admittedly we can never be quite sure what is harmful and what is not, and it seems to be possible that in this case we may have made a mistake. But (iv) this only means that our judgment, being human, is fallible; this we admit, but the possible fallibility of our judgment is no ground for not exercising it. (v) Being in authority, we have to act, and in order to do so we must assume that our opinions, which are also the received opinions of the populace, are true.

To this Mill answers: "There is the greatest difference between presuming an opinion to be true, because, with every opportunity for contesting it, it has not been refuted,



and assuming its truth for the purpose of not permitting its refutation. Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right." In other words, it is only if you allow popularly received opinions to be questioned and disputed from every point of view that you are entitled to assume them to be true. If you are not entitled to assume them to be true, you have no ground for suppressing the opinions which challenge them.

If the novel opinion is false, there is still no ground in public utility for its suppression. Received opinion is scarcely ever entirely true. But, even if it is, nobody can be sure that it is, unless every opportunity has been given to those who wish to challenge it, and unless this opportunity has been widely used and the resultant challenge has failed to shake the opinion. Now truth is, no doubt, a good; but truth which is recognized to be such, which, in fact, is *known* to be true, is a greater good.

If, as is usually the case, the novel opinion is partly true and partly false, in which event it shares truth with the received opinion, the received opinion will be found to express one aspect of truth only. The novel opinion will in this event almost certainly stress that aspect of truth which the received opinion fails to embody. Thus one-sided popular truth will be supplemented by one-sided novel truth. In such a situation, while both partial truths may justly claim the right of popular ventilation, the novel minority opinion has a special right to be heard, since this is the one "which for the time being represents the neglected interests".

Mill's summary of his argument at this point is contained in the famous declaration, "If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."

**The Principle of Non-Interference.** But it is not only to freedom of thought that Mill's defence of liberty applies. His avowed object is to define the extent to which, and the spheres in which, the individual is entitled to claim freedom from interference by the State or the community. "The subject of this Essay," he writes, "is . . . Civil, or Social Liberty; the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual." Mill begins by narrating how lovers of liberty have for centuries dedicated their efforts and often their lives to resisting the oppression of tyrants. When success crowned their efforts, when by means of democratic institutions the people became, through their chosen representatives, their own rulers, the foundations of liberty might well have seemed to be securely laid. For how, it might well have been asked, could the people wish to oppress themselves? And so, once the people had in theory become their own rulers, once the fact that sovereignty resided in them and in nobody and nothing else had been recognized, and had received recognition in a democratic constitution, political theorists of radical sympathies—Mill has clearly in mind here his father, James Mill, and Bentham—assuming liberty to be effectively safeguarded, had been chiefly concerned to prevent the imposition of any check upon the people's power.

But the problem, Mill saw, was not so simple. The view that the people were autonomous, controlled, that is to say, only by their own will, was, he held, fallacious. For, (1) it was difficult, if not impossible, to devise effective checks upon a government during its period of office, and it might use the power with which the people had entrusted it for purposes which were contrary to their wishes. It might even use it to deprive electors of their liberties, including the liberty to dismiss it, and to substitute another government in its stead. (2) The government in any event only represented the majority of the people. (3) Men in the mass are highly suggestible; they are influenced by custom, convention and public opinion; they are swept

by storms of panic, fear, irrational elation or wild hatred, and their reasons are drugged by the voice of the spell-binding demagogue. What is more, the more closely they approximate to the average, the more completely are they open to the force of suggestion. It follows that the majority which, after all, is composed of average men, dominated by code and creed and custom, amenable to propaganda, echoes and mirrors of their environment, will tend to demand conformity in respect of the creeds and codes, acceptance of the propaganda and acquiescence in the environment from all citizens; they will require, in other words, that the influences which dominate them shall dominate all. Slaves themselves, they will insist that all shall wear the same fetters.

It was against this tyranny of the majority that Mill sought to safeguard the liberty of the individual.

**The Importance of Variety.** One of the strongest arguments in Mill's case for non-interference is his insistence upon the value of variety. Men are by nature different, and, Mill claimed, should have the right to develop their differences. The fact of difference should not be deplored. On the contrary, any society in which it is really worth while to live is a society in which men's minds and personalities exhibit variety. "Such are the differences among human beings," Mill wrote, "in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies, that unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral and æsthetic stature of which they are capable." In the standardization of opinion imposed by a dictatorship Mill would have seen not only the impoverishment of the spirit and the deadening of the mind of the community, but also the suppression of all that makes the life of civilized men interesting, vital and gay. "It is not," he wrote, "by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and

calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to."

Mill based his advocacy of variety upon a further ground. Variety was, he held, the indispensable condition of the advance of the human mind. The arguments with which he supports this view, are not essentially different from those which were adduced in another connection in criticism of the traditional moral sense theories of ethics. The moral sense, it was argued in Chapter VIII,<sup>1</sup> as embodied in the public opinion of a community, is apt to be critical of any departure from accepted moral standards. Public opinion is no less conservative in the realms of art and politics. In all these spheres, the tendency of the mass mind is to discourage experiment, to denounce novelty as heterodoxy, and to iron out differences by demanding conformity with existing codes. The fact that a code of morals or a mode of behaviour is condemned by contemporary standards does not, therefore, it was concluded, constitute in itself a ground for rejecting it.

Mill's argument for variety entitles us to go further. So far from rejecting, he would have us actually encourage heterodoxies, not necessarily because they are true, but because they are heterodox and because heterodoxy makes for variety. For, granted that a particular heterodoxy may not be true, it is only by giving scope for dissent that we give opportunity to truth. The very incapacity of contemporary opinion to discern truth when it meets it, its fear of novelty and its impatience with what flouts its prejudices, render it essential, in Mill's view, deliberately to safeguard the right of individuals to indulge in intellectual

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 308-310.

eccentricity. For the case for variety, the case for permitting the individual to indulge himself in speech and behaviour which appear shocking, to express himself in forms of art which appear ugly, to propound opinions which appear to be false, and not only false but outrageous, and to speak his mind in and out of season, is simply the case for not blocking the channels through which alone those intimations can reach the mind of man, whose embodiment in concrete form, whether in paint or sound, in moral code or political institution, constitutes, in the only real sense of the word, his progress. When Mill championed liberty as being "grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being", it was the liberty to be different which he had primarily in mind. If I may venture to convey the gist of his argument in terms of the conclusions reached in Part II, I should say that it is pre-eminently to those individuals who are "different", that our race owes such progress in the realization and embodiment of the absolute values as it has yet succeeded in achieving. Hence a society which can afford to permit "difference" is, in Mill's phrase, more advanced, or, as I should prefer to say, embodies a greater degree of absolute good than one which insists upon uniformity.

**Mill's Fear of Majority Tyranny.** All advance, then, whether collective or individual, is conditioned by and dependent upon the freedom of individuals to experiment. The success of experiment entails the freedom to innovate, and the freedom to innovate involves once again the liberty to differ. Now it was precisely this liberty to differ, both in thought and conduct, which, Mill saw, was liable to be threatened by the majority. For the eccentric individual, whether his eccentricity expresses itself in behaviour or is confined to thought, tends to arouse the ridicule or the hostility of the herd whose natural disposition is, as we have seen, to exact conformity to its standards. Moreover, the threat to the eccentric was, Mill realized, likely to grow. "The majority," he wrote, "have not yet

learnt to feel the power of the government their power, or its opinions their opinions. When they do so, individual liberty will probably be as much exposed to invasion from the government, as it already is from public opinion."

That such innovation is inimical to individual well-being Mill has already tried to show; it also, he has argued, hinders the development of man's intellectual faculties, and retards the progress of the race. But, and this was Mill's final point, just because it is inimical to well-being and does hinder progress, it is contrary to the best interests not only of the individuals who are required to conform, but also of the majority who insist upon conformity. "Mankind," he wrote, "are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest"; for "the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of their's, or impede their efforts to obtain it". To this principle of non-interference Mill admitted only one exception. He laid it down that "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their members, is self-protection . . . the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others".

**Difficulties of Demarcation.** The difficulty raised by Mill's exception is the familiar difficulty of demarcation. Who, one wants to know, is to be authorized to define the sphere in which men should be free to decide their conduct for themselves and the sphere in which their actions may justifiably be regarded as prejudicial to the well-being of others, and by what principles of demarcation is he to be guided. Here, it must be confessed, Mill is not very helpful. The difficulty of determining the proper limits of State interference with the individual is one which besets any form of democratic political theory, and I shall

venture in the last chapter to offer certain observations indicating the principles which should govern such interference.<sup>1</sup> My immediate concern is with the question of Sovereignty; where, we are asking, is or should be the ultimate repository of power in a community, and in this connection it is pertinent to point out that Mill's insistence upon the need for the free play and expression of individual opinion, and his vindication of the freedom of individual behaviour unfettered by the timidities and unconfined by the conventionalities of the majority, led him to introduce what was in effect a division of mankind into two separate classes, and to assign effective Sovereignty to the superior minority.

**Elements of Platonism in Mill.** On the one hand, there were the many who took their opinions ready-made from their environment and were prepared to allow their actions to be guided by the behaviour of their fellows; on the other, there was a superior minority willing and able to exercise their minds on independent lines, in whom Mill recognized the pioneers and natural leaders of our species. It was the independence of this minority against encroachment by what he called the "collective mediocrity", that Mill was especially concerned to preserve. But the lines upon which this concern directed his thinking led him to some rather surprising conclusions. I will summarize his argument in a series of propositions.

(1) The development of individual personality is a good.

(2) It leads to the increase of variety, which is also a good.

(3) Variety entails inequality and inequality is, therefore, in the nature of things.

(4) The object of the State is the development of the personalities of its members, more particularly of the intellectual elements in the personalities of its members.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 777-781.

branch of public administration is a skilled business" of which "the knowledge does not come by intuition".

The assumption by a deliberative assembly, whose proper function is to represent, to ventilate and to discuss, of the actual business of legislation is described as being "inexperience sitting in judgment upon experience, ignorance on knowledge". Mill accordingly proposed that the actual business of government, in which he intended to include those functions which properly fall within the scope of administration and most of those which we should regard as belonging to the legislature, should be entrusted to a skilled civil service whose members, recruited by competitive examination, would represent the intellectual *élite* of the community.

The duties which Mill allocated to Parliament fell broadly into two categories. First, Parliament would serve as a kind of public inquest, where general principles could be discussed and particular grievances ventilated. Mill's proposals under this head amounted to a recommendation that Parliament should revert to its original function. Parliament—the fact cannot be too often remembered—was not intended as a law-making body: it was originally conceived as an assembly of the nation's representatives for the discussion of matters of national concern and the ventilation of grievances. It was, that is to say, conceived as the "grand inquest of the nation." That it is the business of Parliament to legislate, became an accepted principle only during the nineteenth century. The notorious congestion of parliamentary business to-day constitutes, many hold, a strong reason for the resumption by Parliament of its original function, and for the delegation of the actual business of legislation to bodies of experts on the lines proposed by Mill.

In the second place, Mill proposed that Parliament should confine itself to laying down the general principles which legislation should follow. Guided by these general principles, a "Commission of legislation, having for its appointed office to make the laws", would propose the



details of legislative measures for Parliament to authorize. Thus, while Parliament would not itself make the laws, it would exercise a controlling function over the specifically legislative body, and, as the authorizer and sanctioner of legislation, it would be in a position to ensure that the laws were such as expressed the wishes of the majority of the citizens. Moreover, by virtue of its position as "grand inquest of the nation", it would act as a check upon the activities of the civil service and thus mitigate the evils of bureaucracy. Mill's proposals for constitutional reform thus aimed at rule by an intellectually superior executive subject to ultimate control by a popular assembly.

A Parliament performing the restricted functions envisaged by Mill would not be under the necessity of constantly obtaining fresh mandates from the electorate. Mill consequently rejected Bentham's proposals for annual Parliaments, and refused to consider members of Parliament in the light of delegates rather than of representatives. Finally, he advocated the extension of local government, in order that the greatest possible number of citizens should be drawn into public activity and thus enjoy the opportunity of developing their personalities.

**Advantages of Mill's Proposals.** Mill's proposals may be regarded in the light of an endeavour to make the best of two worlds by combining two conflicting principles, the principle of quantity and the principle of quality. The first is the principle of popular sovereignty, the principle, namely, that the majority should decide the policy of the State; the second, that of skilled direction, that those who possess special qualifications should control the policy of the State. The first principle, that of popular consent and decision, was, of course, inherent in the notion of democracy. But Mill also valued the activities of the intellect and considered that excellence, both in the individual and in the community, consisted in such a development of the individual personalities of the members of the community, as would enable each to become capable

of enjoying high quality intellectual pleasures. In order that the community might achieve excellence in this sense it was, he thought, necessary that the laws should be framed and the social scene set by those who were intellectually superior to the average. Mill's constitutional proposals represent an attempt to combine these two requisites.

The following quotation will indicate the nature of the compromise which Mill suggested between these two conflicting principles:

“Nothing but the restriction of the function of representative bodies within these rational limits, will enable the benefits of popular control to be enjoyed in conjunction with the no less important requisites (growing ever more important as human affairs increase in scale and complexity) of skilled legislation and administration. There are no means of combining these benefits except by separating the functions which guarantee the one from those which essentially require the other; by disjoining the office of control and criticism from the actual conduct of affairs, and developing the former on the representatives of the Many, while securing for the latter, under strict responsibility to the nation, the acquired knowledge and practised intelligence of a specially trained and experienced Few.”

The scheme has obvious advantages from the point of view of the efficient conduct of public business. For the function of law-making and the transaction of public business Parliament—it is on all hands admitted—is an extremely clumsy body. To quote from Shaw's Preface to *The Apple Cart*:

“Government, which used to be a comparatively simple affair, to-day has to manage an enormous development of Socialism and Communism. Our industrial and social life is set in a huge communistic framework of public roadways, streets, bridges, water supply, power supply, lighting, tramways, schools, dockyards, and public aids and conveniences, employing a prodigious army of police,

inspectors, teachers and officials of all grades in hundreds of departments." This press of business exhibits the traditional method of transacting the affairs of State by Acts of Parliament which are debated clause by clause and line by line, before they are finally passed, after a number of readings, as increasingly inadequate. Nor is the dissatisfaction with Parliamentary procedure confined to the critics of democracy. Democrats are increasingly impatient with what they have come to regard not as an aid, but as an impediment to the expression of the wishes of the people. If, for example, the majority of the people of this country were converted to Socialism, it would be the clear duty of a democratic body to pass legislation with the object of transforming the basis of our economy in a Socialist direction. Yet experts in Parliamentary procedure have been constrained to point out that a Socialist majority with a clear mandate from the electorate would, given the existing machinery of Parliament, require at least fifty years to pass the legislation necessary for the introduction of Socialism.

**Mill's Aristocracy of Intellect.** While the advantages of Mill's proposals on the score of efficient conduct of public business may be admitted, it is difficult to feel satisfied with his devices for safeguarding the principle of popular control. When, in the course of his argument, Mill came to a point where a conflict between the two principles could no longer be avoided, his tendency was to throw his weight on the side of quality. This brings me to Mill's second advance in the direction of Platonism.

(ii) Reflecting upon the factors which form the public opinion and set the standards of the community, Mill showed himself increasingly sensible of the influence that the few exercise over the many. He did not wish to diminish this influence; his concern was to ensure that it was rightly exercised, and that those who exercised it, were fitted to discharge their trust.

Mill was essentially a rationalist, the word "rationalist" being here used in its popular sense. His belief, derived from his father, was that human beings are reasonable in the sense that, if the arguments in favour of a course of action or a set of opinions are presented to them with sufficient force and frequency, and if the course of action is right and the opinions true, then they will in the end follow the one and adhere to the other. Of his father, James Mill, he tells us, "so complete was my father's reliance on the influence of reason over the minds of mankind, whenever it is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word and in writing, and if by means of a suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they adopted". Of himself and of those who, with him, set themselves in the early part of the nineteenth century the task of propagating the doctrines of Utilitarianism he writes that what "we principally thought of, was to alter other people's opinions; to make them believe according to evidence, and know what was their real interest, which, when they once knew, they would, we thought, by the instrument of opinion, enforce a regard to it upon one another".

If you could persuade a man's reason, then you could determine his actions for, Mill averred, "it is what men think which determines how they act". Now those who in the last resort are responsible for what men think, are those who control the avenues of propaganda through which their minds are reached. They are our teachers, spiritual pastors and masters in our youth; they are the writers of books and newspapers which we read in manhood. There is no doubt a sense in which the more popular newspapers follow public taste rather than lead it, but the general influence of the controllers of the press on public opinion is not open to question. Now Mill would have agreed with the modern dictators that the controllers of propaganda and, therefore, of opinion, were the real sovereigns in a

community, but he would have insisted, as against the dictators, that the object of such control should be to make the people independent of it, by so improving their intellectual capacity that they could be trusted to form for themselves a responsible judgment on all matters of controversy presented to them.

Thus the functions of Mill's controllers of opinion are not unlike those of Plato's Guardians. Each would seek to mould the opinions of the masses by education, by propaganda, by the laws and through whatever avenues they can be reached. But while Plato's Guardians would have sought to mould them to a recognition of and acquiescence in that subordinate status for which the masses were by nature fitted, it was Mill's hope that the intellectual few would aim at so improving the moral qualities and intellectual capacities of the many, that the many would become capable of taking their share in the government of the community. Until, however, the requisite qualities and capacities were developed, Mill proposed that the real holders of Sovereignty in the community should be the intellectual minority. It is by the intellectual minority that, Mill thought, government is, or at any rate should be, carried on—"a representative constitution," he declared, "is a means of bringing the general standard of intelligence and honesty existing in the community, and the individual intellect and virtue of its wisest members, more directly to bear upon the government"—but the minority should never forget that the object of government is to bring all the members of the community up to the intellectual level of the governing few.

**Comment upon Mill's Political Philosophy.** Mill's views have been given in detail not only because of their intrinsic importance, but because of the conflict of principles which they exemplify. The question, it will be remembered, with which in the first part of this chapter we were concerned was the question, "Where in a community ought power in the last resort to reside?" To this

question Mill gives two answers. The first is, "in the people as a whole". This answer provides the democratic element in his thought, and is responsible for his insistence upon the need for popular control. But Mill also held an ethical theory which caused him to value some pleasures as "higher" than others, from which it followed that those persons who were the more valuable in a community were those capable of enjoying the "higher" pleasures. Since the State exists to promote the welfare of its members, it must seek to increase the number of those capable of enjoying the "higher" pleasures. The State, therefore, has a moral end, that of improving the intellectual quality of its citizens, and power in a State ought to be vested in those who can enable it to fulfil its end, that is to say, in those who are capable of enjoying "higher" pleasures now. At this point, then, we tap a Platonic vein in Mill's thought, following which he proceeds to endow the intellectual *élite* with the power (always subject to popular control) to make the laws and to govern the community, both on the ground that they have superior value in themselves, and because it will be their object so to raise the mental level of the community, as to enable all to become capable of enjoying the pleasures in which their own superiority consists. It is from the conflict of these fundamentally different answers to the problem of Sovereignty that the somewhat complicated provisions, whose purpose is to combine the appearance of popular government with effective control by the most knowledgeable element in the community derive. Mill does not say outright, as Plato does, that the few should rule in the interests of the many, because the few know what is good for the many; what he does say is that the few can and should persuade the many to give them a degree of influence in the community which is out of all proportion to their numbers, in order that they may administer the community's affairs, in the interests of what they conceive to be the welfare of the many, better than the many, with their limited vision and undeveloped tastes, could

administer them for themselves. It is further essential that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the liberty of the few to pursue their own pleasures in their own way, however curious their proceedings may seem to the many. For the individual the right to be odd in his own way; for the community, that the "odd" should be permitted to promote the welfare of the normal—are the two distinctive recommendations of Mill's political philosophy.

**Sovereignty from the Legal Aspect.** To return to the problem of Sovereignty, this may also be approached from the angle of law. The legal approach to the problem issues in a distinctive theory of Sovereignty to which brief reference must be made. Austin's (1790-1859) views set forth in *Province of Jurisprudence*, first published in 1832, a book in which attracted considerable attention at the time, may be taken as representative of this school of thought. Austin's treatment of Sovereignty is concerned purely with the question of fact. Where, he asks, in a community does authority in fact reside? It is sometimes said that the only answer that Austin gave to this question is that authority resides in the law. But his answer is not so simple as that, for, it is obvious, there is in every community a certain number of people<sup>1</sup> who would not obey the law, unless the law were enforceable and enforced, nor can we suppose that a thinker as competent as Austin would have overlooked so obvious a point.

Austin's position is not as clear as could be wished but, broadly, the course of his argument is as follows. First, he considers who or what in a community is at any given moment actually exercising power. The answer to this question is a purely empirical one. It is discovered by examining the life of a community with a view to finding out whom or what its members actually obey. That which in the first instance they obey is, it is obvious, the law. But the law does not command by and in itself; what it does do is to authorize various persons and institutions

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 39, 40, for an expansion of this statement.

to command in different spheres for special purposes. Thus it authorizes Parliament to command in the sphere of law-making; the civil service in the sphere of law-administering; the judges in that of law-determining; the police in that of law-enforcing. Parliament, in other words, makes the law, the civil servant applies it, the judge says what it is, and the policeman enforces it. (I do not wish to suggest that these various officers of the community do not exercise other functions; I am concerned merely to point out that, in relation to law, they all do exercise functions, and different functions.) The essence of Austin's answer to the question, "Where in a community does Sovereignty reside?", is that it resides in those bodies, institutions and persons in which or whom the law of the community places control for different purposes. But if we ask the further question, by virtue of what authority does the law authorize this person or that body to command obedience in his or its appropriate sphere, or, to put the point in another way, who or what authorizes the law to vest authority in different bodies and persons and bodies, no satisfactory answer is given. Nor, indeed, on Austin's theory, is a satisfactory answer possible, for the theory is, in the last resort, a circular one, as may be seen by testing it with a series of questions. Parliament, we are told, exercises Sovereignty in the sphere of law-making because it has been established by law for this purpose. Who, then, gives the law authority to establish Parliament for this purpose? Answer, Parliament, which is the law-maker. Who, then, authorizes Parliament to be the law-maker? Answer, the law. The purport of these questions is to show that any theory which seeks to derive Sovereignty from law must answer the question, "Why do men obey the law?" The answer, whatever form it takes, reveals the fact that that authority is really sovereign in a community by reason of whose existence citizens do in the last resort obey the law. If, however, the theory is content to regard the law as that which authorizes the Sovereignty of some person or body, the question must be



asked, "Who or what entitles the law to authorize the person or body to exercise Sovereignty?" and, as before, we are committed to a circular argument. A statement of the issues raised by the problems of Sovereignty and an account of the reasons which have led to its loss of importance in contemporary political discussion will be found at the end of the chapter.

### III. NATURAL RIGHTS

**Introductory.** The doctrine of Natural Rights which, like the theory of Sovereignty, was a centre of controversial interest and attention in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has also fallen into the background of contemporary discussion. It is not so much that the problems round which the former discussions ranged are not real problems, as that the terms in which they are to-day formulated are not those which were used in the controversies of a hundred and fifty years ago. In the case both of Sovereignty and of Natural Rights, the influences of Marxist theory<sup>1</sup> and of the idealist theory of the State<sup>2</sup> have been largely responsible for superseding the traditional discussions of the early and middle nineteenth century. A brief historical retrospect of these discussions here follows.

Theories of Natural Rights tend to fall into two classes, those which derive Natural Rights from Social Contract theories of the origin of society, and those which link Natural Rights with theories of the purpose of society. The first are theories which explain in terms of origin, the second in terms of end or goal.<sup>3</sup> There is also a number of individual theories which do not fall wholly within either class. The second group of theories, more particularly in the form in which they were propounded by T. H. Green, ultimately transferred the problems at issue to another level of discussion, where they have remained ever since. It is at this level that idealist theory takes up the theme.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII for an account of this.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XV for an account of this.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-33 for an account of these forms of explanation.

## I. Social Contract Theories of Natural Rights

The common characteristic of those theories of Natural Rights which are linked with Social Contract theories of the origin of society is their attribution of rights to man in a state of nature. These rights, which man is supposed to have possessed in a state of nature, are his Natural Rights. Because they belong to man in a state of nature, they are regarded as being independent of society. They are, however, also presuppositions of society, since it is by reflecting upon their rights and considering how they may best be preserved that, it was thought, men were led to form society. "This law," says Locke, speaking of one of the laws of nature by which our rights are bestowed upon us, "is a general rule found out by reason." Hobbes refers to the rights possessed by man in a state of nature sometimes as "laws of nature", sometimes as "rules of nature". It is by following these rules that, he holds, men are induced to form society. Man, he asserts, has a natural right to enforce his will upon others. But he also has a natural desire "to seek peace and to follow it". In order that the desire for peace may be satisfied, the right to enforce one's will upon others is given up—men, we are told, relinquish their "rights" to all things "which being retained hinder the peace of mankind", and agree to "keep their covenants made". Throughout these alleged historical transactions, the guiding principle is, it will be remembered in Hobbes's view, not one of morality, but of expediency.

Locke agrees with Hobbes that men possess rights in a state of nature, and that society is formed in order to guarantee their fulfilment. He does not, however, agree with Hobbes that these rights are lost when a man enters society. With the exception only of the right to be judge in one's own cause, our Natural Rights continue to be our rights, and it is society's business to see that they are preserved. These Natural Rights, whose preservation is the business of society, are, Locke tells us, rights to "life, health, liberty or possessions".

In Rousseau the notion of Natural Rights derived from a state of nature tends to fall into the background. In an early work entitled *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau defines the state of nature as a state of bliss. In a state of bliss men presumably enjoyed all rights that are conducive to their pleasure and profit. In Rousseau's later thought the individual's Natural Rights tend to be swallowed up in the concept of the General Will. The General Will embodies and synthesizes all the separate wills of the various individuals in a community, in so far as they are willing as they ought to will. Their wills for life, liberty, goods and so forth are, therefore, presumably synthesized in and transcended by the General Will. It is to the General Will, then, that men must look for the fulfilment of their rights, and it is to the community as a whole, whose will is the General Will, that they owe allegiance.

**Paine on Natural Rights.** By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the conception of the Social Contract was losing ground. Even when it was not specifically repudiated, it dropped more and more into the background of men's thoughts. But the conception of Natural Rights to which the Social Contract theories had given rise, still persisted.

The English writer Tom Paine (1737-1809), the most enthusiastic advocate of Natural Rights, still retains the notion of a contract, although in his view it is a contract between equals for the creation of executive officials. The contract is not, therefore, a contract to guarantee rights. His book entitled *The Rights of Man* contains a declaration which begins with the announcement that all men are "free and equal in respect of their rights". The declaration proceeds to the assertion that "the end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are liberty, property, security and resistance of oppression;". Liberty is later defined as "the power of doing whatever does not injure another." Paine's reason for refusing to base his

doctrine of Rights on the Social Contract is interesting; it is that no generation can bind its descendants to carry out any contract which it may happen to have made. "Every age and generation," Paine wrote, "must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the age and generations which preceded it." "Man," he continued, "has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow . . . It requires but a very small glance of thought to perceive that although laws made in one generation often continue in force through succeeding generations, yet they continue to derive their force from the consent of the living."

While, however, Paine repudiates the notion of an historically formed and eternally binding Social Contract, he agrees with the Contract theorists that the rights which a man possesses in society derive their sanction from rights which he possessed independently of society, asserting that "every civil right has for its foundation some natural right pre-existing in the individual." Paine's views are strongly represented in the American Declaration of Independence (1776). It is self-evident, it declares, that men were "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". The French revolutionists, also under the influence of Paine, added "property" as "an inviolable and sacred right".

**Bentham and Spencer on Rights.** Paine was the last writer to maintain the doctrine of Natural Rights in its traditional form, but although subsequent writers criticized it, vestiges of the theory are still discernible in their thought. Bentham, for example, was a severe critic of Natural Rights, denouncing the doctrine as vague and unscientific, and the considerations upon which it was based as sentimental. Although, however, he studiously refrains from using the language of Natural Rights, his particular brand of Utilitarianism is, it is obvious, considerably influenced by the notions which he repudiates.

As we have seen, the American Declaration of Independence, following Paine, maintains the right to "the pursuit of happiness", as a fundamental Natural Right. Bentham accepted this "right" as axiomatic, and devoted his efforts to discovering, by what he believed to be strictly scientific methods, the laws which govern human nature in its pursuit of happiness. Granted that all human beings want happiness and only happiness; granted, too, that they have a right to happiness, by what kind of collective action, Bentham wanted to know, can their collective happiness be promoted? Or, to use the language of Natural Rights, by what kind of collective action can their right to happiness be guaranteed?

Herbert Spencer's thought also bears traces of the doctrine of Rights. In one of his later works, *Man versus the State*, he set himself to answer one of the questions propounded by his ethical theory,<sup>1</sup> the question, namely, "How is man to achieve that stage of equilibrium at which he is perfectly adjusted to his environment?" He answers this question by what is in effect a re-assertion of the eighteenth century doctrine. The right upon which he chiefly insisted was a right to the "free energy of faculty," that is to say, a right to the free development of one's personality. The primary function of the State was, Spencer held, that of securing this right to its individual members. If it failed to do this, the individual had the right to defy it. The implication of this "right of defiance"—that anybody who feels that his right to free development is restricted by the application of the State's laws has a right to resist—is tantamount to an assertion of the right to anarchy.

**Difficulties Latent in Spencer's Theory of the State. The Right of Revolt.** Spencer did in fact avoid this anarchical conclusion at the cost of some inconsistency, by invoking the Social Contract theory of the origin of society. Men, he affirmed, had entered into a form

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 369, 370.

of contract to preserve their rights; society was the result of this contract. The State, then, was in origin a contrivance to ensure that men should enjoy their rights, and since this was the purpose of its existence, it had a right to make itself as effective as possible in order that it might fulfil this purpose. Thus in the interests of the individual's right to the development of the "free energy of faculty", the State might restrict activities on the part of other individuals which interfered with the exercise of this right. This conception of the origin of the State may be correct, but it is obviously inconsistent with Spencer's earlier notion of the State<sup>1</sup> as a gradually evolving organism, whose function is to effect a mutual adjustment between the individuals who compose it. If this evolutionary view of the State is correct, the State will, when adjustment between individuals is complete, disappear. If, on the other hand, the Social Contract view of the State is correct, the State will always remain, since the exercise of its power of interference with anti-social activities on the part of particular individuals will always be required for the preservation and, if necessary, for the enforcement of rights.

**Is There a Right of Revolt?** Spencer's two views of the function and nature of the State throw into relief the dilemma in which the Natural Rights theory places its exponents. If the State exists solely for the preservation of rights, the individual has presumably a right to rebel against it when it fails to perform the function for which it exists. In all ages men have asserted this right. Sometimes the assertion has been made in the interests of religion. "We may obey the laws of the State," says Origen, "only when they agree with the divine law; when they contradict divine and natural law we must obey God alone." Sometimes it has been made in the interests of the individual's private conscience. "In the Court of Conscience," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, "there is no obligation to obey

<sup>1</sup> See p. 543 above.

an unjust law." Sometimes it has flowed from the doctrine of Natural Rights. "The principal aim of society," wrote Blackstone in 1765, "is to protect individuals in the enjoyment of those absolute rights which were vested in them by the immutable laws of nature." All these views confer upon the individual, whatever the nature of the ground which is urged to justify it, the right of revolt. But if we concede that everybody has a right to rebel against the State, when he chooses to think that it is failing to preserve his rights, we are in effect conceding a right to anarchy. Now the admission of a right to anarchy is fatal to the effective functioning of any State and is fatal, therefore, to the view that the State exists in order to preserve rights.

**Common Elements in Foregoing Theories of Rights.** All the theories of rights so far considered are based upon the same general view of society and of man's relations to it. Hence though they differ on particular points, they conform to one general formula. This may be stated in a series of propositions.

(1) There is, first, an historical affirmation: man pre-existed society.

(2) There is, secondly, a moral and metaphysical affirmation: man is a creature who possesses certain rights in virtue of the general nature and plan of the universe, and of the part which he has to play in carrying out the plan of the universe.

(3) In order that these rights may be preserved, he forms society.

(4) Rights, then, are not created by society, but are brought by man into society.

(5) The purpose of society is to secure man's rights.

(6) If it does not do so, the individual has a right to rebel, or, alternatively:

(7) he has no right to rebel, even if it does not, because society was, after all, formed to secure his rights as a whole, and even if on a particular occasion it appears to violate

one of them, it does so only that it may the better secure them as a whole; or it does so, only in order that it may the better secure the rights of most of its members, even if it does not secure the rights of a particular member at a particular moment, or of a particular member at any moment.

As I have just pointed out, there is a difficulty here, a difficulty which provoked the criticisms which, from the first, were levelled against the whole doctrine of Natural Rights. To these criticisms which culminated in a different conception of rights, we must now turn.

**Criticisms of Natural Rights: Views of Burke.** The criticisms which were urged against the doctrines of Natural Rights so far considered were bound up with criticisms of the Social Contract theory of the origin of society. These criticisms entailed a different view of the nature and origin of society, a view which approximated to that of the Greeks, in that, regarding society as an organic whole, it interpreted human nature teleologically,<sup>1</sup> with reference to the part which individuals should ideally play and the ends which they should ideally pursue as members of this whole. This alternative view of the nature of society entails in its turn a different conception of rights, which is also teleological. An account of the teleological conception of rights, which receives its most celebrated expression in the works of T. H. Green, will be given at the conclusion of the criticisms of the traditional doctrine of Natural Rights. The alternative, organic view of society will be expounded in the next chapter in its fully developed form, which is known as the Hegelian or idealist theory of the State.

A name prominently associated with the criticism of Natural Right is that of Burke (1729-1797). Burke represents the reaction of the concrete, empirical English temperament to the doctrinairism of such theories as those of Hobbes and Rousseau, theories which sought to prescribe

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30, 31.



what was good and bad, right and wrong, in a society by reasoning from general premises about the nature and purpose of man and the State.<sup>1</sup> It is from this point of view that Burke criticizes the doctrine of Natural Rights. He charged it with being a purely abstract conception owning no relation to reality. This criticism entailed a criticism of the Social Contract theory, for, if there were no rights, it was nonsense to suppose that men had formed society in order to preserve them. Again, if there were no rights, it was nonsense to suppose that the duty of obedience in a society was based on a far-fetched deduction, explicit or implicit, to the effect that, since society existed to preserve rights, and since, in order that it might do so, it must be permitted to function smoothly, and since the smooth functioning of society entailed an obedience on the part of its members to its laws, it followed that citizens must obey the laws.

Society does, however, exist and man has a duty to obey it. Why, then, does it exist and what, on Burke's view, is the basis of this duty? Burke's answer broadly is, because God so ordained it. "The awful author of our being," he wrote in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, "is the author of our place in the order of existence; and that, having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will, but according to his, he has, in and by that disposition, virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned to us. We have obligations to mankind at large which are not in consequence of any special voluntary pact. They arise from the relations of man to man; and the relations of man to God, which relations are not matters of pact. On the contrary, the force of all the pacts which we enter into with any particular person, or number of persons amongst mankind, depends upon these prior obligations." In other words we have a relation to God who created us, and we also have relations to other men, since God

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 558-560 below for a development of this criticism of the undue abstractness of some political theories.

created them too. The relations of the individual to other individuals produce society, or rather, since society must be supposed to have existed from the very first, they logically entail society. The ordinances of society must be obeyed and the right relationships between men in society must be observed, simply because these ordinances and these right relationships derive from the fundamental relationships between man and God and man and man. That a particular government may seek to abolish these ordinances or modify these right relationships is true. It may, for example, seek to alter the family relationship between men and women, or the parental relationship between fathers and children; or it may outrage the sentiment of nationality, or disrupt that system of custom and tradition which makes a people into a nation. If a government were so to act, it would, presumably have to be disobeyed, since the ordinances of societies and the relationships between and the loyalties of men in societies possess a natural sanctity derived from their divine origin, a sanctity which nothing can abolish.

One wonders what Burke would have said of the Russian Revolution; or rather, one does not wonder, for he would have unhesitatingly condemned it, as he unhesitatingly condemned the French. The bearing of all this upon the doctrine of Natural Rights is clear. Society guarantees no rights and the basis of our obligation to obey it cannot, therefore, be established by representing society as a guarantor of rights. Society is a growth which has developed because God ordained it so, its purpose being to regularize and stabilize the relations between man and man which He also ordained. The growth and development of society so conceived are as natural as the growth of a tree or the development of an art. The art of music, for example, is not the result of a definite decision to produce music; it flowers naturally from the spirit of man. Similarly with society. And just as it is nonsensical to ask what rights a man ought to have, and how far society ought to guarantee

them, so it is nonsensical to ask where in a society Sovereignty ought to reside; as nonsensical as to ask where in a body the heart or the brain ought to reside. For if society is a natural and inevitable growth, Sovereignty in a society ought to reside precisely where it is found to reside. This view of society as a natural growth will be developed in the next chapter. Its practical corollary is that society cannot be suddenly or violently changed without disaster. The view that society cannot be suddenly changed without disaster, a view ultimately based upon theology, is reinforced by experience. In opposition to the abstract theories which upon the Continent were invoked to justify revolution, Burke exhibited the concrete fact of the English constitution. 'Here,' he said in effect, 'is a constitution which embodies the collected and collective wisdom and experience of the ages; wisdom which has been acquired as the result of the handling of day to day problems. It is clearly folly for a single generation to try to destroy in a day this slow growth of the ages. The British constitution is in fact a concrete distillation of centuries of wisdom, wisdom garnered from experience; no theory can justify us in destroying what it has taken men so long to build.'

In the eighteenth century the doctrine of Natural Rights was criticized by a number of writers. Bentham, for example, denied the existence of pre-social rights. He insisted that rights only came into existence when there was a society armed with laws to guarantee them. "Rights", he wrote, "properly so-called are the creators of law properly so-called." Bentham, however, as we have seen, postulated what is in effect a natural right to happiness.

As a result of the criticism to which the original doctrine was subjected, a revised theory of rights made its appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century. Of this revised theory, T. H. Green may be taken as the most typical exponent. The new attitude to rights embodied in this theory may be broadly described as teleological,

in the sense defined in Chapter I,<sup>1</sup> whereas the view which underlay the eighteenth century theories is one derived from origins.

## II. Teleological Theories of Natural Rights

The eighteenth century theories postulated (1) a state of nature prior to the existence of society, (2) a contract to bring society into being, and (3) rights possessed by man in the state of nature and brought by him into society, whose business it was to preserve them and guarantee their fulfilment. A man's rights were thus established by reference to his original nature and the original nature of society. A teleological view of rights would establish them by reference not to man's origin, but to his goal; not, that is to say, by reflecting upon what man had been, but by looking forward to what he might become. His rights would, on this view, be simply rights to become all that he had it in him to be; or if, conceiving of man as a moral being capable of pursuing values, we prefer to use the language of morality and values, we may say that his rights will be rights to pursue and realize values. This, broadly, was the view of T. H. Green (1836-1882). A man's rights, he held, were derived not from what he had been, but from what he had it in him to become; to become, that is to say, by virtue of his pursuit of ideal ends. Green's theory, like Burke's, has a theological background. God created man and created him for a purpose. This purpose was to be identified, at any rate in the first instance, with the complete realization of the best elements in man's nature. The word "best" requires interpretation in the light of Green's moral philosophy, with which we are not here immediately concerned. Briefly, however, his moral theory was modelled on Kantian lines. With Kant, he believed in the absolute and unqualified value of the good will;<sup>2</sup> he believed, that is to say, in the will to do one's duty in accordance with the injunctions of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 28-30.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 204-207, for an account of Kant's view.

moral imperative, irrespective of consequences in the shape of rewards and punishments. To act always and wholeheartedly in accordance with the dictates of the good will, to obey always the injunctions of the moral imperative, is to realize the highest development of which man is capable, and to fulfil God's purpose in creating him. In this process of self-development the State plays a double part.

**GREEN'S ATTRIBUTION OF A TWOFOLD FUNCTION TO THE STATE.** First, there are various external hindrances to the development of man's moral self which it is the function of the State to remove. As I have already pointed out in another connection,<sup>1</sup> a man cannot pursue the good life, whatever the terms in which it is conceived, unless he feels reasonably secure from the grosser forms of physical violence. He also requires to be safeguarded against the uncertainties of tyrannous caprice and, we may add, although Green does not do so, against the menace of disabling poverty. He needs, as we should say to-day, legal justice and economic security. All these hindrances to the good life it is the State's business to remove. "The function of government," Green writes, "is to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, and morality consists in the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties." The State's business, then, is to establish the minimum conditions in the absence of which the moral life cannot be lived. These minimum conditions are regarded by Green as being in the nature of rights. We may say, then, that a man's rights are, in the first place, to those external conditions which are necessary to the realization of his moral self by means of the free activity of the good will. This conclusion is expressed by Green as follows:—

"Every moral person is capable of rights; i.e., of bearing his part in a society in which the free exercise of his powers is secured to each member through the recognition by

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 39, 40.

each of the others as entitled to the same freedom with himself. To say that he is capable of rights is to say that he ought to have them. . . . Only through the possession of rights can the power of the individual freely to make a common good his own have reality given to it. Rights are what may be called the negative realization of this power."

The function assigned to the State is, so far, a purely negative one. Society is, in Green's phrase, a "hindrance of hindrances". But society has also a positive rôle to play in the realization of the good life by the individual, a rôle which belongs to it by reason of the fact that the individual's duty to and relations with society constitute a necessary element in his development. Green was deeply influenced by the thought of Plato and Aristotle, who regarded the intercourse of a man with his fellows in society and the acceptance of the obligations which living in society entails as necessary elements in the development of his full personality. If we adopt the teleological view of the nature of a living thing, we may say that society is necessary to the realization of human nature. Since the realization of his nature is part of God's plan for man, we may further say that the State is necessary for the fulfilment of God's plan. Judged from this point of view, some States will, it is obvious, perform their function better than others, and we are thus enabled to establish a standard by which the worth of States can be measured.

**GREEN ON NATURAL LAW.** This conception of merit or worth as belonging to a State received expression in Green's treatment of what he called "natural law". The natural state of a society is, from the teleological point of view, that to which it is ever seeking to approximate. It is, in other words, its ideal state. Natural law is the system of ordinances, rules, customs and laws which would obtain in a society which had reached its natural state. Natural law was thus distinguished by Green from "positive law". Positive law prescribed what acts in any given society were actually forbidden and punished.

Natural law, could it be discovered, would be found to prescribe what acts in a society ought to be forbidden and punished, if society was to realize its natural state. Natural law, therefore, would be the legal and moral system of a society which had reached its natural state. To sum up Green's political theory, man has a higher nature which consists in the continuous and unhesitating exercise of his good will. That he should realize this higher nature accords with God's plan for him. He has a right to become what God intended him to be. In society alone can he exercise this right. It is, then, the business of society to guarantee his right to develop his ideal nature. In so far as society adequately performs its function, it becomes an ideal society. The system of law by means of which man's conduct in the external world would be regulated in such a way as to enable him to realize his ideal nature, is natural law. Society is ideal in the proportion to which its laws approximate to natural law.

**SOCIETY AND THE STATE.** The distinction between positive and natural law is connected with another distinction which Green introduces between the State and society. The distinctive feature of Green's conception of society is its possession or ownership of a General Will, which Green broadly conceives on Rousseau's lines. Green's General Will differs, however, from Rousseau's in one important respect. It is conceived not so much as the continuing will, always existing and always right, of a super-individual personality<sup>1</sup> called the State, as the highest common factor of the hopes, fears and wishes of the individual men and women who are members of a society. The General Will, then, of a society must by its very nature be fully representative and expressive of the wills of its members. The distinguishing feature of the State, as Green conceived it, is its possession of Sovereignty, which Green, following Austin, identifies with the actual effective power in a community. In virtue of its Sovereignty

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 499, 500, 503.

the State makes and enforces law; the degree to which the system of the State's laws approximates to the General Will of a society is also the degree of the State's merit. In a perfect State the approximation would be complete.

**GREEN'S THEORY OF FREEDOM.** The teleological conception of rights has an important bearing upon the problem of freedom. The function of the State on its negative side is, as we have seen, to relieve men of all external hindrances to the realization of their personalities, the realization of their personalities being identified with the continuous and unrestrained exercise of a free moral will conceived on Kant's lines. It is by realising our moral personalities that, Green holds, we become free. Since the State has a necessary rôle to play in assisting us to realize our personalities, we are, by living the lives of loyal and obedient citizens, assisting the functioning of an organization whose existence and smooth running are a necessary condition of our freedom. If we wish to withhold our obedience, yet are forced to give it, our freedom is none the less being promoted by those who force us. This last statement has an air of paradox. How is it defended? The establishment of the freedom of man in the true sense of the word "freedom" is, we are told, the ultimate justification of the State. In order that man's freedom may be established, the State must remove certain hindrances. In removing hindrances, it may have to use force; force against the rebel; force against the anarchist; force against the slave-owner opposing the manumission of his slaves; force against the parent depriving his children of education; force against the employer who overworks employees in his factory; force, in a word, against all anti-social individuals. Green's argument is that in using force with this object, the State is furthering the freedom of citizens as a whole. It is, therefore, furthering the freedom of the victims of its force. One is reminded of Rousseau's conception of the individual being "forced to be free". Green, however, was careful to point out that the force which



society was entitled to exert against recalcitrant individuals was *moral* force. For it is only the *moral* will of a society which can be regarded as a living whole or personality, which can justify the use of force against its members to further the freedom of its members. Green was thus led to endow society with a moral consciousness, or a consciousness of a common moral end, an end presumably to be identified with the uninterrupted exercise of the moral will on the part of all its members. This common moral consciousness is again reminiscent of Rousseau's General Will. It justifies the use of force against individuals in order to create freedom and, presumably, constitutes the ground for Green's declaration that "will, not force, is the basis of the State". Carlyle was declaring about the same time that "the true liberty of man . . . consisted in his finding out, or being forced to find out, the right path, and to walk thereon." Green's conclusions on this point have an important bearing on the idealist theory of the State to be considered in the next chapter.

Is there a Right of Revolt? But suppose that the State commands something with which the individual disagrees. Let us imagine a particular case. A man has, we will suppose, a vivid conception of what ought to be; his society embodies a more than usually faulty version of what is. To express the distinction in Green's terminology—a man who possesses an insight into the provisions of natural law, which is the ideal law of society, perceives them to be hopelessly at variance with the provisions of the positive law of his State. Now he has a right to realize the ideal elements in his personality, elements which acknowledge the natural law and which are realized in obedience to it. He has, then, a right to act in accordance with the natural law, even if this means disobeying the positive law. Is he to exercise this right? The problem is one which we have already glanced at in connection with Aristotle's philosophy;<sup>1</sup> it is the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 91, 92.

problem of the duty of the good man in the bad State. As we have seen,<sup>1</sup> a substantial body of opinion represented in all the ages has urged that a man has a right to revolt against the State which violates his conscience. If, however, we admit this right, we are, as I pointed out in discussing Spencer's theory of the State, conceding the right to anarchy; for since, to every man who has a grievance, virtue seems to reside in himself and wickedness in the State, and since between the individual and the State there can be no impartial judge, the right to revolt entails the right to be one's own judge of the occasions on which the right to revolt may be justifiably exercised. If, on the other hand, we insist that the individual must toe the State's line, while holding at the same time, a moral theory of the State, which maintains, as Green maintained, that the citizen has a right to the good life and that it is the function of the State to enable him to exercise this right, our insistence means that the individual must forgo the pursuit of those ends which seem to him to be good, must forgo, in other words, the pursuit of the very ends for the sake of which the State is agreed to exist.

For this dilemma Green offers no adequate solution. He points out very properly that many of the individual's rights can only be pursued in harmony with others. To insist upon his right to pursue ideal ends, when such insistence entails disobedience and revolt against the State, is to jeopardize all the other rights, freedom from violence, security under the law, unrestricted combination with his fellows, and so forth, which the individual, in common with other members of society, enjoys; to jeopardize these rights not only for himself, but for others. Green's suggestion is, then, that an individual placed in the dilemma which I have imagined, would be well advised to hold his hand until he has succeeded in educating public opinion up to the level of his own insight, and then, with a majority behind him, to proceed gradually to modify the positive

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 544, 545 above.

laws of his country in the direction of an increasing realization of his own vision of natural law.

**The Dilemma of the Socialist under Capitalism.** The solution is a lame one, but it is difficult to see what other, on Green's premises, could be offered. The problem has a contemporary interest in its bearing upon the dilemma of the twentieth-century socialist. He cannot but think capitalist society grossly defective. Moreover, he claims to have elaborated the plan of a better society in which men's personalities will be fully developed and their ideal natures will stand at least a chance of being realized. Is he, then, to revolt against society as he finds it? He knows that, if he does so, his action will inaugurate a period of violence, probably culminating in civil war, in the course of which all his other rights and liberties may be superseded, while the civil war itself may end in a victory for the reactionary elements in society, under whose unchecked domination the rights suspended during the war will never be restored. Rejecting this alternative, the socialist may seek to work for his ideals inside the existing system, hoping to persuade the majority of his fellows to adopt his point of view, so that the system may be gradually transformed into one nearer his heart's desire. In theory there is little to be said against this course; in practice, however, the ground gained after half a century of agitation is negligible, and it is always possible that, as the theory considered in Chapter XVII maintains, advance may be retarded or even entirely prevented by factors which human ideals, convictions and desires are impotent to control. If, according to this theory, Capitalism is prosperous, then modifications of its character such as are desired by socialists may be permitted; if, on the other hand, it is hard-pressed, its attitude will stiffen and any advance in the direction of "ideal rights" for the mass of the people will be met by uncompromising resistance. In neither event will the existence of large numbers of idealistically minded,

peacefully inclined socialists affect the course of events.<sup>1</sup> The problem is one on which it would be interesting to hear Green's views.

#### IV. COMMENT AND CRITICISM

**Applicability of *A Priori* Principles to Politics and Ethics.** The questions discussed in this chapter seem remote from present-day interests, and, although the issues which they raise are very much alive, a modern discussion of them would be carried out in terms very different from those used in this chapter. The doctrines of Sovereignty and Natural Rights are the fruits of an attempt to apply to politics and ethics absolute general principles reached by abstract reasoning, principles whose application to this kind of subject matter is apt to be unfruitful. Aristotle, it will be remembered,<sup>2</sup> warns his readers that exact conclusions must not be expected when we are studying ethics and politics, because their subject matter is too various and changing to admit of the precise application of universal general principles. His warning might with advantage have been borne in mind by some of the theorists whose views we have been considering.

This stricture is not intended as a reflection upon the validity of abstract reasoning as such. There are certain branches of study to which general principles, deduced by the mind by reflection upon the implications of self-evident axioms, may with advantage be applied. Examples are logic and mathematics. That a tree cannot both be and not be a beech tree; that the double of any number must be an even number, are principles which, though they are verified by sense experience, are not derived from sense experience. They are accordingly known as *a priori* principles, and the knowledge which is reached by their means as *a priori* knowledge.<sup>3</sup> From these

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 688-690.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV, pp. 87, 88.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter IV, for a discussion of the issues raised by the existence of *a priori* knowledge.

general principles deductions can be made and applied to particular cases, and in logic and mathematics the deductions will be both absolutely true and universally applicable. Thus from the principle that the double of any number will be an even number, we can deduce that twice the number 189637 will be an even number without multiplying it by 2 in order to find out whether it is so or not. But the process of deducing from general principles is not the only method of obtaining knowledge. There is also the method of induction, that is to say, of generalization from instances. Proceeding by induction, the theorist first observes a number of particular cases which have certain features in common, and then frames a general law which seeks to embrace all the cases by reason of their common features. This is pre-eminently the method of science. The scientist observes that on a number of occasions the sun has been seen to rise in the east, and that the combination of two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen has resulted in water. In consequence, he frames general laws which purport to explain and predict the movements of the sun on occasions not yet observed, and to state the chemical constitution of water which has not yet been tested. Unlike the laws reached by *a priori* reasoning, the empirical generalizations of science are neither absolute nor universal in their application. It is always possible to imagine occurrences which are other than those which the law requires, and it is always possible that an instance will turn up which fails to follow the law.

Now politics and ethics are concerned with human beings, their desires, their motives and their behaviour, all of which it is possible to imagine to be different from what they are. The field of politics and ethics is, then, *prima facie*, unsuited for the application of *a priori* principles. I do not by this wish to suggest that politics and ethics belong to the same realm as that in which the subject matter of the sciences lies, and that the methods of the sciences are those by means of which they should be studied. It is sufficient to emphasize the fact that both as

regards politics, and in a lesser degree as regards ethics, the method of deducing from what are taken to be self-evident axioms conclusions as to what must be the case, and then insisting that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, what must be the case is in fact the case, leads to untrustworthy results. It is no less dangerous to lay down in advance general principles prescribing what ought to be, and then proceeding to censure and even to punish particular classes of the community, or particular kinds of conduct, because of their refusal to illustrate the general principles. Yet this precisely is the method of reasoning which was applied to politics and ethics in the eighteenth century. The discoveries of Newton had led to a widespread belief that there were certain general laws from a knowledge of which correct conclusions relating to particular facts could be reached by process of deduction. These general laws, being natural laws, could be discovered by the light of nature; that is to say, by natural reasoning. Hence men were led to speak of natural religion, natural law and natural morality, meaning those kinds of religion, law and morality which were supposed to have been deduced by natural reasoning from self-evident premises. Of this general tendency, the theories which we have been considering in the present chapter are pre-eminent examples. Sovereignty and Natural Rights, like natural law and natural religion, consist pre-eminently of bodies of conclusions deduced from self-evident premises. Let us first consider from this point of view theories of Sovereignty.

**That Sovereignty need not Reside Anywhere.** As the conclusions of chains of reasoning starting from premises which appeared to their authors to be self-evident, theories of Sovereignty were evolved, which asserted that Sovereignty ought to reside in this section of the community or in that, the implication being that, whichever the chosen section happened to be, Sovereignty ought in every community, whatever its nature, to reside in that section.

Thus, it was said, Sovereignty ought to reside in the prince, the executive, the people, or the majority of the people. Also—although the theorists themselves seem scarcely to have been aware of the transition—Sovereignty *does* reside in the prince, the executive, the people, or the majority of the people. But it is far from clear that Sovereignty in a community necessarily should or morally ought to reside always in the same place, and it is certainly not clear that it always does reside in the same place. I personally happen to hold the view that Sovereignty ought to reside in the people as a whole, but this view owns no more authoritative basis than my own unsupported intuition, and I do not know how to defend the assertion if challenged. That Sovereignty ought to reside in the people seems to me to be self-evident, but I am well aware that it is very far from being evident to all people. Moreover, I do not see how it is possible to prove by argument either that the people can or should, or cannot or should not, delegate its Sovereign powers to representative persons or bodies.

The question, where Sovereignty actually *does* reside, seems to be purely one of fact. If Sovereignty means effective power in the community, effective power in one community may be wielded by a dictator; in another it may be embodied in custom, in another crystallized in the law, in another exercised by a popular assembly. But effective power does not *necessarily* reside anywhere. The State may, that is to say, use force, and all States known to history have in fact used force, but it is not clear that force either does or should reside always in the same element in, or section of the State. The view has been authoritatively put forward in modern times that there is nothing peculiar or sacrosanct about the State as a form of human association.<sup>1</sup> It is simply one form of human association among many. It exists for special purposes just as clubs, guilds, churches and armies exist for special purposes, its purposes being distinguished from those of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 737-739, for a development of this view.

other organizations only by reason of their higher degree of generality. This view has been powerfully urged by Professor Laski in his books, *Grammar of Politics* and *Authority in the Modern State*. It will be referred to again and developed in Chapter XIX. If we can accept the view that the State is distinguished from other associations only by reason of the greater generality of its purposes, and not necessarily by its exercise of force, then the answer to the question, "Where in a community Sovereignty resides?" is that it need not reside anywhere at all.

**Marxist View of Sovereignty.** The doctrine of Sovereignty is, however, as I have already indicated, largely obsolete, and it is the prevalence of Marxist theories of the State which have made it so. According to Marxist theory,<sup>1</sup> Sovereignty resides in that class in a community which owns the instruments of production. This class employs the rest of the community which, lacking the necessary instruments of production, has no alternative but to sell its labour-power to their owners. The latter permit the rest of the community to work for them, on condition that all the products of its labour, in excess of such as are necessary to keep the workers alive, are sequestered by the owning class. Politics, ethics, law, religion and art are simply the various contrivances which the possessing class has devised to justify to men's minds the system by which it benefits, and to make it appear the only right and possible system. This it does by prescribing as lawful, moral, true and desirable whatever desire, conduct or belief or thing conduces to the maintenance of the system by which it profits, and denouncing as wrong and unlawful whatever threatens the system. Until Capitalism is overthrown, there can, according to Marxist theory, be no freedom in a community; for the freedom to pursue intellectual goods advocated by Mill is purely academic so long as economic power is monopolized by a single class and property is distributed on its

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 670, 699, 700, for a development of this view.



present grossly inequitable basis. The followers of Marx would, then, insist that Sovereignty in a community resides with the possessors of the instruments of production and the controllers of the sources of wealth, that is to say, with the capitalist class. As a matter of historical fact, however, Marx did not develop his views in terms of a theory of Sovereignty. He pointed out simply that the State was based on force, and that this force was used in the interests of those who held the keys of economic power. Marxist views dominate contemporary political theory, and it is in terms of their phraseology and modes of thought, rather than of those derived from the eighteenth-century conception of Sovereignty, that contemporary discussion of the subject is carried on.

The Contract a Logical Presupposition of Society not an Historical Occurrence. The various theories of Natural Rights may also be criticized on the ground of abstractness. They were put forward as corollaries of the Social Contract theory of the origin of society. That it is exceedingly improbable that a contract was ever made, I have already suggested. The reasons for postulating its occurrence are not historical but *a priori*. Reflecting on the structure and nature of society, thinkers came to the conclusion that it must have been formed as the result of a contract. If they had said, 'we can only explain the facts of society, if we suppose that the natures of human beings are to some extent moral and social, and that in virtue of this social morality which they possess by nature, they are justified in trusting one another and capable of abiding by contracts made; we must also suppose that they have a certain social *flair* in virtue of which they are enabled to get on with one another in society'—no exception could have been taken to their statement. If I were to say, 'I am unable to explain the facts of the universe around me, unless I postulate a God who created the universe', I should not consider my conclusion to have been shaken by the fact that many primitive tribes do not believe in

God. Similarly, the fact that no historian has ever been able to point to the signing of an historical contract, would not invalidate the conclusion that an implied contract was a logical presupposition of the existence and functioning of society. If a geometrical figure is found to have three internal angles which are equal to two right angles, the fact justifies us in concluding that the figure in question is a triangle. But nobody wishes to argue that the fact of its being a triangle precedes in time the fact of its having three angles which are equal to  $180^\circ$ . The two facts logically entail one another, but they do not succeed one another. Similarly, the fact that the existence of societies entails a willingness on the part of individuals to live in society does not mean that this willingness ever expressed itself in a definite contract to form society, or that the societies which actually exist to-day were formed as the result of such a contract.

**To What are There Rights?** If the notion of an historical contract is dropped, the doctrine of Natural Rights loses much of its plausibility. The doctrine is, it is obvious, a product of the same type of *a priori* reasoning as the Social Contract theory with which it has been historically associated. A "right" is an abstract sort of thing which derives its nature and authority from no more impressive source than the mind of the thinker who conceives it. As one reads the advocates of Natural Rights, one feels a certain sympathy with the critic who asked to be shown a right.

For what rights are there, and how are they to be discovered? There seems to be on way of determining the answers to these questions. Theorists can and do announce that there are such and such rights to such and such privileges; they even make lists of rights, but they are at a loss to give reasons for the inclusion of any particular right upon their list. If we press them to do so, they respond with a number of divergent dogmatisms which are supported by nothing but the convictions of their authors.

To what, we ask, are there rights? To "liberty, property, security and resistance of oppression", Paine answers. But how, one may ask, does he know? The question must be put, for *prima facie* the assertion that Paine's rights do in fact exist may easily be challenged. Take, for example, the right to property. A socialist would say that no man has a right to property unless he does socially useful work; as Bernard Shaw has frequently announced, a man has no right to consume without producing. Again, property may be used in a manner injurious to the community, as when a man employs his capital to make a corner in some socially valuable commodity; buys stretches of unspoiled coastline, to which the public has hitherto had access, in order to preserve them for his own exclusive enjoyment, or to cover them with bungalows for his own profit; floods the market with harmful drugs, or gains control of a newspaper in order to debauch the public taste. A man's right to property, is, most people would, accordingly, agree, subject to considerations of public utility. Again, who are to be regarded as the natural possessors of rights? Babies and lunatics? Possibly, but also possibly not! Even the rights of a minor may be questioned. His right to property, for example, is not admitted by the law, which requires that it shall be held in trust until he ceases to be a minor. Consider, again, Locke's statement that, as all men are "equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions". The obvious comment seems to be that whether one is or is not entitled to harm another in these respects depends entirely upon circumstances. To adapt the question which Socrates puts to Cephalus at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, has a lunatic the right to possessions which happen to include a revolver? And, if one has borrowed the revolver, has one not a right to harm him in respect of this "possession," by failing to return it? Let us imagine the case of a beleaguered city in which food is running short and there is fear that the garrison may be starved before a relieving force makes its appearance. Has a baby, a child, a woman or an old

man the same right to a ration of meat as an able-bodied man of arms, and to an equal ration? The answer is, to say the least of it, doubtful. If we choose to invoke the authority of time-honoured axioms such as "to each according to his need", or "to each according to his usefulness", axioms which have seemed self-evident to many people, we shall have to answer in the negative. We cannot, in other words, lay down by means of a *priori* theorizing general propositions about rights which will command universal acceptance; what rights we shall in practice be prepared to admit will depend upon circumstances. Again it is far from clear that the different natural rights which various thinkers have postulated may not on occasion conflict. Locke, for example, postulates a right to equality and a right to property. But the right to equality is clearly threatened by the exercise of the right to property. Locke sees the difficulty and tries to evade it by an argument to the effect that, when people consented to the use of money, their consent implied a consent to inequality in the possession of money. But inequality in the possession of money is, as the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has shown, destructive of real equality; is, therefore, a negation of the right to equality.

**That any Doctrine of Rights is Conditioned by Assumptions.** The above considerations apply to those rights which thinkers have supposed men to possess by nature, and to bring with them into society from a state of nature. The position in regard to the teleologically conceived rights of Green is different; but the doctrine of teleological rights is conditioned, even more directly than that of Social Contract rights, by certain assumptions, and, unless we make these assumptions, the doctrine falls to the ground. If, for example, we are prepared to assume that God created man for a purpose, then we may plausibly argue that man has a right to an opportunity to fulfil that purpose; if, further, we assume that the purpose is the full development of a man's personality, then clearly a man

has a right to be given a chance to develop and to realize his personality. The extent to which the acceptance of a doctrine of teleologically conceived rights depends upon assumptions will appear, if for the sake of illustration we accept the ethical conclusions which were reached in Part II, and proceed to consider their bearing upon the doctrine. There are, then, we will assume, certain absolute values, and the worth of an individual's life is to be measured by reference to the extent to which it embodies these values. A good life, on this view, is one which is characterized by a substantial degree of moral virtue and happiness, and is devoted to the successful pursuit of truth, or to the creation or apprehension of beauty. Given these assumptions, we may add that the purpose of human existence is to achieve goodness in the sense defined, and, therefore, that a man has a right to the opportunity to pursue this purpose. Such an opportunity, we may further point out, is offered in and only in a society. We may then conclude that it is the business of society to guarantee a man's *right* to live the good life as defined. If we agree that a man does in fact possess such a right, and that it is the business of society to guarantee its fulfilment, it is difficult not to conclude that the right carries with it an obligation. The obligation arises in the following way.

**Basis of Theory of Political Obligation.** Society, on the assumption we are provisionally making, must be conceived as an organization which exists for the purpose of guaranteeing to its members the right to the good life. In order that it may effectively fulfil this purpose, it must safeguard the individual from violence, from injustice and from gross poverty, which is also undeserved poverty. If, then, we have a right to the good life in the sense defined, we have also an obligation to maintain the minimum of social organization which is a necessary condition of the realization of that right. This minimum organization it is society's business to maintain. Since in its absence the right to the good life, as we have agreed to conceive it, cannot

be exercised, it follows that we have an obligation to obey the laws of society and to contribute, so far as in us lies, to its smooth working. Hence the duty of political obedience springs from the recognition of society as a necessary organization for guaranteeing the fulfilment of individual rights; or, more precisely, for guaranteeing to the individual the opportunity of pursuing those ends which he has a right to pursue.

The way in which society will most effectively perform this function of guaranteeing individual rights, or rather of guaranteeing the opportunity for their exercise, will depend upon the circumstances both of society and of the individual. It is this dependence upon circumstances which stultifies any attempt to draw up a list of the rights of man in society. "Every civil right," says Tom Paine, "has for its foundation some natural right pre-existing in the individual." If we agree to use the word "right" in the teleological sense just defined, we may, I think, accept Paine's statement. But it does not therefore follow that we can say what a man's civil rights are. All that the considerations adduced above entitle us to claim is that a man has a right to have rights, those rights, namely, which must be accorded to him, if he is to enjoy unrestricted opportunities for the pursuit of the good life. But the nature of these rights will vary from society to society and from individual to individual, and it is impossible, therefore, to draw up lists of them *in vacuo*, or to determine by means of *a priori* reasoning what they are.

**Moral Presuppositions of Any Doctrine of Right.**  
It is, I think, clear that even the somewhat modest theory of rights just sketched entails metaphysical, or, at least, ethical, assumptions. It entails, that is to say, that the universe is not meaningless, but is moral in the sense that the word "ought" can be used meaningfully in relation to events in the universe; that man has a distinctive part to play in this moral universe; that certain absolute values exist; and that human beings *ought* to pursue and to try

to realize these values. Granted these or similar assumptions, we may say that human beings have a right to pursue what they ought to pursue, and that it is the business of the State to provide them with the opportunity of exercising this right. Any or all of these assumptions may, however, be questioned and, if they are, the use of the word "right" in the immediately preceding sentence is inadmissible.

In any event, the language of Natural Rights is a clumsy and inappropriate mode of expressing the conclusions just stated. If we conscientiously employ it, we shall find ourselves committed to such statements as that a man has a natural right to exercise his right to pursue the good life, or, more precisely, a natural right to be given an opportunity by the State to exercise his right to pursue the good life, the purpose of the State being the safeguarding of this right to the good life, or of the opportunity to exercise it. The truth of the matter is that, with the abandonment of the Social Contract theory, the ground for postulating the existence of natural rights disappears. Green's conception of teleological rights really presupposes a different theory of the State, which will be examined in the next chapter. It may, however, be remarked here that, if the implications of this theory are pushed to their logical conclusion, they dispose of the doctrine of natural rights altogether.

**Transition to Marxist Theory.** There is a further reason for the gradual recession into the background of contemporary political thought of questions relating to natural rights. Under the influence of Socialist theories, a growing body of thinkers came, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, to regard the right to an economic competence as a fundamental right of man. The possession of money was, they affirmed, that without which no other right could exist, for money, as Bernard Shaw was later to point out, is "the counter which enables life to be distributed socially". The nineteenth century saw an enormous increase in the wealth of communities; but it

also sponsored an economic system under which only a few seemed substantially to benefit from this increase. In 1937, for example, there were in Great Britain some ten thousand people drawing incomes of twenty thousand pounds or more a year. The majority of these persons performed no service to the community; they were, that is to say, unemployed. At the other end of the economic scale there were eleven million wage-earners receiving less than £125 a year, the average wage for the country as a whole being less than £100 a year. All these wage-earners worked for seven, many for eight, some for nine or ten hours a day in order that they might draw these wages. Mr. Seebohm Rowntree has estimated that a careful housewife, who was a good buyer, required in that year 53s. a week if she lived in a town, and 41s. a week if in the country, in order to keep a husband and three children reasonably well-fed. It will be seen that the bulk of the wage-earners in Great Britain in 1937 did not reach this standard. Now the socialist contention, which began increasingly to be urged from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, was that, until every man had a chance, and an equal chance, of obtaining a reasonable economic livelihood, men were being deprived of one of their natural rights, their right, namely, to a living wage. To translate this socialist contention into the language which we have been using, we shall say that a man has a natural right to the full development of his personality; he has also a natural right to pursue ideal ends. These rights cannot, however, we shall insist, be exercised, unless he enjoys economic security and material well-being. He has a right, then, to economic security and material well-being; or rather, he has a right to the same opportunity as have all his fellow citizens to secure these conditions necessary to the realization of his moral rights. Equal opportunity with others cannot, however, be extended to him so long as a privileged class hold the keys of economic power. He has a right, then, to endeavour to dispossess this privileged class, and work for such an apportionment of the economic



resources of the State as will enable an equal opportunity for material well-being to be accorded to all. In the last resort, therefore, he has a right to revolt against the capitalist State in the interests of economic justice. It is in these terms that, I imagine, a Marxist socialist would translate into the language of natural rights the distinctive contentions of his school of thought. In fact, however, Marxist socialists do not normally use the language of rights. Since, as I have already noted, the economic issues raised by Socialism, and particularly by Marxist Socialism, occupy an increasing share of the attention of modern political theorists, the problem of natural rights has receded into the background. When the issues which it raises are discussed, they are discussed in terms of a different phrasology. Thus the problem of natural rights, like the problem of Sovereignty, points us forward to a discussion of Marxist theory. To this discussion Chapter XVII is devoted.

*Books*

*Sovereignty.*

HOBBS, Thomas. *Leviathan.*

LOCKE, JOHN. *On Toleration and Civil Government.*

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AUSTIN, JOHN. *Lectures on Jurisprudence.*

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BURKE, EDMUND. *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs.*

GREEN, T. H. *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation.*

RITCHIE, D. G. *Natural Rights.*

## CHAPTER XV: THE IDEALIST THEORY OF THE STATE

**Introductory.** The idealist or, as it is sometimes called the absolutist theory of the State, forms an integral part of the tradition of philosophical idealism which, until recent years, was the dominating influence in English philosophy. Assuming for the first time its typical form in the works of the German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831), the theory was popularized in England by a group of Oxford philosophers of whom F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) was the most prominent, and developed to its extreme conclusions in Dr. Bosanquet's<sup>1</sup> work *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. In the years immediately succeeding the War the doctrine was subjected on the theoretical side to a number of criticisms, the more important of which will be summarized in Chapter XVIII. In particular it was widely charged with having bestowed a philosophical sanction upon the actual practices of States, especially of States in war-time. Dissatisfaction with these practices brought discredit upon the theory which was thought rightly or wrongly to excuse them, and led political theorists to seek in conceptions of a different order an alternative to the view of the State which the theory entailed. Still more recently, however, the rise of totalitarian States in Italy, Germany and the countries of south-eastern Europe has led to a renewal of interest in and support for the theory, since, even when totalitarian tenets have not explicitly invoked Hegelian philosophy in their justification, they can be plausibly represented as the logical developments of the implications which are latent in that philosophy.

The theory is difficult and abstract. It is also apparently remote from the actual facts of political life and is apt to

<sup>1</sup> 1848-1923.

strike the English reader as unrealistic. It constitutes, indeed, a pre-eminent example of that *a priori* reasoning whose validity in relation to political and ethical problems is, as I suggested<sup>1</sup> in the last chapter, open to question. In spite, however, of the abstract and remote character of the theory, it is highly important, both because it represents the logical development of several lines of thought which in earlier chapters I have been engaged in following, and because of the philosophical sanction which it would seem to bestow upon the policies of States in the contemporary world. I will, first, say something of the various lines of thought which may be regarded as the ancestors of the theory; I will then briefly outline its main features, and indicate some of the corollaries that follow from it.

## I. ANCESTORS OF THE THEORY

Common to all those who have followed what, for the sake of brevity, I propose to call idealist modes of political thinking are a rejection of the Social Contract theory (except in so far as Rousseau inherited and took over the theory as part of the framework of his thought), a refusal to entertain doctrines of natural rights, except in the teleological sense defined by T. H. Green, a disavowal of popular sovereignty (Rousseau again excepted), and an insistence upon the natural as opposed to the artificial status and origin of society.

### (I) Views of Burke

Let us consider in the light of these denials and insistences the views of Edmund Burke (1729-1797) as set out in his *Speeches and Letters*. At his criticisms of the Social Contract theory and the doctrine of Natural Rights I have already glanced.<sup>2</sup> They embody a number of features which recur in the best conservative thought of every generation, and which most readers will at once recognize as familiar

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 558-560. <sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 546-549.

counters of political controversy. Burke was concerned to lay stress upon the importance in a society of tradition. The origin of society we do not know, for society goes back to some dim period of the past unrecorded by history; but, he insisted, wherever there have been men, there have been societies of men. The character of a society or, as Burke called it, a nation, is the result of a large variety of impalpable factors. "A nation," Burke wrote, "is . . . an idea of continuity which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space. And this is a choice not of one day, or one set of people, not a tumultuary and giddy choice; it is a deliberate election of ages and generations; it is a constitution made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people which disclose themselves only in a long space of time. It is a vestment which accommodates itself to the body."

A nation, in other words, like a plant or a tree, is an organic growth. Let any one of the factors that have gone to its making have been different, and the growth would itself have been different. And just as a tree cannot be suddenly or artificially changed without being damaged, and possibly irretrievably damaged, in the process, so a nation cannot be changed by "one set of people" acting in pursuance of "a tumultuary and giddy choice". (Burke, it is obvious, has in mind the French revolutionaries.) As with the nation, so with its rulers. Conscious of their incapacity to manage their own affairs, the people have from the earliest beginnings of society felt the need of rulers, and in accordance with a law both natural and divine, society has thrown up the rulers that the people need. Thenceforward the authority of rulers has been sanctified by time. In other words, the mere lapse of time affords the best possible basis for the right to exercise authority by those who hold positions of authority. "Prescription" was to Burke "the most solid of all titles not only to property, but what is to secure property, to government." It was because the authority of Parliament was

based upon prescription and custom that theories of Sovereignty which maintained that power was or ought to be vested in the people were, Burke held, in the highest degree dangerous. For the people, believing power to reside in themselves, might by "a tumultuary and giddy choice" endeavour artificially to alter the constitution of the nation, with results as disastrous as those which would be liable to attend the grafting on to a tree of an alien shoot, or its uprooting for the purpose of an overhaul of its roots.

For—and here we come to another tenet of the idealists which Burke was one of the first to emphasize—a nation is like any other growth in possessing its own peculiar idiosyncrasies. Just as a tree has its peculiar, individual twist, and the fruit of the tree its peculiar, individual flavour, so a nation has its peculiar, individual form of growth. This form of growth at once expresses and reflects the peculiar and individual characteristics of the people who, in the first place, made the government, and who, having grown up with and under it, could not change it without changing themselves. The generic name which Burke gives to these peculiarities, alike in people and in government, is that of Presumption. "Prescription", that is to say, sanctification by time, is, he writes, "accompanied with another ground of authority in the constitution of the human mind, Presumption". Every nation, in other words, has a presumption to live and to be governed in a particular way. Thus government is never the result of an arbitrary act or a sudden revolution; or rather, if on occasion government does result from arbitrary sudden acts, it is government insecurely based, provisional and temporary.

## (2) Views of Maine and the Lawyers

**SOCIETY AS A DETERMINED GROWTH.** I turn next to the treatment of political institutions by what may, for short, be called the historical method. The writer whom I propose to cite as representative of a line of thought

which has found very various forms of expression is Sir Henry Maine (1822-1888), author of *Ancient Law* and *Popular Government*. *Ancient Law* appeared in 1861, more than half a century after the promulgation of the Hegelian or idealist philosophy of the State, which is the ostensible subject of this chapter, but as we are concerned here with the logical connections of ideas rather than with their chronological sequence, the anachronism may be pardoned. Maine's work has two sides, a negative and a positive. On the negative side he repudiates Social Contract, Natural Rights and Popular Sovereignty. We must, he says in effect, abstain from *a priori* thinking about the nature of society and take facts as we find them. Now facts as we find them are the determined results of the historical circumstances that preceded and produced them; and not only of historical circumstances, but also of environing conditions. There is, in short, a law such that a knowledge of it would enable us precisely to describe the character and constitution of a society at any given moment, and also to explain why its character and constitution are what they are. The terms of this law we do not know; they are, indeed, too complex for human knowledge, but historical antecedents and environmental conditions are important factors in its constitution. So far as its negative implications are concerned, the upshot of this deterministic attitude to society is not dissimilar from that of Burke's philosophy. If society is a natural growth and, therefore, a determined growth, it cannot, it is clear, be altered by a sudden act or a sudden series of acts, any more than a man's character, if deterministically conceived, can be altered by a sudden event. For just as, on the determinist view,<sup>1</sup> there is a formula, albeit unknown, which adequately describes my character, so that a knowledge of the formula would enable a person to predict my behaviour on any given occasion, so, on Maine's view, there is a formula which adequately describes a society, so that a knowledge of it would enable one to

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VII, pp. 243, 244, for an account of the determinist case.

predict how on a given occasion the society would behave. The conclusion is the same as that already reached; society is like a tree, or like a man's character deterministically conceived; it is, that is to say, an organic growth, the necessary product of the factors which, given its initial constitution, could not do other than make it what it is.

**FUNCTION AND CHARACTER OF LAW IN A SOCIETY.** Maine's positive contribution to political theory is bound up with his conception of law. In consonance with the general trend of his thought, he rejects accounts of law derived from abstract principles apprehended *a priori*. Law is not a product of some mythical General Will, as Rousseau supposed, nor is its purpose to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, as Bentham thought, nor is it designed to safeguard Natural Rights, nor to increase man's moral virtue. Law is, for Maine, simply an expression of the nature of the people who observe it. In this sense it is at once a development and a crystallization of popular custom. The gist of this attitude is expressed in the writings of a nineteenth-century French writer, Savigny. "Law," he said, "is the organ of folk-right: it moves and grows like every other expression of the life of the people: it is formed by custom and popular feeling, through the operation of silent forces and not by the arbitrary will of a legislature." Thus, to adapt a phrase of Maine's, as society develops, the individual's position advances from that of Status to Contract. In a primitive society the individual occupies a position which is assigned to him by virtue of his membership of a social group, a position which is recognized but not defined; in a civilized society he assumes a position regularized by contracts into which he has freely entered, and sanctioned by law, to whose authority he has freely subscribed.

The conclusion in regard to law is similar to that already reached in regard to the constitution of the State and the basis of authority in the State. Society is a natural

growth, and law is one of the expressions of that growth. Law begins as custom, of which it is the natural and, therefore, determined development. That which determines its nature and development is the character of the people from whose life it springs and whose conduct it regulates. Society, in fact, and the laws and institutions of society are living expressions of the characters of the individuals who compose it. As these evolve, so does law evolve, and the factors which determine the character and behaviour of a people determine also the character and provisions of the laws they obey. The inferences are (i) that society has a nature and a being of its own which are not necessarily those of any of its members, although it is brought into existence by the coming together of its members, and that law is an expression of this being: (ii) that the character of society cannot be suddenly or artificially changed, any more than the character of a person can be suddenly or artificially changed. These conclusions belong, it is obvious, to the conservative tradition represented by Burke. Re-inforced, as they are, by the natural aversion of the lawyer from sudden change, the tendency of his mind, accustomed to the slow and gradual growth of statute law from precedent to precedent, to assume that all social development must be equally slow and equally gradual, and his distrust of *ad hoc* legislation for special purposes the need for which is deduced from *a priori* theories about the nature and end of society, they constitute a sustained criticism of the whole way of thinking exemplified by Social Contract and Natural Rights theories and a powerful impetus to the general movement of thought which culminates in the idealist theory of the State.

### (3) Criticism of Representative Government.

A third source of idealist theory is to be found in the criticism of representative government. This criticism, which first appears in Rousseau's work,<sup>1</sup> was already

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 495.



being widely urged in the early and middle nineteenth century, the period when representative democracy was apparently winning its greatest triumphs. That the theory of representative government is not the simple and straightforward affair which at first glance it appears to be, the discussion of Mill's views in the previous chapter<sup>2</sup> has, I hope, shown. The question upon which the criticism in its modern form turns is, "How can the interests of a large modern community be adequately represented by a single individual or group of individuals"? Let us simplify the issue and postulate a community of five persons, A, B, C, D and X, in which X is elected by A, B, C, and D as their representative. Various possibilities arise: X may represent D on no issue whatsoever, D being thus in a permanent minority on all issues. He may represent C on one issue, B on two, and A on all. Only A, therefore, is truly represented by X. Since a representative could represent everybody in respect of every issue, only if everybody took the same view of every issue, and since such unanimity is almost always unrealized in practice, the most that he can hope to do is to represent most people on some issues, and some people on most issues. Since he cannot represent all, the question then arises, "Whom or what *ought* he to represent?" To this question, it will be remembered, there is a number of answers. Rousseau, denying that anybody could be said strictly to represent anybody else, rejected the whole theory of representative government. Locke held that it was the majority which ought to be represented. Locke's view, however, presupposes that there is a more or less stable majority which thinks alike on the majority of the issues that arise for decision. But in practice it is found that A agrees with B and C on issue P, and with D on issue Q, while on issue R, B, C and D think alike, but think differently from A. Hence on one issue A, B and C constitute a majority, on another B, C and D, while on a third the members of the community may be equally divided. Thus the conception of a representative

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 528-535.

entrusted with a general mandate to represent his constituents on all issues is unrealizable in fact, and the nearest approach to true representation that can be made will be the appointment of delegates with mandates to represent, on certain given issues, all or most of the persons who appoint them, but with no authority to speak for them on other issues. This was, in fact, the expedient suggested by Burke, who held that Parliament had no need to be representative of the people whom it was required to govern, and is for certain purposes adopted in Soviet Russia.<sup>1</sup> Mill, as we have seen,<sup>2</sup> is highly critical of representative government. To a representation system based upon numbers, Mill was strongly opposed. The thought of a government which would reflect and express "the collective mediocrity" of the masses was abhorrent to him. He hoped, however, that, as the community advanced in intelligence, the government could afford to be more representative, and pointed out that, the more worth while the community, the more interests would a single representative be able to promote; for a valuable community is one in which the number of common interests is large, the common interests in question being those which are bound up with the increase of cultural well-being. Whatever view we take, representative government involves, it is clear, certain problems, and the nature of some of the solutions which theorists have propounded for these problems brings us back to the sources of idealist theory.

**THAT THE INTEREST WHICH OUGHT TO BE REPRESENTED IS THE STATE'S INTEREST.** It may plausibly be argued that the only interests in the community which ought to be represented are the interests which everybody has in common. If a particular interest opposes the interests which everybody has in common, then, it may well be said, this interest is inimical to the interests of the whole, and the mere fact that it

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 748-750.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 528-531.

happens to be supported by a majority of the people does not constitute a justification for its representation, even when the majority is a stable one. In so far, then, as the question at issue is a moral question—since everybody's interest claims to be represented, whose interest is it that *ought* to be represented?—the answer to it is that the interest which everybody has in common, that is to say, the interest of the whole to which all equally belong, is the one which deserves representation. This conclusion has been historically held to justify the following further propositions:

- (i) Somebody or something actually wills this interest which everybody has in common.
- (ii) This somebody or something is not any individual person, but is a whole brought into being by the coming together of individual persons, yet transcending them.
- (iii) This whole is the State which represents all persons.
- (iv) Therefore the State has a being and nature of its own.

It is a matter for serious reflection that, by one of the ironies of history, the view that only the common interest, that is to say, the interest which all members of a society are deemed to have in promoting the well-being of that society, deserves to be represented, is in the contemporary world chiefly emphasized by sectional political parties, the Fascist Party in Italy, and the National Socialist Party in Germany, which, beginning as minorities, have nevertheless insisted upon their right to impose their conception of the public good upon the societies to which they respectively belong, and have in these countries succeeded. The Communist Party in Russia has insisted upon the same right in the interests of a particular class.

The implications of the criticism of representative government just outlined would certainly seem *prima facie* to concede to minorities even less right of representation than they admit in the case of majorities. Aware, perhaps,

of the anomaly, the parties in question have been at pains to regularize the position by pointing out that, although it happens at the moment to be in a numerical minority, the party, nevertheless, represents the real will of the people for its, the people's, own good. The party, in other words, though small, does in fact represent the common interest, though nobody knows, or at any rate nobody at the outset of the party's campaign knew, what the common interest was, except the party itself. Nor in the countries in which they have obtained power have these parties found difficulty in convincing the people that the party's view of what the common interest demanded was the true one.

#### (4) Influence of Rousseau's Theory of the General Will

Upon the implications of Rousseau's conception of the General Will I have already commented.<sup>1</sup> The theory is confusing and, it will be remembered, is capable of different interpretations. The significance of the theory for our present discussion is its recognition of the General Will as something which is possessed and exercised by a real entity, namely, the State, its claim that this Will always exists in regard to any issue of general import<sup>2</sup> which arises in the State, and its insistence that the Will is always right. For these reasons the General Will is deemed to be morally superior to the will of any individual, section or majority, and the State, in whose being the General Will is vested, possesses a moral excellence superior to that of any individual member of the State, the State's will, as compared with the wills of the individuals who compose it, being, according to the theory, always disinterested. Dr. Bosanquet, one of the English expositors of the idealist theory of the State, makes frequent references to Rousseau and acknowledges the debt which his theory owes to him.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 509-511.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 498. It will be remembered that Rousseau's doctrine on this point is ambiguous.

## (5) Influence of Plato and Aristotle

Fifth—and more important than any of the preceding—is the influence of Greek thought. Indeed, the theory may be not inappropriately regarded in the light of an extension, or, by those who repudiate it, as a perversion of Greek thought. Among the elements which the theory derives from Greek sources there is, in the first place, the view of human nature as an organic growth which comes to maturity only in a society.<sup>1</sup> The life of the individual isolated from his fellows is a life against nature, and the real nature of the individual can in consequence only be developed in a community. It is only by living in society that a man can realize all that he has it in him to be, only by intercourse with his fellows, by the realization of social duties and the fulfilment of social obligations, that he can develop his full self. In addition, therefore, to the obvious benefits of security against violence and redress against injustice that the individual receives from the State, he owes it a debt of gratitude for its bestowal upon him of his own individuality in all its richness and with all its potentialities. Society, the idealists would agree with Aristotle, exists for the sake of the noble life, and that which makes the noble life possible must, it is implied, itself be noble.

The view that society is in some sense a moral entity is implicit in the whole of Plato's political thought. For example, the definition of justice reached in the *Republic*<sup>2</sup> identifies the principle with the whole moral and political duty of man. The definition entails that the whole duty of man can be discharged only in a community, and can be most fully discharged in the best community in which each member faithfully performs the functions appropriate to his status and performs only those functions. But if there is a set of duties appropriate to my position in society which it is right for me to discharge, and in the discharge

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 34, 35, for an account of this view.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II, p. 57 and Chapter III, pp. 69, 70.

of which I develop my capacities and realize my nature, the system which assigns to me my position, and of whose well-being my performance of the duties appropriate to my position is a necessary condition, must itself be a moral system. For, if I realize the end appropriate to my nature in doing my duty to society, it follows that society has also an end, an end which is realized only when each of its members does his duty to it. If society has an end, it follows that it must be a whole in the technical sense already considered in an earlier chapter;<sup>1</sup> it follows, that is to say, that it transcends the sum of its parts, since if it did not, there would be no entity to assign to me my position, to prescribe to me my duties and to benefit from my right performance of them. Just as the policy of a government is a whole which is logically prior to the series of acts which it determines and through which it takes concrete shape, so the State is a whole which is logically prior to the various individuals whose functions it assigns, and whose duties it prescribes.

**THE STATE AS A SELF-SUFFICING ENTITY.** The idealist theory owns another important source in Greek thought. Owing largely to an accident of history, Greek thinkers conceived and developed their political views in relation to the City-State. Both in Plato and in Aristotle the State, that is to say, the City-State, is discussed as if it were a single self-sufficient entity, identical with the whole of society. Thus Aristotle begins by abruptly announcing that it is the nature of the State to be self-sufficing, and Plato on the whole takes the same view. Where the existence of other States is specifically referred to, it is assumed that the only relation which they can have to the State is one of hostility. Thus the natural or juristic relation of one Greek State to another was one of latent enmity, and was recognized as such. The tradition of the self-sufficiency of the State continues after the Renaissance. The Dutch jurist Grotius (1583-1645) held the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 52, 53. See also below, pp. 589, 590.

doctrine of "the freedom of the State from all external restraints", and Hobbes dogmatically remarks that "States are by nature enemies".

The State tends, therefore, to be discussed as though it were equivalent to the whole of human society, and what would normally be regarded as two distinct relationships, namely, the relationship of the individual as a citizen of a State to that State, and his relationship as a member of the human race to mankind as a whole, tend to be treated as if they were identical. Since the State is regarded as representing and containing within itself all the individual's social aspirations, and at the same time fulfilling all his social needs, whatever claims the State may make upon the individual are held to be based upon an absolute authority. In so far as the claims of associations other than the State are considered, it is assumed that the claims of the State must necessarily override them.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE THEORY

We are now in a position to state the main conclusions of idealist theory.

### (I) The Concept of Social Righteousness

I begin with its ethical side. The foundation of Hegel's distinctive view of the State is the conception of Social Righteousness. (The German word for Social Righteousness is *Sittlichkeit*; unfortunately, there is no exact English equivalent.) The Hegelian conception of Social Righteousness develops ideas which are implicit in Plato's account of justice; it also derives features from Rousseau's General Will; its immediate ancestor is, however, the moral philosophy of Kant. In what, asked Kant, does morality consist?—and answered, in the exercise of the free will in accordance with the dictates of the moral imperative.<sup>1</sup> Kant's moral philosophy was criticized by Hegel on the ground that it was individualistic and subjective. It was

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI, pp. 202-207, for an account of Kant's views.

individualistic because it took too little account of the individual's relations with his fellow men in society; it was subjective because it made goodness consist in a state of mind and the activity of a particular kind of goodwill, apart from its expression in concrete acts. Where, then, were the concrete expressions of goodwill in a community to be found? Presumably in the laws of a community. But from the point of view of morality, the view that goodness resides in law suffers from precisely the contrary defects to those which are censured in the notion that goodness resides in a state of mind; whereas a state of mind is too private and too subjective, law is at once too universal and too objective. Law, Hegel maintained, is too universal to be the repository of true morality, since, being the same for everybody, it fails to belong to or to express anybody. It is also too objective, being in effect a petrified deposit precipitated by human will and intention, but divorced from the minds of which the will and intention are expressions.

Hegelian philosophy is known as dialectical: it teaches that all partial concepts are one-sided, and can only be corrected by the enunciation of a wider truth which embraces and reconciles them both.<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, we are in search of the repository of true morality, we shall find it in something which supplements both the undue subjectivity of the notion that morality resides in a state of mind, and the undue objectivity of the notion that it resides in a legal code. This something which supplements and corrects the two partial doctrines, will embrace and transcend them. The embracing and transcending conception Hegel found in the notion of Social Righteousness. The following account of Social Righteousness is taken from Ernest Barker's book, *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day*: "Social righteousness is a spirit and habit of life expressed in the social opinion and enforced by the social conscience of a free people; it is

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XV, pp. 402-407, for an account of Hegel's conception of Dialectic.



at one and the same time a mind or self-consciousness, because it is a spirit, and a thing or external existence, because it is a visible system of habit and conduct. By its relations to one another are controlled; and since our relations flow from our position or station in the community—or rather, since the sum of the relations in which we stand constitutes our position or station—we may say that it controls our position or station.”

Social Righteousness is both within and without. It is without, because it is the spirit of a society precipitated in custom, opinion, belief and law. It is within, because it is also present in our hearts prompting us to respond, and by responding to contribute to the spirit of society. When, therefore, we cheerfully perform our functions and loyally observe the duties appropriate to our station in society, we are recognizing and obeying a moral law which has a more real, because a more concrete,<sup>1</sup> authority than either the purely subjective prescriptions of the Kantian goodwill, or the purely objective injunctions and prohibitions of the law of the State. Now this concrete moral authority which is instinct in the notion of Social Righteousness cannot be a mere floating sanction unlocalized and unanchored. Like Rousseau's General Will, it must belong to, it must be vested in, something; and this something which is at once the fount and the repository of Social Righteousness is, for Hegel, the State.

## (2) The Being and Personality of the State

The State, then, is a “something”; it has a being, a will which may be likened to Rousseau's General Will, and a morality which is Social Righteousness. The actual expression or body of the State is the laws and institutions of a society; its inward being or soul is in the common consciousness of its citizens. And this common consciousness is the State's consciousness. I mean that it is not merely a conscious-

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XV, pp. 421-422, for an account of the technical significance which Hegel gives to the word “concrete”.

ness by the individual of the State, but a consciousness which, though it is the individual's consciousness, belongs to, or rather which actually is, the consciousness of the State, being, in fact, a particular expression of the State's consciousness implanted in the heart of the individual. Finally, the State is a moral entity and it has, therefore, a moral end. Mussolini who, as we shall see in the next chapter, is in common with other Fascist thinkers a prominent exponent of the idealist theory, thus sums up the foregoing elements in the idealist conception of the State. "The Fascist State," he writes, "is itself conscious, and has itself a will and a personality—thus it may be called the 'ethic' State." That man is only what he is because of his position in society, and that he can only develop his full personality in society, are conclusions common to all teleological views of human nature and of society, which we have several times had occasion to emphasize in earlier chapters. The distinctive addition which Hegel makes to these conclusions is that the elements of the individual's nature which are what they are because of his position in a society, are elements which are literally derived from that society. They are, as it were, outposts of society planted in the citadel of the individual consciousness. "The spirit of a nation (which is a spirit of social righteousness)," writes Hegel, "controls and entirely dominates from within each person" so that "he feels it to be his own very being", and "looks upon it as his absolute final aim". The English philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) expresses the same view by declaring that "what we call an individual man is what he is because of and by virtue of community, and communities are not mere names, but something real".

Two rather different conceptions are involved in this account of the relation between the State and the individual, the first chronological and the second logical. The chronological conception is already sufficiently familiar. It insists that the mere process of living in a particular social environment causes the individual to be moulded by his

environment, so that in a perfectly simple and straightforward sense the environment makes him what he is. This process of moulding begins at birth. A child inherits certain racial tendencies and family traits. These are what they are because of the nature of the society in which the child's ancestors have lived and by which his family has itself been moulded. It is into this socially determined family that the child is born. As he grows, he obtains from the community his language, his education, his views on religion, on politics and on morals. Moreover, his relations with the fellow members of his society are themselves determined by the manners and customs of the society to which they jointly belong. The stuff of the individual's being is, therefore, shot through and through with his relations to his community.

### (3) The State's Pervasion of the Individual's Consciousness

There is, secondly, a logical relationship between the State and its members. I have indicted on an earlier page the sense in which some wholes are both more than and prior to their parts.<sup>1</sup> Thus the whole which is the movement of a sonata may be said to precede and to pervade the details of its working out. Because the pattern in the composer's mind is what it is, the movement develops in the way in which it does, and the pattern as a whole determines the development. Similarly, the whole which is a living organism, that is to say, a body animated by a mind, shapes the growth and determines the workings of its various parts and organs. Because a man is ill-tempered, the corners of his lips will turn down; because he is happy, his eyes will be bright. Again, the whole which is the policy of a government expresses itself in a series of legislative acts which give effect to the policy. Taken separately, the acts look like a number of isolated and unrelated measures, but when the policy which informs them is known, they are seen as interrelated parts of a whole, the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, p. 52-54.

determined expressions of something which is realizing itself in and through them. To take one more example, the whole which is the pattern of a jigsaw puzzle determines the nature of the design which will appear on each separate piece of the puzzle. Seen in isolation, seen apart from the puzzle as a whole, the design on each piece is meaningless. It is only in its relation to the whole, that it assumes meaning and significance. But the whole preceded the pieces in two senses, first, as a conception in the mind of the compiler of the puzzle, secondly, as a painted pattern on a block of wood, which is subsequently cut up into a number of separate pieces to be presented to the solver as the parts of the puzzle. Though, however, the movement of the sonata precedes its development, the body its actions and gestures, the government policy its realization in legislative acts, the jigsaw puzzle its separation into pieces, nevertheless, all these are truly parts of the wholes which inform them, so that if it were not for the parts, there would be no wholes. There is, then, a double relationship between wholes and parts. On the one hand, wholes precede and determine the parts in which they express themselves; on the other, the parts taken together make up wholes, even though the whole may be more than the sum of the parts which make it up. It is this two-fold relation which Hegel postulates between State and individual. Individuals constitute the State; but the State informs and pervades the consciousness of the individuals through and in which it realizes itself.

#### (4) The State as an Organism

It follows that the State must, on Hegel's view, be generically conceived after the model of an organism, since the consciousness which belongs to the State informs and pervades the consciousness of the individuals who are parts of the State. It is, moreover, a moral organism in the sense that it can be viewed teleologically by reference to the purpose which it seeks to realize, and by its success in the realization of which its worth may be assessed.

This presumably is the significance of the phrase from Bradley quoted above: "What we call an individual man is what he is by virtue of community, and communities are not mere names but something real." The individual members of the State are conscious of the fact of their participation in it. They know themselves both as individuals, and as parts of the whole which is the State. So strongly, indeed, is the presence of the community in the individual, the participation by the individual in the community's will emphasized, that one might be tempted to say that the end of the individual's life lies outside himself in the State, were it not that the State is conceived to be *itself* within the individual. Since it is within him, the individual cannot help but be conscious of this whole of which he is a part and which is part of him; at any rate he *should* be conscious of it, and, in so far as he is, the organism which is the State becomes both self-conscious and self-willing. Hence Hegel speaks of the State as a "self-conscious" ethical substance and as a "self-knowing and self-actualizing individual". The State's will, knowledge and ethical aspirations are not derived from those of individual persons as persons, but only from those of individual persons in so far as they realize themselves as parts of the community; for it is by virtue of this realization that they bring into existence a new entity, the personality of the State which, characterized by its own will, knowledge and aspirations, proceeds to inform and determine the individual consciousnesses from which it takes its rise. Finally, while individuals have a merely temporary existence, coming to maturity and passing away, the State continues. The State thus comes to be regarded as the permanent repository of a spirit which is ever manifested afresh in the persons of its members, just as it is the same earth which gives rise to and nourishes successive crops which are ever changing and ever renewed. "Such an organization must," writes Mussolini, "be in its origin and development a manifestation of the spirit" which "transcending the brief limits of the individual life represents the immanent spirit of the nation."

### (5) The Morality of the State

To a State conceived on these lines, there is attributed a higher morality than that of the average individual. The main grounds for this attribution are the theory of the disinterestedness of the General Will<sup>1</sup> and the conception of Social Righteousness already described. A further ground is derived from the conception of the State as a whole of wholes. The State is, after all, not the only whole to which the average individual belongs. He is also a member of a family; he is possibly a member of a club, a guild, a trade union and a church. Now all these organizations are themselves parts of the State. The State is, therefore, not merely a collection of individuals and something more than that collection, in the sense in which a body is more than the sum of its organs, or the movement of a sonata more than the sum of its individual notes; it is also a system of wholes which is more than that system, just as a tribe is more than the sum of its families and the sonata more than the sum of its movements. Following the line of thought embodied in Rousseau's theory of the General Will, Hegel argued that the whole which is the repository of the General Will, just because it comprises and gathers up within itself all the *common* wills of its component parts, is more disinterested and, therefore, more moral than the individual's will, which is composed of selfish as well as of disinterested elements. Hence we reach the conclusion that, the larger and more embracing the whole, the higher the degree of morality which characterizes it. This conclusion is in accordance with the Hegelian dialectic which equates higher degrees of reality, and, therefore, of morality, with more inclusive degrees of wholeness.<sup>2</sup>

The attribution of a higher morality to the State is not, at least in Hegel's view, incompatible with the recognition of the morality of organisations other than the State and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 510.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XV, pp. 402-407, for an account of the Hegelian Dialectic.

of the value which the individual may derive from participation in them. Hegel would agree that loyalty to family, church or union is a good and should be cultivated. But he conceived of political education as consisting in an expansion of these local loyalties, so that the ever-widening circle of the individual's loyalties would ultimately become co-terminous with his relation to the State in which all the lesser loyalties would be gathered up and transcended. The English philosopher Dr. Bosanquet (1848-1923) goes further than Hegel and looks to political education not merely to transcend, but ultimately to eliminate all loyalties other than loyalties to the State. In the perfect State there will, in his view, be no loyalties independent of a man's loyalty to the State, since even loyalty to a cricket club will in effect be loyalty to the State of which the cricket club is itself an expression. It is for this reason that sports organisations in fascist countries are regarded as temporary repositories of the honour of the State.

#### (6) Absorption of the Individual in the State

The conclusion of this line of thought is the complete absorption of the individual in the State. The more completely the individual permits his will to be dominated by that of the State, the more wholeheartedly he makes its welfare his concern, its ends his ends, the higher the degree of morality which he will achieve. Thus the theory ultimately envisages individual morality as identical with service to the State, provided that the term "service" is interpreted in the wide sense in which it is used by Plato, the sense in which to serve is to observe one's station and to perform one's duties in the community to which one belongs. Arguing on these lines Bradley reaches the conclusion that "a man's life with its moral duties is in the main filled up by his station in that system of wholes which the State is, and . . . this partly by its laws and institutions, and still more by its spirit, gives him the life which he does live and ought to live". To sum up, since the texture of morality is woven from our relations with our

fellow men and since, as we have just seen, these relations are determined for us by the State of which we and they are members, we may say that a man's morality is bestowed upon him by the State and consists in the due observance of social relations, the punctual performance of social duties, and the willing rendering of State service.

These conclusions are succinctly stated in the following three propositions which I take from Ernest Barker's book, *Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day*.

- (i) The State lives and has a soul.
- (ii) This soul is conscious in its citizens.
- (iii) "To each citizen this living soul assigns his field of accomplishment".

### III. SOME COROLLARIES OF THE THEORY

#### (1) That Individual Freedom is Achieved Only in Service to the State

Since the State gathers up into itself the wills of all the individuals who compose it, in so far as these wills are common or general, and since it is itself the source and inspiration of the common elements in the individual wills which it gathers up and transcends, it follows that to perform his duties to the State and to will its interests is, for the individual, to be free. This conception of freedom is one which has already appeared in a slightly less developed form in the philosophy of T. H. Green.<sup>1</sup> Green, it will be remembered, conceives the State as an organization whose purpose is to enable the individual to realize moral or ideal ends. This purpose it fulfils by removing all hindrances to the living of such a life as will lead to the realization of these ends. Thus, in obeying the State and in helping it to function, he is furthering his own development as a moral being. Hegel's philosophy includes this conception and goes beyond it. The State is, for Hegel,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 554, 555.



itself a moral end.<sup>1</sup> It is a concrete expression of the highest that we know, and in so far as the individual's spirit is absorbed in its service, he is living according to the highest that he knows. The part which the State plays in relation to the good life is, therefore, twofold: (i) it removes hindrances to the good life: (ii) the purpose for which it does so, the living of the good life, is a purpose which can be realized only in and through it. "The State, as such," writes Bosanquet, is "limited to the office of maintaining the external conditions of a good life; but the conditions cannot be conceived without reference to the life for which they exist, and it is true, therefore, to say that the conception of the Nation-State involves at least an outline of the life to which, as a power, it is instrumental." The corollary is that in obeying the State we are realizing the highest conception of the good life of which we are capable. Thus in service we enjoy a freedom which, apart from the State, would be impossible of attainment. In order to develop this conception, let us return for a moment to the Hegelian notion of Social Righteousness. Social Righteousness is, it will be remembered, a double-sided conception. Its subjective aspect is the individual's moral will; its objective, the laws and institutions of society. Freedom, according to Kant, consisted in obedience to the moral will; but the moral will, Hegel had asserted, is bare and meaningless apart from the individual's relations to his fellows in and through which alone it finds expression. Now the individual's relation to his fellows, his attitude to the community of which he is a member, the conventions which regulate these relations and this attitude, and the public opinion which approves and disapproves his conduct and his person—all these constitute the stuff of Social Righteousness. True freedom, according to Hegel, consists in living in accordance with the dictates of Social Righteousness. But Social Righteousness is a conception which entails the State, the laws and institutions of the State being in

<sup>1</sup> See Section II (5) pp. 592, 593 above.

effect a crystallization of the stuff of Social Righteousness on its objective side. True freedom, then, cannot be realized apart from the laws and institutions of the State through which Social Righteousness expresses itself. True freedom thus comes to be conceived of as an externalization or objectification of all that is highest in the conception of freedom in the individual's heart, a conception for which society is responsible, since it expresses the moral will of society, and which, but for society, would remain unrealized. In the State, to use Hegel's language, man has "fully raised his outward self to the level of his inward self of thought". This true freedom which is made possible by and is a product of society is active and developing. True freedom, then, develops as Social Righteousness develops, the development of the latter involving a fuller realization of the former. The State thus makes possible for man a freedom to which he would otherwise be unable to attain. In Hegel's words, "nothing short of the State is the actualization of freedom."

## (2) Over-riding Rights of the State

Secondly, the welfare and personality of the State are more important than those of any of the individuals who compose it, and its rights over-ride individual rights. Reasons for this corollary are to be found both in the conception of the higher morality of the State—the State, it will be remembered, or rather the State's will, is more disinterested than that of any individual—and in its inclusive character. Since its being gathers up and comprises within itself all that is best in the natures of those who are its members, in any apparent conflict between the rights of the State and the rights of the individual, the rights of State have greater weight and should be preferred to the so-called rights of the individual; for the individual can have no *real* rights which conflict with those of the State. This conclusion follows from an acceptance of the teleological view of rights.<sup>1</sup> The real rights of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 550, 551.

individual are not those which he has brought with him from some hypothetical, pre-social state of society, but the rights to pursue and attain to certain ideal ends which his fully-developed nature sets before him. But it is only a fully-developed nature that sets before itself ideal ends, and this nature he owes to society. Thus society is not only responsible for the ends which the individual desires to pursue; it confers the right to pursue them. Since, then, the individual receives his rights from the State, he can have no rights which conflict with those of the State.

### (3) That the State Cannot Act Unrepresentatively

That a man can be forced to be free, forced, that is to say, to realize the ideal ends in which true freedom consists, we have already learnt from T. H. Green.<sup>1</sup> The Hegelian theory carries this paradox further. The relations which bind the individual not only to every other individual in the community, but also to the State as a whole, form an integral part of the individual's personality. He would not be what he is without them, and he only is what he is because of them. It follows that he cannot act as an isolated individual; he acts as an integral part of the State. Similarly he cannot will with a purely individual will; he wills with a part of the State's will. Thus, according to Dr. Bosanquet, even in rebelling against the State the individual rebels with a will which he has obtained from the State, which is, indeed, continuous with the State's will; the State, in short, in times of rebellion, is divided against itself. Paradoxical conclusions follow from this doctrine. For example, the State can never act otherwise than in accordance with the wills of its individual members. Thus the policeman who arrests the burglar, and the magistrate who locks him up, are really expressing the burglar's real will to be arrested and locked up, the policeman and magistrate being the executive officials of a State which necessarily represents and expresses the real will of the burglar who is a member of it. Furthermore,

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter XIV, pp. 554, 555.

since the freedom which man obtains in and through the State is a real and concrete freedom and, as such, opposed to the abstract and unreal freedom which he enjoys as an isolated individual, the burglar is acting freely when he is being marched to the police-station.

Familiar applications of this doctrine in the contemporary world are afforded in the totalitarian States which take obnoxious persons into protective custody "for their own good", and forcibly "heal" the "diseased minds" of communists, democrats and pacifists in concentration camps through the ministrations of officers who claim to represent the victims' own will to be healed.

#### (4) That the State is Exempt from Morality

Although the Hegelian State has a moral end, it is not itself bound by moral laws. Not only is it exempt from the rules of morality in its dealings with its own citizens, but it is not possible for it to act non-morally in its transactions with other States. This conclusion is reached by the following steps. The State, as we have seen, contains and comprises within itself the social morality of all its citizens. Just as the personalities of all the individuals in the State are transcended by and merged in the personality of the State, so the moral relations which each citizen has to each other citizen are merged in and transcended by the social morality which is vested in the State. This social morality, Hegel's Social Righteousness, is both something which transcends and something which is immanent in the moral relations of citizens. It transcends them in the sense that it is not itself any single moral relation or the sum of them, but is more than their sum; it is immanent in them in the sense that it informs and pervades them, as a man's moral character informs and pervades all his acts. It follows that the State can no more be bound by moral relations to its own members than a body can be conceived to be bound by relations to its own parts. That there is a right relation in which the organs of a body can stand to the whole of which they form part, would be generally agreed.

Such a right relation would be one in which each organ so performed its functions as to conduce to the well-being of the whole. If, adapting the analogy, we were to conceive of the organs of a man's body as becoming self-conscious, then the establishment of this right relation might be regarded as a moral obligation which it was their duty to discharge. Each organ, we might say, would be morally obliged so to function as to preserve the well-being of the whole. It does not, however, follow from this notion that the body has a reciprocal duty to its component parts; for the parts have no ends apart from it and no excellence except such as is realized in serving it. Their good, in short, is comprised in its good; consequently to say that it has obligations to them would be as absurd as to say that the end has obligations to the means which subserve it. Similarly with the State and its members. Moral relations, Hegel points out, imply two parties, and there can be no other party besides the State which is itself the sum of all parties. "The State," says Dr. Bosanquet, is "the guardian of our whole moral world and not a factor in our organized moral world," and proceeds to sum up this line of thought with the rather surprising announcement that "it is hard to see how the State can commit theft or murder in the sense in which these are moral offences".

##### (5) The Enhancement of the State's Being in War.

In practice the theory culminates in a doctrine of State absolutism. In theory at all times, and in practice in war-time, the State may exercise, and lawfully exercise, complete authority over the lives of its citizens. Nor is there any ground either in theory or in law for resistance to decrees which are inspired by the real wills of those who obey them, even when they obey unwillingly. In an emergency the State may do as it pleases, and of the justifying emergency the State is the sole judge. "When need arises," says Dr. Bosanquet, "of which it, through constitutional methods, is the sole judge," the State may call upon its citizens to place their lives at its disposal. It

is, indeed, in the omnipotence of the State in time of war that the theory finds its logical development. "The state of war", writes Hegel, "shows the omnipotence of the State in its individuality; country and fatherland are then the power which convicts of nullity the independence of individuals."

#### (6) That The State has no Moral Obligations to Other States

The exemption of the State from morality in regard to its dealings with other States is no less strongly emphasized. I have already referred to the fact that the idealist theory of the State is developed without reference to the existence of other States. The State being regarded as that which comprises and gathers up within itself all the separate moralities of all its individual citizens, and no entity outside the State being recognized, it follows that there is nobody and nothing to whom or which the State stands in moral relations. It cannot, then, stand in moral relations to other States.

It is saddening to reflect with what frequency this apparently shocking conclusion has been justified by philosophers and voiced by statesmen. "When the safety of the country is at stake," Machiavelli wrote, "no consideration of justice or injustice, of honour and dishonour can find a place. Every scruple must be set aside." "What scoundrels we should be," said Cavour, "if we did for ourselves what we are doing for Italy." Fichte's celebrated "Preserve peace that you may begin war with an advantage in your favour" is a characteristic expression of the same attitude, nor is it clear that the sentiment enshrined in the Englishman's "My country right or wrong" is in essence different, although it is rather the exemption of the individual member of a State from moral obligations to the citizens of other States, than the exemption of the State itself that is here asserted.

The doctrine of the emancipation of the State from the requirements of morality in respect of its dealings with other States is widely practised to-day. That it has inspired

the policies of all States in the past, the student of history will regretfully testify. What is distinctive of the post-war twentieth century is that the policies of States in the past and the practice of States in the present are now justified by a political theory which claims for the State a morality, if morality it may be called, which is precisely the reverse of that which is commonly enjoined upon the individual. For while in the relations of individuals morality is distinguished from expediency, in the relations of States morality is identified with expediency.

"For the external relations of States Christian and Social ethics do not apply."

"Any means, however immoral, can legitimately be resorted to for the seizure and preservation of sovereign authority."

The two quotations, taken from the utterances of contemporary continental statesmen, admirably express the conclusions of idealist theory, but the clearest and most succinct statement of the doctrine is perhaps contained in the utterance of a Minister of State in Nazi Germany who, in 1936, informed the German people that "that which benefits Germany is right, that which does not is wrong".

### (7) Divine Attributes of the State

The reader will now be in the appropriate state of mind to follow Hegel in his attribution of quasi-divine characteristics to the State. He will be prepared to be told that "the existence of the State is the movement of God in the world. It is the absolute power on earth; it is its own end and object," and to see in the State a manifestation of God—Hegel refers to it as "this actual God". If we discount these somewhat extravagant utterances the upshot of the theory is sufficiently clear.

The State is the natural, necessary and final form of human organization. In its perfect development it is both omnipotent and absolute, and all existing States are only States in so far as they approximate to the State in its perfect development. The respects in which they fall short of the perfectly omnipotent and absolute State are to be

deplored, the inference being that we want not less of the State, but more. The State has furthermore a real will and a real personality of its own, which, from the very fact that they derive from what is best in the personalities and wills of individuals, come to be endowed, if not with moral, at least with quasi-divine attributes. Thus the State, by virtue both of its transcendent character and of the devotion and sacrifice which it imposes upon its members, enlarges their personalities, and purges them of petty aims and human selfishness. In Hegel's words, "it is the ultimate end which has absolute rights against the individual", and "carries back the individual, whose tendency it is to become a centre of his own, into the life of the universal substance".

And to the obvious objection that no State that has ever existed has exercised any of these functions, the idealist replies that he is not describing the practice of existing States, but the attributes of the ideal State; adding that this is a perfectly justifiable proceeding, since only the ideal State is really and truly a State, all other States, in so far as they fall short of the ideal State, being to that extent not States. Since, however, the perfect State has never existed, the critic might with some show of justice protest that the idealist theory is a theory about nothing at all.

A general criticism of the idealist theory and of the doctrines which derive from it is contained in Chapter XVIII.

#### *Books.*

- BARKER, ERNEST. The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle;  
 X Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the  
 Present Day (Home University Library).  
 BURKE, EDMUND. Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs.  
 X MAINE, SIR HENRY. Ancient Law; Popular Government.  
 X ROUSSEAU, JEAN JACQUES. The Social Contract.  
 HEGEL. Philosophie des Rechts.  
 GREEN, T. H. Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation.  
 X BRADLEY, F. H. Ethical Studies, especially the chapter entitled  
 My Station and its Duties.  
 MUIRHEAD, J. H. The Service of the State.  
 BOSANQUET, B. The Philosophical Theory of the State.



**PART IV**  
**ETHICS AND POLITICS:**  
**THE MODERNS**



## CHAPTER XVI: THEORY OF FASCISM

### I. INTRODUCTORY. ETHICS AND POLITICS REUNITE

Throughout the exposition continued in the two preceding Parts I have endeavoured to treat ethics and politics separately. The endeavour on occasion involved the subjection of the material to considerable strain, nor, it must be confessed, has it been completely successful. In Part III, for example, ethical questions could not be wholly avoided, and in the immediately preceding chapter, devoted to the exposition of the idealist theory of the State, the attempt to "keep ethics out" was, it was obvious, beginning to break down. For the idealist theory, though it is primarily a theory of the State, is also a theory of individual conduct, which declares that a man's moral life is "filled up by his station in that system of wholes which the State is".<sup>1</sup> The theory also insists that his moral is intimately bound up with his civic life, while the announcement that "the conception of the Nation-State involves at least an outline of the life to which, as a power, it is instrumental",<sup>2</sup> entails the view that there is a good life to the living of which the State is a necessary means, and that our conception of the nature and function of the State is, or should be, determined by our conception of the nature of the good life. Thus the idealist theory subscribes to the Greek view that the moral life is one which can be realized only in the State, which is itself a means to the realization of the end, which is the moral life. It is, then, only by an arbitrary and possibly unjustifiable division of subject matter that I have allocated the last chapter to Part III.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, p. 593.    <sup>2</sup> See Chapter XV, pp. 594-596.

Yet in comparison with the theories now to be expounded the idealist theory of the State seems remote from and inapplicable to the conduct of daily life. This remoteness appears particularly striking when the idealist theory is contrasted with Fascism. The idealist theory of the State constitutes one of the most important, if unacknowledged, sources of Fascism. Fascism is, indeed; from one point of view, simply the theory in action. Yet Fascism is, its exponents insist, an attitude to life as well as a theory of the State; a temper of mind no less than a conception of government. It is not merely a repudiation of Socialism and Democracy, it is a renaissance of the spirit of man. While Communism does not make such all-embracing ethical claims, it entails as directly as does Fascism, a particular view of ethics. Communism, that is to say, entails a particular view of the way in which life in a modern State should be lived, a view which is related to, which, indeed, springs from the communist theory of society and of the nature of the forces that determine the form and behaviour of society. Ethics is a subject much discussed in contemporary Russia. How far should a man's life be dedicated to the service of his class in a Capitalist, or of the State in a Socialist, society? How far is sexual behaviour a private matter for the individual's personal determination, how far a public one falling within the cognisance of the State? How far is a degree of asceticism in matters of eating, drinking, dancing, love-making, even of smoking, required (a) of a member of the Communist Party, (b) of a member of a Communist State who is not a member of the Party? Are positive obligations in the way of conduct, laid upon members of the Communist Party from which non-members are exempt? Are one standard of conduct and one code of ethics appropriate to a revolutionary period, another to a counter-revolutionary period, when enemies have been beaten off and the Socialist State is in process of being established, and yet another standard to a state of established Communism? Questions such as these are continuously debated

in contemporary Russia; and, though the answers which are given to them may be, and, indeed, are very various, they are all correlated with the Communist theory of the nature of the historical process, of the particular phase which has been reached in that process, of the characteristics of societies in that phase, and of the relation of the State to the individual in such societies.

Ethical questions in fact are answered by reference to political factors, historical considerations and economic circumstances.

In sum, both Fascism and Communism enjoin upon the citizens of fascist and communist States the duty of living their lives in particular ways, in those ways, namely, which contribute to the power and prestige of the States of which they are members. Furthermore, they engage in active propaganda on behalf of the approved ways of life, and do not hesitate to censure and even to persecute departures from them.

**Philosophies in Action.** Both Fascism and Communism are in fact philosophies in action. Now philosophies in action become philosophies of compulsory conformity. While they are academic and find expression only in the tenets of a school, they tolerate rivals; indeed, they have no option. But when their tenets are embodied in the program of a party, and that party is successful in obtaining control of the government, they develop an intolerance of other philosophies and of the ways of life and theories of politics which other philosophies countenance and encourage. "I am ordering you now," declared the Reich Statthalter of Thuringia at the Nazi District Conference in 1933, "to be intolerant with everything else. In future there must be in Thuringia one political faith only. . . . The Nazis claim the right to be intolerant in view of the necessity for uniform thinking and acting in the nation as a whole."

Political parties are in fact instruments for precipitating philosophies into programs and translating the pro-

grams into practice. So translated, the philosophies are found to aspire to lay down the whole duty of man; they prescribe his ideals as an individual and his loyalties as a citizen; they define for him what is good and reveal to him what is true. Thus General Goering recently assured an audience of lawyers that "Justice and Hitler's will are one and the same thing", while a Bishop of the German Confessional Church, Bishop Dietrich, has pointed out that "since Hitler has been presented to us by God, those who do not place themselves at his side are evil-willed". Fascist theory is reluctant to admit that the individual may possess ideals as an individual, and recognizes only such as are comprised in his loyalties as a citizen. To these generalizations there is in the contemporary world one exception, namely, the philosophy, if philosophy it can be called, of Individualism, and the system of government which is usually found associated with Individualism, namely, Democracy.

#### **Common Characteristics of Fascism and Communism.**

In contradistinction to Individualism and Democracy both Fascism and Communism exemplify the identification of ethics and politics, exemplify it more closely, perhaps, than any other political philosophy past or present. The degree of this identification may be inferred from the following characteristics which both doctrines exhibit. (1) An insistence upon the fact that citizenship is not passive but active. It is not a mere obeying of laws or a counting of votes, but a realization of ideals in a particular way of life. (2) The attempt to exclude all parties and sections who do not subscribe to the ideal of the dominant party from a share in the government, and even to deny to them the right to express their dissent. (3) The co-ordination under the State of all forms of voluntary association and communal life. (4) The determination to give to that party in the State, whether large or small, which professes the tenets and subscribes to the ideals of a particular philosophy, whether Fascism or

Communism, a dominant influence in the policy of the State.

Possessing these characteristics, both Fascism and Communism become in practice all-embracing creeds which pervade every department of the State, control every individual action and seek to control every individual thought. In them, therefore, to a degree hitherto unknown in the sphere of practice, though envisaged by Plato in that of theory, ethics and politics become one. For this reason, I have thought it proper to assign the distinctive theories of the contemporary world to a separate Part.

## II. DIFFICULTIES OF EXPOSITION OF FASCISM

**Fascism as an Emotional Protest.** The fact that it stands for a whole way of life makes it difficult to treat Fascism shortly. It is not easy to summarize what the Germans call a *Weltanschauung*. But in the case of Fascism there are added difficulties due to the prominent part which Fascism plays in the contemporary world. With the exception of Communism, Fascism arouses keener controversy than any other doctrine or movement of the times. To some it appears as a new awakening of the human spirit; to others, as its extinction; to some, as the dawn of a new world; to others, as a return to the Dark Ages. The character of the forces which have inspired it is a subject of controversy no less keen than that which focuses upon Fascism itself.

To some Fascism appears in the light of an emotional protest. The contemporary world, they point out, is full of able, vigorous men who can find no outlet for their energies or scope for their talents. They are ambitious for power and are not disposed to shrink from the use of force in its achievement, but modern society has for decades put a premium upon brains rather than upon brawn, has looked askance at the use of physical force and withheld power from those whose talents were for its exercise. Men of energy and

initiative are also oppressed by the growing standardization of the times. In a modern democracy a vigorous member of the middle classes, conscious of untapped powers and unsatisfied impulses, is apt to find the life of office, train, dinner, radio and bed, with golf, a motor-ride or the sea-side at weekends, insufferably dull. It is a life which he lives in common with thousands, yet he is prevented by snobbery and tradition from following the example of the members of the working class, and combining with the thousands to improve his conditions and remake his life. While, on the one hand, he is deprived of the spiritual comfort which comes from co-operation with his fellows, on the other he lives a life which affords no scope for courage, no hope of adventure and no occasion for the exercise of initiative—or rather, he must contrive to make shift with such poor occasions as are offered by the pursuit of what are vaguely known as hobbies.

In the contemporary world such a man is oppressed with a sense of smouldering, though often unconscious discontent. To such a one Fascism appears as a deliverance.

**Fascism as a Substitute for Religion.** There is also the point of view that sees in Fascism a substitute for religion. Mankind has a need to believe and in all ages religion has existed to satisfy the need. In none has the official religion satisfied this need so inadequately as in our own. Broadly speaking, educated men and women in contemporary Europe are for the most part without religion. Nature abhors a vacuum no less in the spiritual than in the physical realm, and religious substitutes consequently spring up to take the place of religion. Of these one of the most important is Fascism. The following quotation from Canon F. R. Barry's *What has Christianity to Say* summarizes this view: "Before all else, man is a worshipper. From his earliest appearance in history he has been building his pathetic altars, stretching forth his hands to the unknown God. This is persistent through all the mazes of his social and religious record, through all



its perversions and unlovely forms, its ignorance, its cruelty and terror—man's ineradicable quest for God, in whom alone he can find rest and fulfilment. If he cannot find God in heaven, he must fall down before a God on earth and deify some idol of his own making."

The remark of a recent German writer to the effect that the only form in which he can accept Christ is in the character of "a true Hitler nature", admirably illustrates Canon Barry's diagnosis.

**Is It a Revolt Against Civilization?** Others attribute the emotional urge behind Fascism to an unconscious revolt against the pace of change. Progress, they point out, by its very nature involves a strain on the human mind—the strain of continual adaptation to new conditions, of novel reactions to novel complexities. It demands not only a high and increasingly high level of development, but certain tolerations and restraints—the toleration of ideas, of habits, and of culture that one does not understand, the restraint of one's primitive desire to "hit out" at what one cannot tolerate.

When the process of change goes too fast, it engenders, inevitably, protest and reaction: the protest of those who, resenting their felt inferiority in face of the achievements, the knowledge, and the reputation of the clever, the cultivated and the learned, are unconsciously looking for a chance of "taking it out of" those who make them feel inferior; the reaction which is born of a desire to return to a simpler and more familiar form of society, in which discipline and courage are the virtues of the ruled, leadership and confident dogmatism of the rulers. Thus a civilization in which the pace of progress has outstripped the capacity of the average man for adjustment, is always in danger of slipping back to an earlier level as a result of his unconscious protest against the strain which it imposes upon him. 'We do not understand all this progress: and we do not hold with what little of it we do understand. Therefore we are going to stop it, if we can.' So

runs the unconscious argument,<sup>1</sup> which, whatever the guise of political or sociological doctrine in which it happens to clothe itself—the maintenance of old traditions, the return to a simpler mode of life, the preservation of racial purity, the “clean-up” of moral licence or political corruption, or shortly, simply, and mysteriously “the salvation of society”—underlies the reactionary movements of the contemporary world. It is of a Fascism so inspired and conceived that Bertrand Russell has remarked: “There is no philosophy of Fascism; there is only a psycho-analysis.”

Or, again, there is the communist analysis of Fascism which represents it as the final phase of Capitalism. Capitalism in *extremis*, unable any longer without undermining its own foundations to make the concessions which the growing power of the workers leads them to demand, abandons the pretence of political democracy and becomes openly and oppressively reactionary. Capitalism in this phase cannot afford to bend for fear it break, and with its back to the wall takes a rigid stand in defence of its possessions. A rigidly defensive Capitalism means the destruction of democracy, the suppression of liberty and the oppression of the workers.

**Favourable Accounts of Origins of Fascism.** These are hostile diagnoses of Fascism. Writers favourable to Fascism see the movement in a very different light. It signalizes, for them, a new awakening of the human spirit, an awakening which has given birth to a movement comparable in value and importance to the Renaissance. Adopting the standpoint of a protagonist of Italian Fascism, we shall point to a Europe which has been dominated since classical times by two streams of influence, the Greek and the Roman. The Greek element in European culture stands for speculation, rationalism, scepticism, experi-

<sup>1</sup> That the argument is not always unconscious, the loudly cheered remark of a Nazi speaker at a public meeting, “Whenever I hear the word ‘culture’, I reach for my Browning,” (not the poet) affords interesting testimony.

mentation and individualism; the Roman, for loyalty, social solidarity, discipline and respect for tradition. We shall point out how the Renaissance established the Greek values and fostered the Greek spirit, for it was the Renaissance which inaugurated in the realm of thought an era of free enquiry that culminated in the triumphs of science on the one hand, and the collapse of religion on the other; and in that of politics an era of democracy which insisted that liberty and equality were the ultimate political values, and saw in the State a mere contrivance for maximizing individual happiness. But we shall go on to tell how the Greek spirit, unchecked, ran to excess, an excess which was anarchy in politics, chaos in morals, and loss of faith in religion; and we shall point to Communism, to sexual licence and to atheism as the fruits of the unbridled extravagance of the Greek spirit. Contemplating with distaste these twentieth century phenomena, we shall declare our conviction that a movement of integration, in both politics and morals, has been long overdue, and in Fascism we shall find that movement. For Fascism stands for a return to the Roman virtues of loyalty, discipline and service. It lays stress not so much on individual development as on social solidarity, and it finds its exemplar of the ideal man not in the scholar, the scientist or the thinker, but in the cultivated warrior, the "Knight chivalrous of Fascism," controlled to the point of ascetism, proud yet humble, deeply religious, an unstinting giver of himself in the service of others, a defender of the poor and the weak, a fighter for the right, and an upholder of the traditions and sanctities of his race.

**Varieties of Fascism.** It will be obvious that the existence of such diverse attitudes towards and interpretations of Fascism makes the task of impartial exposition exceedingly difficult. It is difficult to view impartially that which arouses strong emotional reactions—it is easier, for example, to obtain a clear view of the binomial theorem than of the evidence for a sexual offence alleged to have

been committed by a negro against a white woman in one of the Southern States of America—and in the case of a movement which, like modern Fascism, at once agitates and divides the contemporary world, it is impossible that exposition should wholly escape the disturbing influence of emotions from which the expositor, himself a child of his age, cannot be wholly immune. Not less embarrassing than the emotional reactions of the expositor, are the varieties of the doctrine which he seeks to expound. Fascism is an intensely nationalist creed, the expression, as its exponents insist, of the soul of a nation. The German soul differs from the Italian, and Fascism, therefore, necessarily assumes a very different complexion in Germany from that which it wears in Italy. As a result, statements which are made about Fascism, affirming it to be or to maintain this or that, will often be found to be true only of a particular variety of Fascist doctrine and behaviour, and will be misleading if universally applied.

In the face of these difficulties all that I can hope to do is to present as shortly as I can a summary of some of the leading ethical and political doctrines of Fascism, refraining, so far as possible, from personal comment or criticism.

**Anti-Intellectualism of Fascism.** But at this point a further difficulty arises; for if by “the leading ethical and political doctrines of Fascism” there is meant a creed of precise articles, at once common and peculiar to all forms of Fascism, no such creed is discernible. For Fascism explicitly repudiates set doctrines. The reasons for this repudiation are interesting in themselves and afford a path into the labyrinth of the subject which it will be convenient to follow.

Fascism is pervaded by a thorough-going anti-intellectualism. More particularly in its German form, it repudiates the notion that there is an absolute truth or set of truths which can be discovered by the human mind by a process of reasoning, and communicated by the discoverer to others

by a process of exposition and argument. Fascism would emphatically disassociate itself from the Rationalism of such a writer as Mill.<sup>1</sup> Professing a general distrust of abstract reasoning, it has much in common with the criticisms of scientific method which have been authoritatively put forward during the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> It is the nature of reason, it is pointed out, to analyse and abstract; analysis and abstraction may be suitable methods for the scientist and the mathematician, but they are inapplicable to life, for life is an art, and its nature, therefore, can only be grasped intuitively. Life, again, is a whole; to analyse it into its component parts and then to classify the parts is to destroy the whole. Life, finally, is a process, a constant flow of change, and to pigeon-hole it into the abstract categories of the intellect is to arrest the process and to falsify the flow. The influence of contemporary anti-rationalist philosophies, particularly those of Bergson,<sup>3</sup> and the neo-idealist philosopher Gentile, who has held important posts in the Italian fascist government, is fermenting here, more particularly in the thought of Italian Fascism. Life is conceived by Bergson as an active and continuously creative principle. To try to freeze this principle into immobility for the purpose of inspection, to pin it down for dissection by the scalpel of the intellect, is, Bergson insists, to falsify it. Its nature can be grasped, the fascist adds, only by the instinctive insight of the man of action, by the vision of the saint, or by the secular wisdom of the peasant whose roots are in the soil. The German thinker Heidegger has announced that he learns more from peasants than from philosophers. Hence it is to the business house, to the military academy, to the open fields, above all to the battlefield, and not to the study or the laboratory that we must go for an understand-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 534, for an account of the distinctive characteristics of Mill's Rationalism.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Guide to Modern Thought*, Chapter IV, pp. 100-106, for a summary of these criticisms.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XIX, for an account of Bergson's philosophy.

ing of Fascism. We must see it in action, if only because we cannot read it in books.

**Fascist Attitude to Truth.** This reliance upon the instinctive and the irrational, this distrust of the operations of the intellect, whose methods are conditioned by the postulate that truth exists and is discoverable, are characteristic of all forms of fascist doctrine. It is not so much that the fascist disowns the activities of the intellect; he is, indeed, perfectly prepared to make use of them; but he will use them as instruments of propaganda, in order that by the creation of opinion he may further his purposes, rather than as guides to the nature of objective fact. Thus Hitler announces in his book *Mein Kampf* that it is the duty of Germans "not to seek out objective truth, in so far as it may be favourable to others, but uninterruptedly to serve one's own truth." On a subsequent occasion, when putting forward the Nazi program, he explained, that "the National State will look upon science as a means for increasing national pride. Not only world-history, but also the history of civilization must be taught from this point of view". In the same vein are the declaration contained in a decree of the Prussian government expounding the Nazi conception of education to the effect that "National Socialism consciously turns away from education that has knowledge as its last end"; the recommendation to educationalists made by Dr. Frick, German Minister of the Interior, "to produce the man political who in all his thoughts and actions is rooted in his nation and inseparably attached to its history and faith. Objective truth is secondary, and not always to be desired"; and the injunction to teachers of Herr Rust, Minister of Education, "that they give to their pupils the fundamental principles of the philosophy and the idea of National Socialism. . . . Not to remain neutral and objective in the school, not to make the child into a cold observer, but to awaken in him enthusiasm and passion. It is a question of eternal and divine values and not one of cold reality." In so far as the

concept of truth is admitted, it is treated pragmatically. That is true which we desire to be true and decide is true, for by the process of desiring and deciding we change reality in the direction of what we desire and decide. The word "we" stands, however, not for the individuals whose views of truth are in question, but for the State or rather, for the governing party in the State. Truth, in fact, is what the State decides is true. As with truth, so with knowledge. Knowledge is not the mind's apprehension of some objective fact which is known; knowledge is what the State has decided that individuals should believe; ignorance what the State has decided that individuals ought not to know. "It is less important," the Minister of Education in Germany has announced, "that a professor make discoveries than that he train his assistants and students in the proper view of the world". Doctrines that spring from this attitude to truth and knowledge are not such as can be easily expounded. Just as the artist cannot tell you what he does but, when asked to give an account of himself, refers you to his works, so the fascist points to his acts as the best witnesses of his doctrine. For the man of action, he will tell you, has little need of doctrine; action is thought's anodyne. When a man's soul is in action, how can he doubt that his action is divine? Thus action at once provides doctrine and proves the doctrine it provides.

**The Fascist Attitude to Life.** While fascist doctrine is vague, changing and difficult to fix, the fascist state of mind is clear and definite. That this should be so, is not surprising, for, if life is an art, what matters is the temper which we bring to the living of it. It is not by means of a set of fixed principles externally imposed, but by the cultivation of a certain attitude and habit of mind that we shall live aright. Nevertheless, the fascist temper of mind is not altogether easy to describe. An advocate of Italian Fascism might, I think, convey its character somewhat as follows: Life is or should be a challenge;

a challenge to keep our senses alert, our faculties trained, our appetite for experience fresh and undulled, our spirits keen and unsophisticated. Good and bad, right and wrong, are objective principles in the universe (this, by the way, as we shall see later, is by no means the general view of German Fascism); there is a moral law and it is absolute. It is only an unspoiled spirit that can discern these principles, and a disciplined nature that can live in accordance with the dictates of the moral law. Hence arises the duty of keeping the spirit bright and the passions under control. Happiness is a good, but it is not the supreme good; the value of wealth has been over-rated, and when over-rated it can exercise a corrupting influence over the minds and spirits of those who pursue it. It is the ethical fallacy of thinking happiness the one supreme good that is responsible for the democratic fallacies that all men are equal, and that it is the State's business to make these equals happy; it is the psychological fallacy that the pocket is the rudder that steers human nature that is responsible for the Marxist fallacy that economic circumstances and forces determine the movements of history and the beliefs of men's minds.<sup>1</sup> The Marxist or realist interpretation of history is, indeed, the result of the misplaced application to life of the habit of abstraction and rationalization which we have seen to be one of the characteristics of scientific method. If we must talk in terms of determination, let us realize that in the long run the spiritual determines the material. In other words, it is man's sense of values, his principles of morality, and his insight into the nature of right and wrong, which determines the events of history and the political structure of society.

To the reader who feels disposed to criticize this account of the fascist temper of mind on the score of vagueness, I plead that it is difficult to find a more exact statement. The following quotation from the volume on Fascism in the Home University Library, by Major J. S.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 666-672, for an account of these Marxist doctrines.



Barnes, may perhaps convey more clearly than I have succeeded in doing the distinctive and essential characteristics of the fascist attitude to life: "Fascism is determined to educate the new generation into one of believers in a Divine Providence, the heralds of an age of faith, to make of the new generation one of heroes who know no fear because of their faith, who would exalt the spirit of sacrifice, gladly fly in the face of any danger run in a worthy cause and welcome martyrdom with a smile. This is no exaggeration. This is the root of the fascist revolution. God is to become once more the central principle of our conscious life, with an objective, didactic moral law, founded on reason, recognized as paramount, not accordingly running counter to the natural quasi-normative laws of organic life, such as the laws of conservation, integration and growth, but transcending them; a law that sums up and harmonizes all our loyalties, dethrones the individual or the State from the position they would usurp from God, yet renders the self-regarding sentiment of self-respect or patriotic feeling capable of receiving a divine extension."

Having read and reflected upon this quotation the reader may be disposed to object: 'But this account has little in common with any statement of Fascism that I have heard and absolutely nothing in common with the spirit of the German Nazi movement, which appears to be anti-Christian and, as you have pointed out above, is disposed to deny the existence of the absolute values of truth and of morality.' The reader's objection would, I think, be justified. To make it, is to put one's finger on the greatest of all the difficulties that confront the would-be expositor of Fascism, which is that in Germany and in Italy, the two countries in which Fascism has come to power, the temper of the movement is different, and is apt to issue in different statements of doctrine. How then—the bewildered expositor cannot but repeat the question—is it possible to give a coherent and precise account of a creed which is at once so vague and so various?

### III. ETHICAL ANCESTRY AND DOCTRINES OF FASCISM.

**Basic Doctrines and Denials.** I propose at this point to make an attack upon the difficulties to which I have referred, by dogmatically selecting three doctrines as being both common and peculiar to Fascism in all its forms. They are, first, the view that power and not wealth or happiness is the true end of human endeavour; secondly, the glorification of the will in those who would realize this end; thirdly, the application to human nature of a principle of qualitative selection as a result of which some are designated as noble, namely, the holders of power, and the rest as raw material to be manipulated by and to serve the noble. The development of these three doctrines will provide us with a guiding thread through the ramifications of fascist doctrine and the variety of forms in which it finds expression. The three basic doctrines to which I have referred entail a series of denials which I have set forth in the ensuing list, giving chapter and verse in the shape of brief quotations from fascist writers in illustration of each denial.

(1) First, there is the denial, already mentioned, of Hedonism in all its forms. "Fascism," writes Mussolini in *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, "denies the materialist conception of happiness as a possibility, and abandons it to its inventors, the economists of the first half of the nineteenth century: that is to say, Fascism denies the validity of the equation well-being-happiness." The other tenets of the utilitarians are rejected with as little ceremony (and as little argument) as the supreme value of happiness.

(2) Fascism rejects the dogma of equality in its utilitarian form, that everybody should count as one and nobody as more than one. Fascism denies both that all people are of equal value in the eyes of the State, and that they should share equally in the benefits of the State. "Fascism,"

Mussolini writes, "denies in democracy, the absurd conventional untruth of political equality dressed out in the garb of collective irresponsibility." As the treatment of Jews, socialists and pacifists in Germany shows, Fascism also denies the dogma that all citizens of the State should be equal before the law.

(3) The denial of equality is reinforced by a denial of the dogma of majority Sovereignty. It is not the case, according to Fascism, that power in a community either resides or ought to reside with the people or the majority of the people. To quote again from Mussolini: "Fascism denies that the majority, by the simple fact that it is a majority, can direct human society; it denies that numbers alone can govern by means of a periodical consultation, and it affirms the immutable, beneficial and fruitful inequality of mankind, which can never be permanently levelled by the mere operation of a mechanical process such as universal suffrage." "The general will," which, according to Fascism, it should be the aim of State policy to express, is, says Major Barnes, "a question of motive and not a question of counting votes irrespective of motives." He proceeds to deride the view that "majority government as a mere piece of machinery" is "calculated to result in a more efficient, a wiser and more moral government than any alternative piece of machinery that may be suggested". What, in effect, the fascist is denying is the possibility of discovering what is right merely by counting heads. If it be asked where Sovereignty in a community ought, according to fascist doctrine, to reside the answer is in a General Will conceived on Rousseau's lines. The General Will, according to Major Barnes, is expressed only by "truly disinterested votes . . . because only the disinterested votes represent the social side of human nature." According to Rousseau and to the idealist theory of the State, the General Will, by virtue of the fact that it is disinterested, is the source and repository of morality. In a fascist State, however, it is the will of those who are in power which is deemed to express the General

Will, and the will of those who are in power comes, therefore, to be regarded as at once the source and the prescriber of morality. That "Justice and Hitler's Will are one and the same thing" we have already noted, while Herr Wagner, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, has laid it down that "what Hitler decides is right and will remain eternally right". I do not know whether Herr Wagner has read Machiavelli and learned that "a Prince should take the surest courses he can to maintain his life and the State; the result will always be thought honourable". He could not have found an apter and more succinct expression of his doctrine.

(4) There is a denial that the development of individual personality is the true end of the State. Thus Mussolini asserts that "the principle that society exists solely through the well-being and the personal liberty of all the individuals of which it is composed does not appear to be conformable to the plans of nature".

(5) If the development of individuality is not the end of the State, the foundation of Mill's case for individual freedom, which demands for the individual as a right complete freedom of thought, of speech and of writing, disappears. The fascist view is that only so much liberty shall be allowed to the individual as is compatible with the convenience of the State. The individual in the fascist State is, according to Mussolini, "deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential; the deciding power in this question cannot be the individual, but the State alone". This attitude to liberty is characteristic of Fascism in all its forms.

As in Plato's theory, the State concedes to the people only those liberties which they are deemed to be capable of using and enjoying without harm to themselves. The fascist State, in fact, is like a school in this, that the better behaved the pupils, the more liberty they are allowed. To quote Major Barnes "concrete liberties may be conceded by the State, generally speaking, in proportion to the efficacy of the moral law reigning in the hearts

of the people and in proportion to their knowledge of circumstances". As to what liberty it is expedient for the people to enjoy, the State is, as we have seen, the sole arbiter and different liberties are appropriate to different State needs. As Mussolini puts it: "There is a liberty for times of war, another for times of peace; a liberty for times of revolution, another for normal times; a liberty for times of prosperity, another for times of stringency."

The view that individual liberty and development should be subordinated to State convenience is common to all forms of Fascism. Thus the advocates of British Fascism, comparatively undeveloped as it is, are already insisting in their official organ that "Fascism . . . stands for the cessation of present political life, and in this sense for the suppression of political self-expression".

(6) Finally, there is a repudiation of wealth as a measure of value and a disavowal of the psychology which inspired the economics of the nineteenth century. It is not true that man is motivated only by considerations of profit and loss. It is not true that he only acts in such ways as he thinks will redound to his economic advantage; and emphatically it is not true that he ought so to act. "The pursuit of a maximum aggregate wealth," writes Major Barnes, "should be subordinated to the pursuit of a healthy social system. In other words, general well-being is more dependent on a healthy social system than on great aggregate riches."

Reports are made from time to time that wages have dropped in fascist countries. This, however, is not treated as the calamity which democratic peoples are apt to consider it, and discontented workers are exhorted to console themselves with reflections upon the glory that Fascism has brought to the nation and the respect which, under fascist rule, it obtains from other nations. Nor are only the workers exhorted to place the development of the spirit before the filling of the pocket; the programs of Fascism both in Germany and in Italy originally contained important measures for curtailing the profits of wealthy capitalists.

**Positive Ethics of Fascism.** I turn now to the positive ethical theory which underlies Fascism. I have already mentioned as the dominating fascist ideal, power; as the dominating fascist character-trait, will; and as the guiding principle of fascist policy, qualitative selection of persons, of those persons, namely, who use will to obtain power. These basic principles are perhaps most clearly enunciated by writers who, preceding in point of time the historical rise of Fascism, may be regarded as its spiritual ancestors. Of these the most important are the German philosophers Fichte and Nietzsche.

**Influence of Fichte.** In an essay entitled "The Ancestry of Fascism", published in 1934,<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell draws attention to the important influence of Fichte on fascist thought. Fichte (1762-1814) was the apostle of the renascent German nation in the early years of the nineteenth century, when the Germans were fighting Napoleon. His object was to unite his countrymen in opposition to the French Emperor, and he sought, therefore, to awaken German patriotism, to make Germans conscious of their solidarity and to inspire loyalty to the nation. In pursuance of these aims, he introduced a distinction between classes or grades of men which is in some ways reminiscent of the division into classes of Plato's State and Aristotle's. There is on the one hand the noble-minded man who is prepared to identify himself with and sacrifice himself for the nation, and there is, on the other, the ignoble man who exists only to serve the noble man.

Bertrand Russell gives some interesting quotations from Fichte. Education is to be remodelled with the object of "moulding the Germans into a corporate body". The main factor in an education devoted to this object is universal military service, and everybody is, therefore, to be trained to fight. If the question is put, "Why are they to fight?" the answer is not, as one might have supposed, to safeguard freedom, to increase material prosperity or to

Published in a collection of essays entitled *In Praise of Idleness*.

defend hearth and home, but because they are imbued with "the devouring flame of higher patriotism, which embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal, for which the noble-minded man joyfully sacrifices himself and the ignoble man, who only exists for the sake of the other, must likewise sacrifice himself". Although among Germans there is a distinction between the noble and the ignoble, a distinction which deprives the ignoble of all claim to existence on their own account and permits them to live only in order that they may render service to the noble, it is, nevertheless, laid down that in comparison with other races all Germans are noble; for "to have character and to be German undoubtedly mean the same".

The outstanding trait of the noble is strength of will, which Fichte calls "the very root of man". The will chiefly affirms itself by postulating not only itself, but everything else. Thus "the universe", says Fichte, "is myself". While the superiority of the noble is manifested by development of will, the inferiority of the ignoble is emphasized by the deliberate suppression of their wills by the noble. Thus the new education which is designed to mould Germans into a corporate body "must consist essentially in this, that it completely destroys freedom of the will". It is, however, only the ignoble whose wills are destroyed.

**Strength of Will as the Distinctive Characteristic of the Noble.** That the will is at once the distinguishing characteristic of the noble and the determining force in history is a doctrine common to all forms of Fascism. Speaking for himself and Hitler in the Olympic Meadow, during his visit to Berlin in the autumn of 1937, Mussolini affirmed their "common conviction and belief in the will as the decisive factor in history", while General Goering announced to the Public Prosecutor and State attorneys in 1934 that "Justice and Hitler's will are one and the same thing". It is by means of the will that in modern fascist States the noble dominate and inspire the ignoble. Thus Mussolini's victorious general on the Biscayan front

in the Spanish Civil War, General Terruzzi, sent the Duce a telegram, after the capture of Santander, informing him that "the Blackshirts wore, as always, the same warlike expression which was shaped for them by your will", while the first of the Ten Commandments which the Nazi Minister for Labour has drawn up for the use of Nazi workers reads: "We greet the Leader each morning and we thank him each night that he has provided us officially with the will to live."

Nor are these phenomena confined to fascist countries. As Soviet Russia moves in the direction of Totalitarianism, the tendency to regard every (creditable) activity on the part of its inhabitants as springing from and sustained by the will of the head of the State becomes increasingly marked. For example, valuable meteorological researches were carried out in 1937 by a number of Soviet scientists who encamped on a drifting polar ice floe. The radio operator attached to the party, Krenkel, sent a message to his electors in the Ural Mountains at the time of the first Soviet elections (December 1937) conveying the following assurance: "We do not feel lonely in the white wastes. The warm and mighty breath of our flourishing Fatherland warms us. The care of our most beloved leader Comrade Stalin increases our strength tenfold and enables us to carry out our work."<sup>1</sup>

**Justice as the Interest of the Stronger.** The question next arises, in pursuit of what is the will of the

<sup>1</sup> Adulation of the Leader, identification of the ruling party with the State, would also seem to be increasingly totalitarian, diminishingly specifically fascist characteristics. It is interesting, for example, to compare with the sentiments of gratitude to Hitler quoted on this page the following headlines which appeared in an official Soviet paper, *The Moscow Worker*, at the time of the December 1937 elections: "Great words of Truth—We have one and the same thought as the Party—a United Family—The Party of the Bolsheviks deserves the confidence of the People—We will close our ranks still tighter round the Party—We shall do our duty with Honour—What happiness to live in Stalin's Epoch—Under the sun of Stalin's constitution—Our votes to the faithful sons of the People and our love to the Bolshevik Party are endless."



superior to be exercised. What, in fact, is the aim of the superior? Fichte, in so far as he gives any answer to this question, suggests that it is the well-being of the nation. It was left to Nietzsche to affirm that power is itself an aim, and that it is by their conquest and exercise of power that the noble are to be recognized.

Nietzsche (1844-1900) is the exponent of a view of morals which, though it has received little mention in the preceding pages, appears and reappears like a constantly recurring *motif* in the history of ethical theory. It is a view which first finds expression in Plato's *Republic* in the speech of Thrasymachus who identifies "justice", a word which stands for the whole of what we should call social morality, with "the interest of the stronger". Justice, he maintains, is that kind of conduct which is convenient to and enhances the power of the governors of a community. Asked to defend this view, Thrasymachus points out that the stronger control the government and make the laws. These laws are designed to serve their own interests; in other words, they are so framed that, by the mere process of obeying them, citizens are led to further the interests of their rulers. Morality, which is the name we give to law-abiding conduct, is, therefore, a device on the part of the rulers to ensure subservience and contentment on the part of their subjects. Since subservient subjects are a source of strength to their rulers, we may say that morality is "the interest of the stronger". In other words, whatever courses the Prince adopts, "the result will always be thought honourable".<sup>1</sup> The man who makes the laws in a community is in one sense like Gyges in Glaucon's fable.<sup>2</sup> Gyges, it will be remembered, could break the law with impunity because he could become invisible at will. While the law-maker does not break the law with impunity, he can ensure that he has no incentive to break it. Thus Anatole France speaks of the majestic impartiality of the modern law which "bids rich and poor alike to go to sleep in doorways". He can

<sup>1</sup> See p. 622 above.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, p. 21. ACC.

also, as Thrasymachus points out, ensure that, so long as others keep the law; his own power will be automatically safeguarded. And, since the law is at once the prop and the mirror of the public opinion of a community, and, since the public opinion of the community is in matters of conduct at once the guardian and the arbiter of conventional morality, we may further say that the habit of acting in a way of which the public opinion of the community approves will be found to conduce to the maintenance of the *status quo*, and hence to the interests of those whom the *status quo* suits. But "the stronger" themselves are above the laws which they have made for the masses. Since the laws exist for their convenience, they are, it is obvious, justified in dispensing with them whenever they interfere with their convenience. An argument similar to that contained in the quotation from Lowes Dickinson's *After Two Thousand Years* in Chapter X<sup>1</sup> is accordingly developed to show that it is right and just for "the stronger" to set aside the law, just as it is right and just for the majority to keep the law.

**Views of Mandeville.** Thrasymachus's thesis is capable of extensive development and wide application. In the fifteenth century, for example, it was restated by Machiavelli;<sup>2</sup> in the early eighteenth century it was revived and elaborated by Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733). Society, Mandeville points out, was devised by skilful politicians for their own advantage. This they hoped chiefly to secure by the spread of what is known as morality. Addressing themselves, therefore, to man's pride, they drew his attention to the fact that human beings had always considered themselves to be superior to the brute beasts. Yet, if he indulged his passions as soon as he conceived them, and gave way to sensual desire and violent rage, wherein did man's superiority consist? In order to demonstrate his superiority man must, it was

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 377-379.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction to Parts II and III, pp. 194, 195.

obvious, learn to master his appetites and restrain his passions. The plain man listened to the words of the flatterer, and, aspiring to live the higher life, transformed himself from a savage into a clerk. The process, Mandeville remarked, is known as civilization. Tamed by his own conceit, man was now fit to live in society. As a social animal he regarded as virtuous every action on the part of others by which the society to which he belonged was benefited, and stigmatized as vicious the indulgence of private appetites irrespective of the public good.

But the skilful politicians who had planned the deception from the beginning had taken good care to ensure that the good of society should be identical with their own advantage. Uncivilized man is ungovernable man, but man tamed and tractable, with the bees of social virtue and social service buzzing in his citizen's bonnet, is at once the prop and the dupe of unscrupulous governments. "From which," as Mandeville says, "it is evident that the first rudiments of morality broached by skilful politicians to make men useful to each other as well as tractable, were chiefly contrived that the ambitious might reap the more benefit from, and govern vast numbers of them with the greater ease and security."

**Nietzsche's Ethics.** This line of thought is developed by Nietzsche. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he launches an attack upon utilitarian morals. Utilitarian morality is, he maintains, merely the herd instinct in the individual. We bestow moral approval upon those forms of character and disposition which benefit us personally, or which benefit the herd to which we belong, and we designate with the name of "virtuous" those actions of which we approve. Morality is also the offspring of fear. It is because we are afraid of offending public opinion and incurring the censure of the herd that we refrain from actions of which the herd disapproves. There is nothing very new in these ideas. They are, indeed, the ordinary stock-in-trade of the subjectivist and relativist theories of morals already

described.<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, however, expresses them with an unequalled force and vividness. "Everything," he writes, "that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbour, is henceforth called *evil*; the tolerant, unassuming, self-adapting, self-equalising disposition, the *mediocrity* of desires, attains the moral distinction and honour." His account of the virtue of truthfulness in the herd may be cited as a good example of his general view. The herd, he points out, demands that "thou shalt be recognizable, thou shalt express thy inner nature by means of clear and constant signs—otherwise thou art dangerous. Thou must not remain concealed; thou must not change!"

One by one Nietzsche challenges all the contentions of utilitarian morals. The ideal of equality is, he maintains, a myth, for human beings are not equal; the ideal of happiness is a conception fit only for animals. The morality of motive fares no better at his hands. It is, he concedes, an advance on Utilitarianism; it is better, that is to say, to judge actions by their origins than by their consequences. It is, however, false to suppose that the origin of actions is the freewill of the agent; for freewill is a delusion, and the conscious motive which apparently leads to the performance of an action is only a by-product of forces over which the agent has no control. "Morality," he writes, "in the sense in which it has been understood hitherto, as *intention-morality*, has been a prejudice, perhaps a prematureness or preliminariness, probably something of the same rank as astrology and alchemy, but in any case something which must be surmounted."

**Attack on Christian Ethics.** The repudiation of freewill and the morality of motive culminates in an attack on Christianity and in particular on the Christian virtues. Conscience is not the voice of God: it is a feeling of guilt arising in the soul which has the courage to flout but not to despise the prejudices of the herd. Humility and meek-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter X, pp. 373-379 for an account of these.

ness are virtues appropriate to slaves; pity is the offspring of cowardice, for "the greatest of almsgivers is cowardice. All those who are not sufficiently masters of themselves and do not regard morality as a self-control and self-conquest continuously exercised in things great and small, unconsciously come to glorify the good, compassionate, benevolent impulses of that instinctive morality which has no head, but seems merely to consist of a heart and helpful hands". Kindness, helpfulness and benevolence are, in other words, signs of weakness. Christianity, in fact, is little more than an organized conspiracy to put a premium upon weakness. Christianity is the religion of the inefficient and the cowardly; it assures the failures of this life that they will succeed in the next; the miserable, that they will be happy; the lonely, comforted, and the poor, wealthy with a wealth more valuable than earthly riches. At the manly virtues of independence, boldness, pride and self-assertion it calls "sour grapes", assuring the herd who lack them that their possessor is displeasing to God. Finally, it offers the bribe of eternal life to comfort the many for their inferiority, assuring them that in virtue of their possession of immortal souls they are "ends in themselves", and that as "ends" they are the equals in the eyes of God of the mighty, the proud and the powerful. "That everybody as an 'immortal soul'," Nietzsche writes, "should have equal rank, that in the totality of beings the 'salvation' of each individual may lay claim to eternal importance, that insignificant bigots and three-quarter-lunatics may have the right to suppose that the laws of nature may be persistently broken on their account—any such magnification of every kind of selfishness to infinity, to insolence, cannot be branded with sufficient contempt. And yet it is to this miserable flattery of personal vanity that Christianity owes its triumph; by this means it lured all the bungled and the botched, all revolting and revolted people, all abortions, the whole of the refuse and offal of humanity, over to its side. The 'salvation of the soul'—in plain English, the world revolves around me."

**The Ethics of Power.** So far I have summarized only the negative side of Nietzsche's doctrine, and told the tale of his repudiations. These, as I have already hinted, are remarkable less for their novelty than for their vigour. It is in his positive doctrine that Nietzsche's contribution to ethics, and in particular to fascist ethics, consists. What is it, he asks, that the herd chiefly fears, and answers, "the lofty, independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, and even the cogent reason". Why is it that these qualities are an object of fear? Because they confer an advantage upon their possessor in the struggle for life, and are, therefore, evidence of the superiority of those who possess them. Nietzsche's thought was strongly influenced by the Darwinian concepts of Natural Selection and the struggle for existence. Darwin announced that the fittest survive; Nietzsche moralized the announcement by adding that the fittest *ought* to survive. In other words, he sought to derive the principles of morality from the facts of evolution. A morality based on evolutionary concepts will assert, in the first place, that good is that which furthers, evil that which hinders, the evolutionary process. But the evolutionary process, as it manifests itself in the human race, does not take place only, or even mainly on the physical plane. In man, as in all beings, life is striving to evolve a higher type, but higher in respect of its moral and spiritual, not predominantly in respect of its physical qualities. By what marks are moral and spiritual superiority to be recognized? By the will of the morally and spiritually superior person to exercise power over his fellows. Everywhere, Nietzsche points out, the higher type dominates, or seeks to dominate, the lower; everywhere the lower seeks to defend itself against domination. In politics its defence takes the form of democracy, which, announcing the great dogma of equality, enables the masses of the mediocre to make their numbers felt by the counting of heads and the casting of votes; in ethics, the lower clothe themselves in the Christian virtues of meekness, pity and unselfishness, and the mediocre erect a

scale of values which puts a premium upon mediocrity. In sum, the struggle for survival still continues, and assumes the form of a conflict between the average many and the superior few for the achievement of power. The upshot of Nietzsche's doctrine is to present a contrast between a small number of superior individuals, new types whom the evolutionary process is seeking to evolve, and the vast mass of average men who represent the type already evolved. The distinctive characteristic of the superior type is their will to power; or, rather, it is only in the superior that the will to power, which is common to all living organisms, emerges into consciousness to guide their actions and to set their ends.

"Wherever I found a living thing, there found I the Will to Power; and even in the will of the servant found I the will to be master. Neither necessity nor desire, but the love of power, is the demon of mankind. You may give men everything possible—health, food, shelter, enjoyment—but they are and remain unhappy and capricious, for the demon waits and waits and must be satisfied."

"Passion for power," Nietzsche continues, "is the earthquake which breaketh and upbreaketh all that is rotten and hollow; the rolling, rumbling, punitive demolisher of whited sepulchres; the flashing interrogative sign besides premature answers; passion for power; before whose glance man creepeth and croucheth and drudgeth, and cometh lower than the serpent and the swine, until at last great contempt crieth out of him."

**The Will to Power.** This passion for power Nietzsche endows with moral attributes. In those who have it it is a mark of higher morality. Not only do they dominate the herd; they *ought* to dominate it. It is almost as if Nietzsche were saying; "Might is right and quite *rightly*." From this fundamental principle all other ethical principles are derived. Pleasure and pain, for example, are not the rudders of human nature; they are the by-products of the urge to power. Pain means that an obstacle to power is being encountered; pleasure, that it is overcome. "Pain

as the hindrance of the organism's will to power is, therefore, a normal feature, a natural ingredient of every organic phenomenon; man does not avoid it—on the contrary, he is constantly in need of it. Every triumph, every feeling of pleasure, every event presupposes an obstacle overcome." Truth is not absolute; it is whatever conduces to power or gives us the experience of wielding it. The criterion of truth Nietzsche writes, lies in "the enhancement of the feeling of power". It is for this reason that the doctrines of Christianity which make a merit of lack of power are so bitterly denounced. For everybody cannot after all obtain power, and mankind compensates itself for its inability to obtain what it wants by declaring what it wants to be wicked. It is for this reason that Christianity is the appropriate religion of the herd and Christian morals its appropriate morality.

**Master and Slave Morality.** The glorification of the will to power leads to the conception of two kinds of morality appropriate to two different classes of human beings. First, there is the morality of slaves. It is a morality which denounces power and inequality, praises happiness and equality, and calls virtuous whatever makes for happiness. Secondly, there is the morality of masters, which designates power over the slaves as the true end of life and approves of whatever qualities in the masters are conducive to the acquisition of such power. With the principles of herd morality we are already familiar; what are the precepts of master morality?

"One must learn to love oneself with a wholesome and healthy love, that one may endure to be with oneself and not go roving about. O my brethren, a new nobility is needed, which shall be the adversary of all populace rule, and shall inscribe anew the word 'noble' on new tables. *And what is noble? To be able to command and to obey!* Severe and genuine culture should consist above all in obedience and habituation." Master morality has "profound reverence for age and for tradition. Here we find



utility and obligation to exercise prolonged gratitude and prolonged revenge—both only within the circle of equals—artfulness in retaliation. Signs of nobility: never to think of lowering our duties to the rank of duties for everybody; to be unwilling to renounce or to share our responsibilities; to count our prerogatives, and the exercise of them, among our duties”.

It is only, then, in the masters that Christian morality is inappropriate, for it is only the masters who permit the will to power to become conscious. For the slaves Christian morality is not only appropriate, but necessary; it supplies them with “the pillars of their existence and the soporific appliances towards happiness”, and the masters will, therefore, do well to encourage its persistence. One is tempted to wonder why Nietzsche published his books for the slaves to read. But perhaps he counted upon his doctrines obtaining official recognition, in which case presumably, slaves would not be educated, or, if educated to read, not educated to the point of being able to understand Nietzsche.

To sum up, there are two scales of moral values originating in the distinction between the ruling class, or masters, and the slaves, who are dependent upon the masters; for “men are not equal” and “a higher culture can only originate where there are two distinct castes of society”. For the masters the antithesis between good and bad means practically the same as the antithesis between “noble” and “despicable”; for the slaves it is the same as the antithesis between “useful” and “dangerous”. Slave morality is in fact utilitarian morality; it is distinguished by the fact “that it keeps its advantage steadily in view, and that this thought of the end and advantage is even stronger than its strongest impulses, not to be tempted to inexpedient activities by its impulses—that is, its wisdom and inspiration”. “We bear no grudge against them, these good lambs,” Nietzsche generously concedes, “we even like them; nothing is tastier than a tender lamb.”

**The Coming of the Superman.** Towards the end of his life Nietzsche lost his reason and his later thought is characterized by a certain wildness. Regarded as a systematic philosopher expounding a considered and consistent body of doctrine, Nietzsche is of small importance. It is as a medium for catching and precipitating the tendencies stirring in the womb of the times that he acquires significance. The theories which I have sketched culminate on the ethical side in the doctrine of the Superman, and on the political, in the apotheosis of the aggressive warrior and of the aggressive State. With the rise of Fascism these doctrines have assumed an importance far exceeding what seemed likely in the age when Nietzsche announced them.

With the doctrine of the Superman we are not here directly concerned. It is a development of the biological idea which Nietzsche derived from Darwin. Darwin taught that a number of previous species had led up to and culminated in man; it is probable, then, Nietzsche pointed out, that man himself will be superseded. The being who is to supersede and surpass man is the Superman. Forerunners of the Superman are already beginning to appear; they are, indeed, the superior individuals in whom the will to power has become conscious, who have achieved mastery over self by discipline, and over others by personality. Ultimately, from among their number the Superman will emerge. "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man? All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves, and ye want to be the ebb of that great tide, and would rather go back to the beast than surpass man? What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame. And just the same shall man be to the Superman: a laughing-stock, a thing of shame."

Although Nietzsche believed in a continuous evolutionary process leading up to man, and from man to the Superman, he held somewhat inconsistently that with the Superman the process would stop. The development of the Superman was

in fact the goal of evolution. "The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the Superman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I conjure you, my brethren, *remain true to the earth*, and believe not those who speak unto you of super-earthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not."

**Praise of War.** Nietzsche's political doctrines are chiefly remarkable for their praise of war. Hegel, we have already seen, commended war because it emphasized the being and enhanced the power of the State. Nietzsche's advocacy of war is based partly upon ethical, partly upon racial grounds. The ethical ground is that, since courage and the will to power are the outstanding virtues of the superior man, and since war calls for courage, strengthens the will to power and gives those who possess the will the chance to exercise power, it is war that provides the superior man's higher qualities with scope for development; in war his superiority will be made manifest. The point is one whose importance Machiavelli was among the first to perceive. He informs Princes that "they ought to make the art of war their sole duty and occupation, for it is peculiarly the science of those who govern". "If ye cannot be saints of knowledge," Nietzsche adds, "then I pray you, be at least its warriors. War and courage have done more great things than charity. What is the good? ye ask. To be brave is good. Live your life of obedience and of war!"

It does not seem to have occurred to Nietzsche that people are sometimes hurt in war and that pain is, presumably, to be deplored because it hinders the aggressor's will to power.<sup>1</sup> He often writes as if pain were in itself a good. Nietzsche further praises war because it braces nations that grow weak and soft. Peace, prosperity and comfort breed evil humours in the body politic. War is a purge that clears them away. "For nations that are growing weak and contemptible," Nietzsche wrote, "war

<sup>1</sup> See p. 633 above.

may be prescribed as a remedy, if, indeed, they really want to go on living. National consumption, as well as individual, admits of a brutal cure. The eternal will to live and inability to die is ever in itself already a sign of senility of emotion. The more fully and thoroughly we live, the more ready we are to sacrifice life for a single pleasurable emotion."

Nietzsche was not a consistent thinker, and although on occasion he undoubtedly writes as if he thought that war is a good, it is of spiritual and psychological conflict, of tension, competition and the clash of rival self-assertivenesses, rather than of war between nations that he sings the praises. Certainly he was no friend to militarism, and attacked the Germanic nationalism of his time just as he attacked anti-Semitism. It is rather as a remedy for degeneracy than as a good in itself that he recommends war between nations. The contemporary German writer Oswald Spengler has, however, so developed Nietzsche's praise of psychological conflict and of war as a cure for degeneracy, that in his hands it has become a glorification of war as a good in itself.

A similar attitude was common in England before the last war. "War," wrote Ruskin in the *Crown of Wild Olives*, "is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of man"; and Henley and Carlyle had much to say in the same strain. It is, however, in Germany that the advocates of war on biological grounds have made the most numerous converts. War, it is said, eliminates the weak, enhances the strong, and places a premium upon those virtues which have survival value. Thus immediately before the war of 1914-1918 a German general, Bernhardt, published a book, *Germany and the Next War*, in which he shows how "war is a biological necessity, an indispensable regulator in the life of mankind, failing which would result a course of evolution deleterious to the species and, too, utterly antagonistic to all culture". And because it is necessary, it is also beautiful: "Though words are very beautiful things," Mussolini has declared, "rifles, machine-guns,

ships, aeroplanes and 'cannons are more beautiful things still."

**Successful Force as the Sole Test of Superiority.** We have seen that war enhances the superiority of superior individuals and restores to vigour men who have grown slack. But what war does for superior individuals it can also do for superior races. Evolution proceeds by means of the struggle for survival. As the struggle grows more intense, the process of evolution is accelerated. War, then, acts as a kind of forcing house for evolution, providing for superior races those conditions in which their superiority can be made manifest, and so enhancing their superiority and fulfilling the evolutionary purpose. Nietzsche was much attracted to the so-called science of eugenics. He believed that it was possible scientifically to breed superior individuals and races, and just as he exhorted the individual to be "not considerate of thy neighbour," so he enjoined upon the superior race the precept that "suffering is the source of greatness". If this doctrine is true, a race has only to consider itself to be superior on ethnological grounds to other races, and it will find both incentive and justification for war in order that it may demonstrate its superior qualities on the battlefield, being assured that fighting not only ensures the triumph of the superior, but ennobles the superior whom it enables to triumph.

There is a further reason why the outcome of the kind of ethic I have been describing should be war. If everybody were to accept Fichte's and Nietzsche's doctrines, everybody would think that he was "noble" and "superior". Although these doctrines are far from being universally held, many do in fact entertain in regard to themselves the kind of opinion which, on Nietzsche's view, is admirable. How are these many claimants to the title of nobility to select themselves? How are the "superior" to demonstrate their superiority, except by the test of war?

In the absence of any moral standard, power can be the only criterion of worth. But there is no way of showing

one's fitness for power except by exercising it. Hence, if A and B both believe themselves to be superior men, and if the circumstances are such that they cannot both have power, the only way in which their superiority can be made manifest is by fighting it out, in order to find out which is the better man. It is not, therefore, surprising to find the Nietzschean admiration for war echoed in contemporary fascist literature. I cite one quotation, where a hundred might be given. The following appeared in 1937 in the *Deutsche Wehr*, the professional journal of Hitler's Officer-Corps:

"A new world has come into being for which war is frankly a postulate, the measure of all things, and in which the soldier lays down the law and rules the roost. . . . Every human and social activity is justified only when it aids preparation for war."

The article from which the extract is taken proceeds to point out that war has now become a form of human existence with the same rights as peace. .

**Nietzscheanism and Christianity.** I do not propose to comment on these doctrines beyond drawing attention to the width of the gulf which separates the scale of values they imply, from the Christian ethic which has been accepted in Europe, at least in theory, for nearly two thousand years. Christianity believes in human equality; Nietzsche, that some men are by nature superior to and more important than others. Christianity holds with Kant that each human soul is an end in itself and should be treated as such; Nietzsche, that ordinary men are the raw material for the manipulation of superior men. Christianity maintains that all races are of equal worth in the sight of God; Nietzsche, that some races are of greater worth than others, because they possess superior survival value; Christianity prescribes the attainment of virtue as the end of life; Nietzsche, the exercise of power; Christianity preaches kindness and humility; Nietzsche, ruthlessness and pride; Christianity exhorts us to meet evil not with a contrary evil, but with

good, and denounces war; Nietzsche glorifies war and holds that we are justified in working our wills not only upon those who do us evil, but upon all comers, provided that they are weaker than we are. Finally, Christian philosophy proclaims that truth is absolute, and declares that to the eye of faith it may be revealed; Nietzsche adopts a pragmatic attitude to truth, and has faith only in the Superman who will make his truth for himself.

### Contemporary Expressions of Nietzsche's Doctrines.

I have enlarged upon Nietzsche's ethical doctrines for the reason that fascist ethics consists of little more than their application. The insistence upon will, the glorification of power, the division of mankind into two classes, those who have the will to seize power and to wield it—the natural leaders of mankind—and those who, lacking will, are the naturally led, the repudiation of the virtues lauded by Christianity—all this and much more in the Nietzschean vein finds expression in the utterances and the actions of the rulers of contemporary Germany. Particularly close to Nietzsche is the Nazi criticism of Christianity. In March, 1934, the German Nazi Church issued a Catechism from which the following is an extract: "The German has his own religion, which springs living from his own special observation, sentiment and thought. We call it the German or German-racial religion, and by that we mean the peculiar and natural German faith in the nation. . . . The German of to-day needs a healthy and natural religion which makes him brave, pious and strong in the fight for folk and Fatherland. The German religion is such a creed . . . Christianity is not such a creed; on the contrary, it is rather the type of an unhealthy and unnatural final religion." The extract could be paralleled by innumerable quotations of a similar tendency. It is not in Jesus Christ that the modern Nazi believes, but—I quote from the articles of faith contained in the "Bible" of the German Faith Movement—"in the German, God's other beloved Son". As the German Confessional Church, in a

manifesto protesting against a policy on the part of the State which seeks to substitute "neo-paganism" for Christianity, sadly remarks: "There are many to-day who declare that one need only seek God in nation, in race, in the community and in blood. That places the creature above the creator."

The "Superior" Man is he who Knows the Moral Law. With one important exception, the foregoing summary of Nietzsche's views may be taken as embodying the essence of fascist ethical theory. The exception illustrates the difficulty already mentioned as confronting the expositor of Fascism, the difficulty, namely, which arises from the differences between German and Italian Fascism. For the exception is nothing more nor less than the assertion of the existence and the validity of the moral law. This assertion, which finds little place in the writings of German fascists, is put into the forefront of their creed by the advocates of Italian Fascism. The attitude of German Fascism to truth is, as we have seen, frankly pragmatic; its attitude to morals is either relativist, in the sense that it maintains that right is what conduces to the power of the stronger, or else Nietzschean, in the sense that it equates virtue with strength. Italian writers, however, maintain the existence of a moral law which is both absolute and independent of our apprehension of it. Hence, while the Nazis are apt to write as if the "superior" in a community were rendered superior simply by virtue of their stronger will and greater power, Italian fascists assess a man's "superiority" by reference to his capacity to discern and his willingness to obey the moral law. Italian Fascism, in fact, maintains that the rulers in a community are, or at least ought to be, those who know the Good.

The view that those who know the Good ought to rule has not lacked its advocates at any time since Plato declared that philosophers should be the kings of his ideal State. It appears, for example, in the work of Carlyle (1795-1881). I have already referred to Carlyle's definition



of true liberty as the "finding out, or being forced to find out, the right path and to walk thereon". But who, one wonders, is to exert the force which is necessary to enable common men to find the right path? The answer can only be, those whom Carlyle denominates as "Superiors" or "Heroes"; those, namely, who, we are to presume, have already found it. Hence the problem of government is for Carlyle simply that of finding "your Real-Superiors", and letting them govern you, while democracy is the form of government into which communities lapse in the absence of Real-Superiors to govern them. Democracy means, for Carlyle, "despair of finding any Heroes to govern you, and contented putting up with the want of them".

Mazzini (1805-1872) looked not to individuals but to the nation to discover the moral law. His writings are, unfortunately, not as clear as could be wished, but broadly his view is that democracy is tolerable as a form of government in so far as it observes the moral law, but that, if it does not, the people are not, or ought not to be (for there is the confusion between "fact" and "ought" which we have already noticed in discussing the theory of Sovereignty)<sup>1</sup> sovereign, and the people's will ought not to be obeyed. "The simple vote of a majority", Mazzini writes, "does not constitute sovereignty, if it evidently contradicts the supreme moral precepts . . . the will of the people is sacred, when it interprets and applies the moral law; null and impotent when it dissociates itself from the law, and only represents caprice." And, if the people's will does not "interpret the moral law", then—the inference seems inescapable although Mazzini does not draw it—the people must be directed from above.

The "Superior" Man is he who Embodies the General Will. This inference is unhesitatingly drawn by Italian fascists, who argue as follows. Questions of right and wrong are matters of objective and discernible fact.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 514.

Tyranny, according to Major Barnes, is the triumph of evil; freedom is emancipation from sin, a sentiment which T. H. Green might have echoed. Government ought, therefore, to be in the hands of the best available people, that is to say of those people who know the moral law, since only under such men will the mass escape tyranny and achieve freedom. Just as it is the business of "the best" to rule in accordance with the moral law, so the State may be conceived to have a moral object, namely, that of fulfilling the moral law, from which it follows that, since a government which is based upon a sectional, party or majority vote will be concerned with the promotion of selfish interests, such a government will negate the object of the State. Hence democracy, majority rule and the party system must be rejected and any activity which threatens the realization by the State of its true end, namely, that of fulfilling the moral law, must be prohibited. Consequently government has a "positive duty"—I am quoting from Major Barnes—"in accordance with such lights as it possesses, to aim at stamping out—even if prudence dictates that the process should be gradual—by the sanction of its laws every form of activity which is anti-social, anti-patriotic, anti-moral and anti-religious".

Following Rousseau and the idealist theory of the State, Italian Fascism proceeds to identify the will to discern and to apply the moral law, the will, that is, to act rightly, with the General Will. Hence those who discern and apply the moral law are the repositories and interpreters of the General Will. Government, then, should be the prerogative of "the best" in a community. Imbued by nature with a high moral purpose, trained so to discipline themselves that they may be able to realize the purpose that imbues them, they will direct the policy of the State in such a way as to promote the reign of the moral law among the citizens who are subject to their government. Such are the fundamental ethical principles from which Italian Fascism derives the political principle of aristocratic government.

We are now in a position to make the transition from ethics to politics and to give some account of fascist theories of State.

#### IV. THE POLITICAL DOCTRINES OF FASCISM

**The State and the Individual.** The fascist theory of the State is, in effect, the idealist theory described in the last chapter. This, at least, is true of Italian and German Fascism, although there are varieties of Fascism, notably in Spain and Austria, which derive their claim to authority from the Roman Catholic Church, rather than from the State. These clerical varieties of Fascism sometimes find themselves in practice in opposition to the State, and would not in theory be prepared to accept all the conclusions of the idealist theory of the State described in Chapter XV. The main stream of fascist thought incorporates these conclusions. The State is regarded as a whole which is more than the sum of its members, and has a being in its own right which informs that of the members which it nevertheless transcends. The being of the State is a moral being; the State has, that is to say, a purpose to fulfil, and it is the duty of its members to enable it to fulfil its purpose. Moreover, it is only through the right performance of their duty to the State that they can fully develop their own personalities. Thus the being of the individual is enhanced by service to the State. By co-operation with his fellows in pursuit of a common purpose which is greater than his own purpose he develops his nature and realizes all that he has it in him to be; he also realizes that in himself which would otherwise remain unrealized because unrealizable. Thus service to the Totalitarian State elevates the individual to a higher plane than that which is attainable in a life devoted to personal ends. It is a mistake, the fascists would maintain, to suppose that the mentality of the citizens of the Totalitarian State is slavish. On the contrary, tendencies to

self-assertion and aggression are transcended in the service of an ideal and in obedience to a leader, and the individual is lifted out of the selfish little pit of vanity and desire which is the self, and is merged in something which is greater than the self. As Mussolini puts it, "It is the State which educates its citizens in civic virtue, gives them a consciousness of their mission and welds them into unity". In Germany, confidence in the Leader is said to transform a heterogeneous mob of individual units into a homogeneous and self-assured nation.

In all these ways the State contributes to the personality of its members. Although, however, the individual owes duties to the State, it owes none to the individual. It is not with its citizens a coequal member of a world in which both it and they are bound by moral principles which are independent of either; it is itself the source of the citizen's morality. For at this point the theory of the General Will is invoked to prove that, since the State is a moral entity, whatever the State does is right. To quote again from Herr Wagner, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, "What Hitler decides is right and will remain eternally right. Whatever is useful to the German people is right; whatever is harmful is wrong".

Not only is the State not bound by the morality of which it is itself the source in its relations with its own citizens; it is exempt from moral obligations in its dealings with other States. Since it is sovereign and in its own sphere omnipotent, there can be no power higher than its power. Therefore, it can own no superior among other nations, nor can it admit itself subordinate to any other member of the family of nations. Its natural tendency is to seek self-expression in the form of expansion. "For Fascism," Mussolini writes, "the growth of Empire, that is to say, the expansion of the nation, is an essential manifestation of vitality and its opposite a sign of decadence." Peace in the world depends, therefore, on the chance of no other State or nation being in a position to thwart the State's ambitions. For if opposition to its policy of self-expression

and expansion seems likely at the moment to be successful, the fascist State will bide its time until it thinks that it can sweep the opposition aside. The foreign policy of fascist States is, therefore, one of imperialist adventure and expansion in the interests of self-realization.

**The State and the Group.** Within the nation every manifestation of the life and interests of individuals must be rooted in the State; for the State pervades their nature through and through. Thus Herr Bohle, the head of the Organization of Germans Abroad, writes:—"We recognize only one kind of German abroad—the total German who, a citizen of the Reich, always and everywhere is German and nothing but German, and therefore National Socialist."

In the German Civil Service all officials must either marry or give reasons why they are not married. Excuses for not marrying, connected with insufficient means will not be recognized for, since the citizen belongs to the State, it is the citizen's business to produce children for the State. Women are told that "there is no higher or finer privilege for a woman than that of sending her children to war", while young people are enrolled in youth (Hitlerjugend) groups with which their interests are completely identified. Thus it is illegal in contemporary Germany for a young man to go for a day's walk in the woods with persons other than those who are members of his own Hitlerjugend group, while to meet members of groups from other towns or villages is strictly forbidden. As with the individual, so with the group. Voluntary associations can never in a fascist State be merely voluntary. Groups must regard themselves as integral parts of the State; voluntary associations as expressions of the State's life. To quote Mussolini again, Fascism "conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State".

Many would regard as the most distinctive characteristic of fascist political theory the absolute claim which the

fascist State makes to direct, control and regulate the sphere not only of the individual, but of group activity. "The revolution will be at an end," a leader in the German paper, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, declared in 1933, "once we possess the whole State. There must be no party, no organization besides our own." Thus a football team in Italy is never merely a football team; it is an expression of the spirit, an extension of the being of the State. Football matches with foreign teams are accordingly treated as matters of national prestige. Victory is hailed as a triumph over the enemy, a testimony to national virtue and a sign of racial superiority; defeat is attributed to foul play and regarded as a *casus belli*. The players are regarded as having the honour of the nation in their keeping. Thus when in 1936 the Naples Football club lost a European cup, it was perfectly logical on totalitarian principles for the State to punish the players by fining them £25 each. (The captain incidentally was fined £40.)

It is on the same principle that trade unions conceived as independent organizations, owing allegiance to a movement which is internationally rather than nationally organized, are regarded as excrescences upon the body of the State. The destruction of the independent labour movement in Germany after the successful Nazi revolution was, therefore, a perfectly logical expression of the underlying theory. "Why do we require a Labour Party?", the leader already quoted continues—"We ourselves are the Labour Party. Why do we require national parties? We ourselves are a national party. Why the need for Marxist or Christian trade union leaders?" As with the labour movement so with the Jews; they, too, owned allegiance to an organization—international Jewry—which extended beyond the bounds of the Nation-State. Because of this extra-State allegiance, it was argued that, however keenly they might desire to be good Germans, the whole of their being could never be absorbed in and exhausted by the duties and interests of the good German. The

Jews, then, were also treated as an excrescence and were cast out of the body of the State.

The Nazi quarrel with the Roman Catholics and with the Confessional Church springs from the same source. It is because the Christian owns an allegiance to a power which is other than and additional to that of the State; it is because the Catholic acknowledges the authority of the Pope, which is not the State's authority, and the strict Lutheran claims the right to hearken to the voice of his conscience, which may not be the State's voice, that Catholics and Lutherans are the objects of persecution.

**Principles of Totalitarianism.** It is, however, in relation to learning and scholarship that the claims of the Totalitarian State make themselves felt with the greatest insistence. Of the National Socialist attitude to truth I have already spoken. Truth is not an absolute value existing independently of the human mind and discerned by it. Truth is man-made; it is the name men give to that which furthers their purposes, that is to say, in Totalitarian States, the purposes of the party in power, which does not hesitate to invoke the idealist theory of the State to identify its convenience with the State's will. Now the culture of Western Europe is based upon the absolutist view of truth. It was in pursuance of its implications that universities were founded. These universities had certain principles in common; freedom of thought, freedom to express ideas, freedom to discuss the ideas expressed, freedom to teach truth as the teacher saw it, freedom to search for truth and to proclaim it when found. University staffs were, in theory, selected from one point of view and one only, that of the qualifications of the teacher for the duties assigned to him. No test based on race, class, religion or political creed was held to be relevant to his appointment. Once appointed, he was secure in the tenure of his office, the only grounds for his dismissal being proved moral misconduct or neglect of duties. As with the staff, so with the students; the sole reason for admitting a student to

the university was in theory his competence to embark upon the course of studies which he proposed. The university further claimed and exercised autonomy in the matter of the organisation of its curriculum, the standards of work which it exacted and the discipline which it imposed; in particular, it repudiated interference on political grounds.

All these principles are denied by the Totalitarian régime in modern Germany. The universities have become, and are intended to become, educational barracks, closed to all but Aryans, in which Aryan students will be taught only by Aryans. Freedom is exercised by the universities within a very narrow sphere. Over the universities is a Minister of State whose decrees govern their curriculum and whose code determines their conduct. It will not be difficult to infer the nature of decrees and code from the principles of ethics and politics already outlined. To take one example, illustrating the fascist attitude to science: "the scientist" in a fascist State—I am quoting from a book by a writer sympathetic to Fascism<sup>1</sup>—"is only free to search for truth as the State sees it".

The main function of the university as the apex of the educational system is to complete the production, begun in the schools, of citizens trained in the principles of Totalitarianism. The education in the schools is devoted chiefly to the production of military efficiency. An intensive military training which leaves less and less time for other forms of education is in contemporary Germany compulsory for every child from the age of ten upwards. In December, 1936, the sixth form was permanently abolished in all High Schools, the school-leaving age reduced from nineteen to eighteen, and young men, thus freed from the bondage of the mind, were required to spend a year in Nazi labour camps before proceeding to the universities. In order to carry out these ideals, a drastic purge of university and scholastic staffs was in Germany found to be necessary. In the year immediately succeeding the assumption of power by the Nazis, between 1,400 and 1,800

<sup>1</sup> *The Fascist, His State and His Mind*, by E. B. Ashton.



university teachers were dismissed, not for intellectual incompetence, but for reasons connected with race and politics.

Even art is not permitted to function independently of the State. The vision of the artist, or rather, all that is valuable in the vision of the artist, is the State's vision, and it must not be employed except in the State's interest. "So long as there remains in Germany any neutral or non-political art," Herr Goebbels has declared, "our task is not ended."

To sum up, the principle of Totalitarianism, more particularly in its German form, demands certain sacrifices of free thought, free criticism, free combination, and free imagination, in the interest of the State's welfare. The welfare of the State is that which is willed by the General Will, that is the real Will of the people. This General Will or real Will is in Germany interpreted by members of the National Socialist Party who explain to the people what the interests of the community require. These interests are in all respects identical with those of the National Socialist Party. Such in outline is the theory of Totalitarianism.

What the theory comes to in practice may be gathered from the following quotation from a book, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, by Robert A. Brady: "In plain language, this," the theory that the National Socialist Party is the interpreter of the General Will, "means that the National Peasant Leader *tells* his designees what they are to do, these *tell* their inferior officers what to do, and these in turn *tell* the peasant, according to the law, whether or what he may own, may produce or may sell. Since the Nazi philosophy calls for complete 'co-ordination of spirit and ideas', the same 'delegatory' or 'entrusting' or *commanding* applies to social life, leisure time activities, and what the peasant, his family and all rural labour may think, where they may go and how they may feel about anything which affects Germany, which is everything. Nazi writers refer to it as the 'new German freedom'."

Mr. Brady is, of course, a hostile critic of Fascism, and the fact should be borne in mind in assessing the value of a judgment which, relating as it does to a movement too recent for objective treatment, cannot be other than partial.

**Theory of Corporations.** The principle that groups are relative and subordinate to the State, from which they derive their being and their authority, finds positive expression in the Fascist theory of Corporations. Although this theory receives prominence in the writings of Italian fascists, it would appear that it is still largely unrealized in fact. It is, however, so characteristic an expression of the fascist theory of the State that a few words must be said to indicate its nature. It is not, in the last resort, of individuals that a complete fascist State will consist, such, at least, is the Italian view—but of individuals grouped together according to the functions which they perform in the community. Each such group of individuals is called a Corporation, and it is through his Corporation that the individual takes his place in the life of the State. It is in the Corporation that the State first expresses itself, and since the State is the first order of reality, the Corporation is the second. The individual in whom the life of the Corporation expresses itself in its turn is, therefore, two degrees removed from reality. The Corporation may consist of both workers and employers in an industry, or it may consist of workers only. In this latter event, it possesses the right of collective bargaining with employers grouped in employers' associations: The Corporation supervises the working of the industry which it represents, determining wages, hours, holidays and conditions of work. It also, together with other functional bodies, acts as an electoral college from which members are appointed to serve on the fascist legislature. Officers of the Corporation are appointed from above, not elected from below. This method of appointment of delegates in fascist countries has more features in common with the functional electoral

system developed in Soviet Russia,<sup>1</sup> than with the method of electing representatives which is characteristic of the democracies of the West. Membership of the Corporation is not open to all, and the Corporation has the right to refuse members. The Corporations, then, are not, like the British trade unions or employers' associations, independent bodies; they are subordinate parts of the whole which is the State, specialized channels through which the State's spirit is canalized and diffused for special purposes. Mussolini sums up the theory as follows: "The fascist State has drawn into itself even the economic activities of the nation, and, through the corporative social and educational institutions created by it, its influence reaches every aspect of the national life and includes, framed in their respective organizations, all the political, economic and spiritual forces of the nation." Just as the mind of the individual expresses itself in words for the communication of meaning and in bodily movements for the purposes of action, yet is always more than the words and the actions in which it expresses itself, so the State which expresses itself in the Corporations retains its integrity of being as an entity which is more than their sum.

**Elements of Platonism in the Fascist Theory of the State.** The theory so far outlined is, on its political side, little more than a development of the implications latent in the idealist theory of the State. It is the introduction into the political theory of the ethical principles, that the good are the powerful and that their distinguishing characteristic is strength of will or, alternatively, to put the doctrine in its Italian idealist form, that those who discern the moral law ought to be the rulers in a community—which is responsible for the distinctive and original features of modern Fascism. For the principle, whatever form it may assume, implies that, like the populations of Plato's and Aristotle's States, men and women may be divided into two classes, the class of the "natural rulers" and the class

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 742-750 for an account of this.

of the "natural ruled". It is impossible to read the writings of the apologists of modern Fascism, and, more particularly, of Italian Fascism, without being continuously reminded of the doctrines of Plato. Government, it is asserted, must be carried on by an aristocracy of the good, who are distinguished by patriotism, sense of duty, and ability to distinguish the moral law. With them rests the decision as to the kind of laws which the other members of the community shall obey, the kind of things which they shall value, and the kind of life which they shall lead. As in Plato's State, the object of education is affirmed to be the preparation for government of those who are by nature equipped with the qualities of Will, discipline and character which the rôle they are to fill demands. It is not proposed to confine the recruitment of these potential governors to any particular social or economic class in the community. In theory, at least, they may be selected from any class and from all, but their appointment to the governing class will be made from above by those who already belong to it, not by election from below. Thus the governing class will ideally consist of different grades of officers all of whom are devoted to the service of the State, arranged in a hierarchy of power which is also a hierarchy of merit, the higher grades being entrusted with powers of appointment to the grades immediately beneath them. Up to this point modern fascist theory has closely followed that of Plato, but at this point there is a difference. Plato's Guardians were selected according to a definite and well-defined formula. His Guardians were philosophers, and philosophers were those who knew the Good. Plato described at length the training and characteristics of the philosophers, and the effect of his proposals was to place power in the hands not of those who desired it, but of those who possessed wisdom and insight into the nature of the Good.

**Principles of Selection in the Fascist State.** But apart from the general recommendation that those should be

entrusted with power who discern the moral law, or, if we adopt the Nietzschean version, who will to exercise it, Fascism has no principle of selection to offer. For, the question may well be asked, "Who is to determine which among the citizens of a community are capable of discerning the moral law, or are fit to exercise power?" Fascists often write as if knowledge of right or wrong was the prerogative of a small body of persons, and as if there could be no manner of doubt which members of a community belong to this privileged body. It never seems to occur to them that there can be genuine difference of opinion as to what it is that the moral law enjoins. What, accordingly, in practice they are demanding is that the State should be run according to *their* conception of the moral law. And if we put the question, "Who are they that their conception of the moral law should take precedence over all others?" the only possible answer is, "They are those in a community who possess effective power". Thus the practical outcome of the ethical principles of Italian and German Fascism, different though at first sight they appear to be, is to all intents and purposes the same; for in the absence of any method of determining what the moral law is and who knows it, the Italian principle that the rulers should be those who know the moral law reduces itself to the Nietzschean principle that government should be in the hands of those who have the will to power and are successful in obtaining power. Fascism in all its forms is, on examination, found to embody this Nietzschean principle. Fascism, that is to say, takes over the Platonic principle of leadership, without adopting the Platonic formula for determining the leaders. In the absence of any such formula the ruling class in a fascist community is in practice self-appointed. It rules because it has achieved the power which enables it to rule, and the sign of its capacity is, as I have already pointed out, the successful use of force.

**The Principle of Leadership.** The beginning of the process by which power is achieved is the emergence of a Leader. The emergence of the Leader is mystically conceived and described. The Leader simply appears. Like the Thibetan Grand Lama he is immediately recognized by his marks; but, whereas the marks of the Lama are physical, those of the fascist Leader are spiritual and mental. Having emerged, the Leader selects for office and power the best among his followers, choosing them on the basis of past loyalties, and binding them to him by future promises. The principle of leadership thus established operates from the top downwards. Those chosen by the Leader to be his followers choose in their turn from the best among their followers those who are to serve and to be led by them. Thus a hierarchy is established which extends through every phase of fascist society, through government, industry, education and the armed forces. Under this system authority, whose source is at the top of the ladder, is continuously devolved by those occupying its successive rungs upon those occupying the rungs immediately below them. At the bottom are to be found those "who", in Fichte's words, "only exist for the sake of the others" in whom the "freedom of the will has been completely destroyed". Thus, whereas Plato envisages two classes, the rulers and the ruled, Fascism provides for an indefinite number, each of which derives its authority from, and is assigned its status by, the class immediately above it. Hence, though Fascism adopts its principle of leadership from Plato, the criteria by reference to which leaders are selected are not those which Plato lays down. Plato's Guardians are wise and exercise power not from choice, but from duty; fascist rulers are strong and exercise power because they glory in their strength. The strength which is relevant to the exercise of power is strength not of mind, but of will. Where Plato's Guardians overtop their fellows in point of intellectual development, the intellectual in fascist countries is disliked—many will be familiar with the famous Nazi *mot*: "Whenever I hear

the word 'culture' I reach for my Browning"—and it is upon fitness of body rather than of mind that emphasis is laid.

**In What the "Excellence of the Leader" Consists.** Again following Plato, the Nazis make provision for the breeding of a superior class. Increasingly rigorous provisions restrict marital choice and ensure that the superior shall breed only with the superior. But, once again, it is in terms of excellence of the body and not of the mind that "superiority" for breeding purposes is assessed. Thus a body of young women is being specially trained in contemporary Germany at State expense in the art and craft of maternity. The future of these young women is already determined; they are to marry members of the S.S. Storm Troopers, the Praetorian Guard of the Nazi régime. The husbands, we are told, are to be chosen "for their superb physique and the aim is to mate them to carefully chosen wives whose offspring must be born and brought up under ideal conditions. In this manner", it is added, "it is hoped to create the nucleus of the new race".

Plato, too, envisaged a specially bred and trained class to be rulers. But it was not only for their "superb physique" that they were chosen. In a word, the qualifications of the leaders in a fascist State are those of Plato's second class, the class of his warriors, rather than those of his Guardians.

If we put the question, "What are the training, the fitness, the cult of superiority for?" the answer seems to be, they are for power which is to be achieved through conflict. Modern fascist literature sings the praises of dangerous living, partly for its own sake—"he who dares", writes Mussolini in his Preface to Marshal Badoglio's book, *The War in Abyssinia*, "has the chances in his favour and is almost always aided by fortune"—partly because it leads to power. This is strongly reminiscent of the doctrines of Nietzsche. Peace and security are signs of decadence; hardship, pain and adventure signs of superiority. In a

recently published book entitled *Once Your Enemy*, by Heinrich Hauser, these tendencies are clearly exemplified. "The inferiority complex of modern man," he writes, "has embodied itself in its organizations. He looks for walls to shelter him. He builds breakwaters to take the force of the waves of life. Thus he tries to cheat fate and death. First of all we must smash up the organization. Security and insurance must be wholly taken away from us. No emergency exit must be left, no funk-hole into which a man may creep. Then, and not till then, will life be strong and simple again."

If it be objected that struggle is a relic of barbarism, and that struggle under modern conditions will lead back to barbarism, Heinrich Hauser retorts by praising barbarism. "What is called barbarism is," he declares, "the power of life renewing itself. The so-called decline of Europe is a phoenix rising from its ashes. We are the outposts of Europe, to-day, yesterday, for the last thousand years. We must be ready to fight, and we are ready. Not only for ourselves and our people but for the Europe whose heart we are."

"A citizen and a soldier," Mussolini has announced, "are synonymous in the fascist State."

## V. SUMMARY

### (1) Fascism and the Arbitrament of Force

It is not, I think, difficult to see why the theory of Fascism is associated in the popular mind with war; why it sings the praise of war,<sup>1</sup> encourages the military virtues,

<sup>1</sup> The following is the official New Year's carol, sung during January by children between the ages of 10 and 18 in Germany:

"With the bells in the tower  
Let us arise,  
And fan the fires  
Which to heaven shall rise,  
And bear our weapons—  
For the Year is new:  
War is the watchword!  
Make the watchword true."



puts a premium upon courage and endurance, subordinates education to military training,<sup>1</sup> and sees in the manufacture of armaments the primary purpose of industry.

The principle of leadership, which is a distinctive feature of Nazi philosophy, leads to a division of the community into two classes, the leaders and the servers; or, to adopt the Nietzschean classification, the "superiors" and the mob.

By what method is this classification effected? How, in other words, are the leaders chosen? There are two answers: the first, by reason of the fact that they have a more dominant will than the led; the second, by reason of the fact that they know the moral law. Now there is no way of proving the possession of a more dominant will except by testing it against that of others, and it is difficult to see how the test is to be made except by force. So far as the superiors' knowledge of the moral law is concerned, there are, as I have already pointed out, different interpretations of the moral law. Many will be found to claim insight into the Good, and since there is no independent authority by reference to which the competing claims to superior moral insight can be adjudicated, since each claimant must be judge and jury in his own cause, there seems, once again, to be no way of deciding the issue between claimants save by appeal to force. Once the democratic concepts of popular consent, majority rule and equality before the law are abandoned, once the test of happiness is rejected and individual freedom required to subordinate itself to State necessity, there seems to be no way of determining controversial issues except, in Bertrand

<sup>1</sup> All male Italians from the ages of eight to fifty-five are regarded as soldiers; children are not promoted to higher classes in Italian primary schools, youths do not receive their diplomas from secondary schools, young men are not, as university students, allowed to take degrees or diplomas, unless they have shown the required military proficiency.

In Germany, as already noted, the Sixth form has been permanently abolished in all high schools and the school-leaving age reduced from nineteen to eighteen. During the year thus gained young Germans are required to serve in Labour Corps; at twenty they go into the Army.

Russell's words, "by the appeal to force and the arbitrament of the big battalions". Fascism, in fact, selects one portion of mankind as being alone important, but gives no indication of the standard by reference to which the selection is to be made. Thus fitness to rule is established by nothing but success in becoming a ruler, and whoever considers himself worthy of power will feel justified in seeking to demonstrate his worthiness by attempting its exercise.

So far as the relations between States are concerned, the idealist conception of the State as an entity which is exempt from moral relations in its dealings with other States, coupled with the affirmation that the State is also an entity whose true nature realizes itself by expansion, ensures that the foreign policy of fascist states will be one of aggression tempered only by expediency. Finally, the political needs of dictators who live and thrive in an atmosphere of alarms and excursions, sharpened as they are by economic stresses which dictate the distribution of circuses in the absence of bread, make it reasonably certain that fascist practice will not fall short of the precepts of idealist theory.

(2) **The Fascist and the Platonic Theories of the State Contrasted.** A close relationship between Fascism and Plato's theory of the State is so frequently asserted that it is worth while in conclusion to emphasize again some of the points of difference. Both Fascism and Plato envisage an authoritarian State in which the best make the laws and the many achieve such happiness and virtue as lie within their compass, by cheerfully obeying the laws and giving their services, thus enabling the State to function and the best to realize the purposes which are appropriate to the best. The differences are two. First, in Plato's State the criterion by reference to which the best are selected is that of knowledge or wisdom. There is an absolute good and an absolute justice. Men may be so educated that they can apprehend these absolutes. In the light of the knowledge which their apprehension

reveals, they will so frame the laws and ordinances of the State that they manifest the Forms of goodness and justice. Obeying these laws, subscribing to these ordinances, men will realize the degree of goodness and justice which is possible to ordinary human beings living on the earth. Fascist leaders, on the contrary, select themselves; they do, indeed, make claim to know what is good, but since no standard is provided by reference to which their claim may be tested, they manifest their superiority by determination and skill in achieving and ruthlessness in exercising power. Power is treated as if both for the individual and the State it were itself a good. This view is explicitly maintained in Nietzsche's philosophy, and is supported in the contemporary world by theories of racial superiority which maintain that certain peoples are racially superior to others and ought, therefore, to rule over them.

Secondly, the end for which government is exercised in Plato's State is the well-being of the community as a whole. This well-being is envisaged in terms of wisdom for the few and justice for the many. Justice, the contented doing of the job for which he is fitted, is the highest morality of which the ordinary man is capable; but, Plato would add, in living according to the laws and ordinances which the Guardians have framed for him, he also achieves such happiness as appertains to his nature; and that it should enable him to do so is one of the objects, perhaps the chief object, of the State. It is not true, then, to say that Plato treats the ordinary man only as a means; he is prepared to regard his welfare as an end, though as an end of inferior value.

The object for which rule is exercised in a fascist State is the enhancement of the power of the few, the many being regarded merely as the raw material over which the power of the few is exercised and the means through which it is achieved. As Fichte puts it, "The ignoble man who only exists for the sake of the other must likewise sacrifice himself". Thus, for Fascism, the subordination of the individual to something other than himself becomes an

end in itself. It is true that by invoking the principles of the idealist theory of the State an endeavour is made to show that in subordinating himself to the State the individual is realizing his true nature. But Fascism would not, I imagine, maintain that any existing State is an ideal one and the theory, it will be remembered,<sup>1</sup> asserts that it is only in the State as such, that is to say, in the ideal State, that realization of the self's true nature through subordination to the State is achieved. In practice the subordination of the individual becomes a subordination to the State *for the sake of the State*. "All individuals or groups," says Mussolini, "are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State." The end of the individual is, then, to be found only in the end of the State. What, then, is the end of the State? Mussolini answers by bluntly announcing that the fascist State is "an embodied will to power and government"; it is in the interests of this "embodied will" that Fascism considers itself entitled to subordinate the individual to the State. Over whom are the "power and government" exercised? Over other States abroad and over the mass of inferior individuals at home. Thus the evolution of powerful individuals in the community of individuals and of powerful nations in the community of nations is the ultimate end to the pursuit of which everything else must be subordinated.

### *Books*

#### *Ancestry of Fascism.*

PLATO. *The Republic*, especially Books VIII and IX.

MACHIAVELLI, NICCOLO. *The Prince*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, p. 602.

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- Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia contains a good account of the anti-intellectualist tendencies of Fascism.

## CHAPTER XVII: THEORY OF COMMUNISM

### I. EXPOSITION

**Introductory.** Communism is only partly an ethical, only partly a political doctrine. It is also a metaphysical philosophy, a theory of the nature of reality, a theory of knowledge and a theory of economics. The economic aspect of Communism lies outside the scope of this book, and, since this constitutes an integral part of the main body of communist doctrine, my treatment here must necessarily be incomplete. Some account of the metaphysical basis of Communism and of its theory of knowledge is given in Chapter XVII of my *Guide to Philosophy*; these topics, therefore, receive only a passing mention here. As certain of the ethical and political doctrines which form part of the philosophy of Communism are also described in my *Guide to Philosophy*, a number of passages in that book relate to subjects which properly fall within the scope of this one. I do not wish to rewrite in different words what I have written there, and I have accordingly ventured to reprint these passages as they stand, in so far as they seem to be both accurate and appropriate.

**The Dialectical Process.** Communism as a coherent body of doctrine first takes shape in the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). It was originally known as Dialectical Materialism. The word "Dialectical" indicates its partial derivation from Hegel. Hegel taught that the development both of thought and of things is brought about through a conflict of opposing elements or tendencies. The doctrine is two-sided. It is a description of the way in which things come into

being, develop and behave, and it is a description of the way in which we come to learn the truth about them. For Hegel, the two processes, the development of things and the discovery of truth, were aspects of the same reality; but whereas he gave logical priority to the second, Marx emphasized the priority of the first.

The dialectical process involves a continual series of ups and downs. One tendency by its very success generates its opposite, so that at the very moment of its apparent triumph its opposite begins to gain upon it. To take one of Marx's own examples:—the nineteenth century saw the development of an increasingly triumphant and increasingly extreme Individualism. But Individualism throughout the whole period of its advance was generating Collectivism, which first entered the field as a formidable rival at the very moment of Individualism's apparent triumph. Since in coming to fruition any tendency or movement prepares the way for its opposite, the right understanding of the tendencies operating in society at any given moment depends upon a knowledge of the processes which have brought that society into being.

But the movement from one tendency to the other is not simply that of a see-saw. The later tendency is truer than the earlier because it takes it into account and includes it. Thus the conflict of opposing tendencies both in thought and in events is no less fruitful than necessary, since it leads to a development in the direction of truth and reality. There is, however, no finality about the process, which is endless.

**Marx's Materialism.** Hegel held that the driving force of the dialectical process was the ideas themselves. Marx denied this; for him, ideas which were not the ideas of any mind were meaningless. Moreover, he held a materialist doctrine according to which minds are themselves in an important sense the reflections of the environment in which they operate. The events which take place in a mind are, therefore, in the last resort,

etermined by events or movements in the world outside mind.<sup>1</sup> These events in the physical world are the erators of events in the mind of man, and consequently ermine the process which we call history. Of this ccess the mind of man is an integral part, but it is t the originator.

**Marx's Theory of History.** The theory of the Dialectic, combined with the materialist view of the causation events, issues in a theory of history. According to this istory, events occur as the result of the conflict of oppos- g tendencies; the truth about events, that is to say the rrect interpretation of history, will be reached by e understanding of both the opposing tendencies and of the ult of their conflict. Just as in the world of thought, pursue a tendency to its logical conclusion is to reveal opposite, so in the world of fact the very success of one ovement tends to call into existence its opposite. Feudal- n engendered the conditions which permitted the rise the bourgeoisie, who, through the expansion of industry d the growth of commerce, were presently to destroy udalism; and Capitalism, by reason of its creation of a ass-conscious proletariat, is forging the instrument of its wn destruction. But while from one point of view—looked : from the outside as it were—the tendency is a one-sided evelopment which is seen to call its opposite into exist- ace to correct its one-sidedness, from another—viewed as were from the inside—the tendency is itself seen as a nthesis of opposites. Thus each system of society con- uns its opposite within itself, and it is the opposition etween it and the opposite it contains which leads to e disruption of the system and to its supersession by other.

Marx's metaphysical background is thus dialectical and aterialist. His dialectical theory teaches that movements f any kind result from the confrontation of opposites, and

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 694-696 below for an expansion and qualification of this



that which emerges as the result of the confrontation comprises within itself and transcends both opposites whose conflict has produced it. His Materialism leads him to insist that the driving force behind the process of dialectical development is in the last resort not a mental, but a physical event. It is not the thoughts and wills of men, but changes of climates, discoveries of raw materials, and the inventions of new technical processes which determine the course of history. The development of new industrial techniques as a result of inventions suggests, it is true, the activity of minds operating upon matter. But, Marx is careful to point out, inventions do not spring fully fledged from the creative brain of man. What men will invent is determined not by them but for them, by the nature of the problems with which the conditions under which they are living confront them. Moreover, the conditions established by the external environment determine in the case of any particular invention which happens to be made, whether it will be developed and applied. Thus even the activity of inventing or creating is not, as it appears to be, a spontaneous mental activity, but is a function or by-product of environmental circumstances.

This brief sketch of the background of Marx's thought will put the reader in a better position to understand the political and ethical theory which he derives from it.

**Fundamental Political Principles.** The gist of the resulting doctrine is contained in the following quotation from Marx's collaborator Engels, which I take from Bertrand Russell's book, *Freedom and Organization*.

"The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this

point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the *philosophy*, but in the *economics* of each particular epoch. The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreason, and right wrong, is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. From this it also follows that the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves."

The two most salient features of the doctrine just outlined may be illustrated by two further quotations. First, the conflicts which lead to changes in society are not conflicts in anybody's mind. It is not in human desires and thoughts, but in the processes of production, that the ultimate springs of change are to be found.

"This conflict between productive forces and modes of production is not a conflict engendered in the mind of man, like that between original sin and divine justice. It exists, in fact, objectively outside us, independently of the will and actions even of the men that have brought it on. Modern Socialism is nothing but the reflex in thought, of this conflict in fact; its ideal reflection in the minds, first, of the class directly suffering under it, the working-class."

Secondly, all the various elements which go to make up the cultural life and institutions of a society, ethical, religious, legal and aesthetic, are the by-products of its fundamental economic structure.

"It was seen that *all* past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles: that these warring classes of society are always the products of

the modes of production and of exchange—in a word, of the economic conditions of their time; that the *economic* structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period.”

**Relationship of Men to Things and Men to Men.** From the doctrine just summarized most of the characteristic and distinctive tenets of communist theory are derived.

(1) First, in order to satisfy their need for warmth, food, shelter and clothing, men have learnt to perform certain operations upon things, those things, namely, which are the raw materials of production. There is, thus, from the outset a fundamental relationship in a society between men and things.

This relationship involves a corresponding relationship between men and men. There will be division and specialization of labour, there will be rights which have been taken by or conceded to certain men to exploit certain things, and there will be corresponding prohibitions preventing other men from exploiting them. There will, in a word, be ownership of some things by some men and deprivation in respect of these same things for other men. But these other men, although they do not own things and have no rights in respect of them, may and will perform operations upon them under the control and direction of those who are their owners; the owners may even compel them to perform these operations. Now the different ways in which things are operated upon under different forms of ownership, and the different operations which men perform upon things lead to different forms of relationship between men and men. Thus the relationship between men and men depends in the last resort upon the way in which, at any given period in the development of a society, things are owned and worked.

**Class Basis of Society.** (2) During the period of recorded history, the relationship between men and men has remained fundamentally the same. This relationship is one of exploitation, and, because of it, society is divided into two antagonistic classes. But though it remains the same in fact, this relationship of exploitation assumes a variety of different guises. By reference to the variations in its form Marx distinguishes three main phases in the historical development of societies. These are the phases exemplified respectively by slave-holding societies, feudal societies, and capitalist societies. In the first two, the relation of exploitation is clear. Whether it assumes the form of the relation of owners to slaves, or of feudal lords to serfs, it is unconcealedly a relation between those who own the raw materials of wealth and as a consequence possess economic and political power, and those who, whether as slaves or as serfs, transform these raw materials into usable commodities. This second class pays to the first a tribute which takes the form of what Marx calls "surplus value", in return for the permission to operate the raw materials which the first class owns, and receives as payment for its labour only a bare subsistence wage. Under Capitalism the relation between the two classes remains fundamentally unaltered, but it is cut across and obscured by a miscellany of confusing facts—the fact, for example, that production is for sale rather than for immediate use, the introduction of the middleman as a link between producer and consumer, the growth of political freedom symbolized by the concession of the vote to the exploited classes. All these developments obscure what, Marx insists, remains the fundamental fact in every capitalist society, namely, that most men are only allowed to work on condition that they pay tribute to the owners of the means of production.

**The Development of Society.** (3) Thirdly, that which determines the development from one phase of society to another is a change in the relationship between men and

things, or, more precisely, a change in the way in which men treat raw materials in order to satisfy their needs. From time to time new techniques are introduced, and these determine new forms of society. Inventions are made, men's skill improves, knowledge of matter increases. As a result, new ways of organizing the resources of production are adopted, and these determine new forms of economic organization. Thus, economic systems, if they are to keep pace with the developing resources of production, need to be continually modified.

**Relativity of Ethical and Legal Codes and Logical Concepts.** (4) Fourthly, at any given stage in the development of society, its moral and legal systems reflect its fundamental economic structure, being conditioned by the need of the exploiting class to justify the peculiar form of relationship between the two classes, that is to say, the peculiar form of exploitation of one class by the other, which the current stage of economic technique brings into being. Political institutions and legal systems and the political and legal ideas by means of which men justify and support them, are thus relative to and determined by the economic structure of society. They are at once its product, its prop, and its mirror and in respect of each of these three activities their nature is determined by the particular phase of economic development which they support and reflect. As with the political and legal systems of society, so with its moral consciousness. Slavery and serfdom were approved by the societies which employed slaves and serfs; inevitably, since the moral consciousness of these societies, being a reflection of the stages of economic development to which slavery and serfdom were respectively appropriate, could not do other than justify them. For this reason, appeals to right and justice by the exploited classes will never obtain a hearing, since the moral standards to which they appeal are based on the assumption of the rightness of the very system against which they are appealing. There are no such things as abstract right or

absolute justice; there are only those standards of right, those conceptions of justice which reflect and justify a particular phase of economic development. Together with politics, law, religion, and art, morals, individual no less than social, form a superstructure founded upon circumstance and modelled to the shape of its foundation. Now circumstance is, as we have seen, constituted by men's relation to things and consequential relation to their fellow-men.

**That Religion is the Opium of the People.** I propose to illustrate this fundamental concept of communist philosophy by considering in a little detail two examples of its application; the first, in the sphere of religion, the second, in that of literature.

(i) Lenin, as is well-known, described religion as the opium of the people,<sup>1</sup> and communist Russia is noted for its hostility to religion. The reason for this hostility is the conviction that, historically, religion has been used by the exploiting class as a method for ensuring the subservience of the exploited. Machiavelli recommended that morals and religion should be used as instruments of power by the intelligent ruler.<sup>2</sup> In the view of communists most, if not all, of those who have ruled have been in this respect intelligent.

The grounds for this view, which constitutes a particular application of the Nietzschean and Thrasymachian attitude to morals and to religion described in the previous chapter<sup>3</sup>, are broadly as follows. Society is at bottom based upon force which the exploiters employ to maintain and to perpetuate the inequalities upon which they thrive. But exploiters who lend themselves contentedly to the purposes of the exploiters are more satisfactory subjects for exploitation than a working class which must be driven by the whip. To ensure the desired contentment, the exploiters invoke the assistance of religion; for religion is

<sup>1</sup> The phrase first occurs in the writings of Charles Kingsley.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction to Parts II and III, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 626-631.

not only a means to reconcile the individual to society; it is also a device for inducing the poor and oppressed to tolerate the particular order of society which impoverishes and oppresses them. Thus religion, the instrument of the rich, is also the bridle of the poor.

The communist bids us consider in this connection the significance of the praise which most religions have bestowed upon the virtues appropriate to slaves—namely, meekness, humility, unselfishness, and contentment; to consider, too, how they have censured as the vices of pride and presumption, qualities which in those more highly placed are deemed to be virtues, and appear as courage, originality, independence, and the passionate resentment of injustice and oppression. The Christian religion goes further, and makes a virtue of poverty. It is only, we are assured, with the greatest difficulty that the rich man will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, which opens its gates to the humble and needy. Poverty and insignificance are not, therefore, as they appear to be, and as the world insists on regarding them, disabilities to be avoided at all costs; they are passports to celestial bliss. As such, they are rightly to be welcomed. The Christian religion, indeed, expressly encourages men to cultivate them, exhorting them to worldly improvidence and inertia by bidding them take no thought for the morrow, and to be content with that state of life into which it shall please God to call them.

As it has pleased Him to call ninety-nine out of every hundred to a state of extreme lowliness, religion, in so far as it is taken seriously, assists the governing class to keep the poor in their place. The governing classes have been quick to seize the opportunity Christianity has offered them of not only exploiting the workers, but of representing the effects of their exploitation as a positive asset to the exploitees.

Religion, then, from the communist point of view, is a gigantic deception; a deception practised not consciously—human minds, it will be remembered, are the instruments, often unconscious, of processes which, set in motion

independently of human will, realize themselves through its agency—but in all good faith by the exploiting class, who have as a rule sincerely believed in the truth of the doctrines whose practice by the many was a necessary condition of their own continued tenure of economic power. Using religion as a means, they have nevertheless revered it as an end. Absolute truth and pragmatic truth have thus gone hand in hand, but while the former was a myth, the latter was a reality.

**Unpremeditated Revelations of the True Position.** Occasionally, however, a member of the governing class, at once less tactful and more clear-sighted than his fellows, has not hesitated to expose the foundations upon which his position rested; for example, Napoleon I, who, though a notorious sceptic, stoutly refused to be drawn into anti-Christian or anti-clerical legislation. Taxed with the protection which he afforded to a religion in which he did not believe, "What is it," he asked his critics, "that makes the poor man think it quite natural that there are fires in my palace while he is dying of cold? that I have ten coats in my wardrobe while he goes naked? that at each of my meals enough is served to feed his family for a week? It is simply religion, which tells him that in another life I shall be only his equal, and that he actually has more chance of being happy there than I. Yes, we must see to it that the floors of the churches are open to all, and that it does not cost the poor man much to have prayers said on his tomb."

**Religion and the Industrial Revolution.** Proceeding with his interpretation of the function of religion, the communist notices how in the nineteenth century, when the danger to Capitalism from the growing proletariat first made itself felt, the religious beliefs of the governing classes became more fervent as their conduct became more edifying. It was important that the proletariat brought into existence by the industrial revolution should learn



to know God, and in knowing Him to respect their betters. Their betters should, then, it was felt, set them an example. This they proceeded to do.

The *Annual Register* for 1798 remarks:

“It was a wonder to the lower orders throughout all parts of England to see the avenues to the churches filled with carriages. This novel appearance prompted the simple country people to enquire what was the matter.” Soon afterwards Wilberforce managed to get the first day of meeting of the House of Commons postponed from Monday to Tuesday, lest the re-assembling of Parliament on a Monday night might cause members to travel and to be seen travelling through London on a Sunday. For the same reason, the opening of the Newmarket Races was changed from Easter Monday to Tuesday. “In the old times,” we read, “the villages on the route used to turn out on Easter Sunday to admire the procession of rich revellers, and their gay colours and equipment. The Duke of York, in answer to remonstrances, said that it was true he travelled to the races on a Sunday, but he always had a Bible and a Prayer Book in his carriage.”

The moral of all this is sufficiently obvious. It was, indeed, put succinctly enough by Arthur Young, who, in *An Enquiry into the State of Mind amongst the Lower Classes*, written in 1798, says :

“A stranger would think our churches were built, as indeed they are, only for the rich. Under such an arrangement where are the lower classes to hear the Word of God, that Gospel which in our Saviour’s time was preached more particularly to the poor? Where are they to learn the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the higher powers? . . .” The governing classes appreciated the importance of Mr. Young’s question. “Twenty years later”—I am quoting from *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832*, by J. L. and Barbara Hammond—“one Englishman out of seven being at that time a pauper, Parliament voted a million of public money for the construction of churches to preach submission

to the higher powers. In the debates in the House of Lords, in May 1818, Lord Liverpool laid stress on the social importance of guiding by this means the opinions of those who were beginning to receive education."

A final quotation, from the dialogue between Cusins and Undershaft in Shaw's *Major Barbara*, furnishes an appropriate twentieth-century application of the Marxist conception of the function of religion:

"CUSINS (in a white fury): Do I understand you to imply that you can buy Barbara?"

UNDERSHAFT: No; but I can buy the Salvation Army.

CUSINS: Quite impossible.

UNDERSHAFT: You shall see. All religious organizations exist by selling themselves to the rich.

CUSINS: Not the Army. That is the Church of the Poor.

UNDERSHAFT: All the more reason for buying it.

CUSINS: I don't think you quite know what the Army does for the poor.

UNDERSHAFT: Oh, yes, I do. It draws their teeth: that is enough for me—as a man of business——

CUSINS: Nonsense! It makes them sober——

UNDERSHAFT: I prefer sober workmen. The profits are larger.

CUSINS:—honest——

UNDERSHAFT: Honest workmen are the most economical.

CUSINS:—attached to their homes——

UNDERSHAFT: So much the better: they will put up with anything sooner than change their shop.

CUSINS:—happy——

UNDERSHAFT: An invaluable safeguard against revolution.

CUSINS:—unselfish——

UNDERSHAFT: Indifferent to their own interests, which suits me exactly.

CUSINS:—with their thoughts on heavenly things——

UNDERSHAFT (rising): And not on Trade Unionism nor Socialism. Excellent.

CUSINS (revolted): You really are an infernal old rascal."

**Application of Marxist Concepts to Literature.**

(2) Literature, it is urged, is not a rootless activity to be studied and understood apart from the political and economic conditions of the society which is producing it. Literature has a necessary relation to life and good literature is that which enhances life. Now human life is interwoven with the texture of society; it involves, nay, more, it is the expenditure of human energy in social relations. To enhance life is, therefore, to facilitate what a communist writer calls "a more productive social organization of human energy". The existing social organization of human energy, that, namely, which obtains under Capitalism, is wasteful and oppressive. Literature which takes the existing organization for granted, which is, indeed, merely a parasitic growth upon it, is, therefore, bad literature. Good literature, on the other hand, reveals itself as sensitive to the possibilities of increased human productivity in the age in which the literature appears, and assists the factors which are operating in favour of such increase. Good literature is, therefore, always in essence propagandist, its propaganda being directed to the furtherance of creative change. So far as the literature of the past is concerned, the test of value is the faithfulness with which it reflects the circumstances and outlook of the class or group which the writer represents. But it is also held that valuable literature is more likely to be produced in an era of economic expansion and political agitation than in one of apathy or content. Thus Lenin, who stressed the need to preserve the valuable elements in capitalist culture in literature as well as in the other arts, was a warm admirer of the fictional literature produced in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century, a period of political agitation among the intellectuals and awakening consciousness among the peasants.

In the present era of declining Capitalism communists recognize one, and only one, creative movement, namely, Communism which seeks to overthrow the capitalist system of private profit making and to replace it by the communal

ownership of the means of production and exchange. Thus good literature in the modern world will specifically relate itself to the impending change from Capitalism to Socialism, and will seek to promote that change. To quote from a contemporary communist writer: "The social organism to which literature has to be related is humanity in its advance to Socialism. The function of criticism is to judge literature, both content and form, as a part of this movement."

**Bourgeois (Bad) and Proletarian (Good) Fiction.** To illustrate these principles, theories are propounded which seek to define the function of the good novel in contemporary society. Most English novels, it is pointed out, are written by members of the bourgeois class to be read by members of that class. They are indicted on three grounds: (a) They are written in a faded and jejune language, in which abstract and latinized substitutes for plain speech take the place of the fresh and racy language of common men, enriched by images drawn from their working experience. The phraseology of contemporary American novels, it is pointed out, is vivid and colloquial in comparison with the flat and insipid prose of English writers, and American novels are, therefore, regarded with favour. (b) In the bourgeois novel the emphasis is laid upon individuals and the novelist's judgments of individuals are inspired by bourgeois, that is to say, by capitalist, morality. The bourgeois novel is concerned with such questions as, "Is Miss X a good woman?" "Did X and Y achieve happiness?" "Did Y 'make good'?" that is to say, "Did Y succeed according to the standards of the bourgeois society of which he was a member?"

The good novel, on the other hand—good, that is to say, by reference to the standards which the principles enunciated above invoke—will deal with masses rather than individuals. "From the mass"—I am quoting from a recent statement of the aims of the writer of proletarian fiction by Arthur Calder Marshall—"now one person, now another is picked out not in contradistinction from the others, but

as their examples." In other words, it is with representative types chosen because of their typicality, rather than with individual persons chosen because of their idiosyncrasies, that the good novelist, that is to say the novelist who is relating literature to "humanity in its advance to Socialism", will concern himself.

(c) The theme of the bourgeois novel is the relations between individuals. The commonest example of this theme turns on the time-honoured question, "Will Miss X marry Mr. Y or Mr. Z?" The pre-occupation with this and similar questions is due to the isolation of the bourgeois writer within his class, a class which has little part to play in the movement of humanity towards Socialism; which is, indeed, only too often opposed to that movement. Because this class is essentially parasitic, its work is non-significant, that is to say, it bears no relation to humanity's advance towards Socialism. Such work has neither interest nor importance; it tends to be monotonous and its performance is a matter of routine; what is more, it is taken for granted that it should be such. Inevitably, then, the bourgeois novelist will take his material not from the working, but from the play life of his characters, and his material, therefore, will be frivolous when it ought to be serious.

The true theme of literature, which is serious or good literature in the sense defined, is—I quote again from Mr. Marshall—"the complex struggle of our class society, its changing forms, its conflicts, its triumphs and inefficiencies, its struggle for justice against self-interest, its apparent chaos and illogical order".

In recent years a considerable literature has grown up which seeks to define the true function of the arts within the framework of the presuppositions of Marxist theory. The subject cannot be further developed here, but enough has, it is hoped, been said to illustrate the communist view of the arts as a superstructure built like religion, law and morality upon the foundation of economic circumstance. The foundation is at the moment that of a declining

capitalist civilization, and most contemporary art is modelled upon the structure within which it arises, and reflects the environment in which it is engendered. It is therefore bad or non-significant art. But the communist society of the future is, in accordance with the concepts of the Hegelian Dialectic, already stirring within the womb of the declining capitalist society of the present, and an art appropriate to this new society, an art which points towards the future instead of being content merely to reflect the present, is already being thrown up as a by-product of the new forces which are making for economic change. Such art does not merely point forward to the birth of a new society in the future; it actually assists it to be born. Such is good or significant art.

**The Change from Capitalism to Communism Must Be Violent.** (5) To resume the exposition of Marxist principles, the Dialectic, as we have seen, teaches that each phase of society carries within its matrix the seed of its own dissolution. "The means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must," Marx says, "also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves." "The means" are, in effect, the next phase of social development which, potentially present from the first in the womb of its predecessor, is brought to birth by its predecessor's triumphant maturity. Thus slavery is superseded by Feudalism for which it had prepared the way, and Feudalism gives way to the Capitalism which it itself had fostered. Similarly the contradictions inherent in Capitalism, to which we have already referred, must eventually bring about its own overthrow through the agency of that very class, the exploited proletariat, which Capitalism has brought into being.

The changes involved are, however, not gradual, but violent, for the reason that the political, legal, and moral systems which rise upon the foundation of an economic substructure, generate a life of their own which gives them

the vitality to persist, even when their economic substructure is crumbling away. Every political system embodies the authority of a governing class which has a vested interest in the maintenance of that system. This class clings to its privileges and refuses to abandon its authority without a struggle. Moreover, it uses the power over men's minds with which its command of the avenues of education and publicity invests it, to persuade them both of the social justice and of the inevitable continuance of the system upon which it thrives. Thus, while change in the economic structure of society consequent upon the invention of new techniques of production is gradual and continuous, changes in the political system are discontinuous and violent. The need for political change accumulates in face of increasing resistance, and it is only the logic of economic circumstance that eventually gives the exploited class the power to break down this resistance. There is thus a time-lag before a community establishes the political, legal and moral systems appropriate to its continually changing economic substructure. It is because of this time-lag that political change when it comes is violent and revolutionary.

**Transition from Principles to Policies.** The foregoing is a brief outline of the main features of Marxist theory on its political and ethical sides. Marxism, however, like Fascism, is more than a philosophy; it is the creed of a party which has obtained control of a modern State. The policies by means of which the tenets of Marxist philosophy have been realized in actuality in the government of a State are of importance not only for themselves, but also because they form an integral part of the philosophy which they have brought to fruition. Communists therefore lay great emphasis upon questions of policy, and without some description of the methods they recommend for the realization of Socialism and the theories which they have propounded in support of these methods, the outline of Marxist philosophy would be incomplete.

REMEMBER  
D.P.R.

**The Type of Situation from which Revolutions Spring.** The events of recent years are acclaimed by modern communists as providing a remarkable illustration of the accuracy of Marx's predictions. Their interpretation of recent events is on the following lines. The origin of the world war was economic. The forces of production were advancing, while the existing social structure remained unmodified, with the result that goods were produced at such a rate that society could not absorb them. There ensued an ever more intense competition for fresh markets, which, under the guise of Imperialism, produced war as its inevitable result. Lenin, for example, defines Imperialism as "Capitalism in that stage of development in which monopolies and financial capital have attained a preponderating influence, the export of capital has acquired great importance, the international trusts have begun the partition of the world, and the biggest capitalist countries have completed the division of the entire territorial globe among themselves". At this stage the contradictions in Capitalism lead to its overthrow, the proletarian class created by Capitalism being the force which destroys that which created it. Growing ever in numbers and in the insistence of its demands, it refuses ultimately to be satisfied with anything less than the expropriation of the exploiters, the social ownership of property which has hitherto been held privately, and the transference of power to the militant workers.

The uprising of the proletariat is not without previous parallels in history. In fact every class which has, at some time or another, been dominant in society, has been supplanted and suppressed by a class which the circumstances of its own dominance have brought into existence. But though history affords parallels to the uprising of the proletariat, this is in one respect unique. All previous revolutions have resulted in the suppression of a class by a class, in the usurpation of the power of a minority by a minority. But the victory of the working class brings in its train the emancipation of humanity. Though the



revolution establishes in the first instance, a society which is itself founded on a class basis, the society which it ultimately envisages will be based on the abolition of classes. Thus communists hold that the battle they are fighting, though outwardly waged on behalf of a dispossessed class, is really the battle of the whole of mankind; and it is this conviction, held with the intensity born of an ideal disinterestedly pursued, which generates the self-sacrifice and self-devotion with which a superficially arid and doctrinaire doctrine is embraced.

But though the emancipation of humanity and the abolition of classes is the communist's ultimate aim, it is one which cannot, in his view, be realized for many years. The revolution of the proletariat may pave the way to such a Utopia, but it does not miraculously bring it into being. We are thus led to the conception of two distinct stages of revolutionary progress, a conception anticipated by Marx and adopted by modern communists; (1) a transitional, revolutionary stage based on the domination of the State by the working class; (2) a communist, classless stage, in which the State as a repository of authority has vanished. It will be convenient to consider each of these two stages separately.

**(1) The Revolutionary Stage. Communist Theory of the State.** Communists hold that no fundamental change can be made in the structure of society without important modifications in the State. The experience of the past, and especially of the Paris Commune of 1871, has taught them that the working classes cannot simply take over the machinery of the existing capitalist State and use it for their own purposes. The existing State machine is, they maintain, essentially unsuited for revolutionary purposes; its officials are unreliable, its procedure ineffective, and its nature incapable of being changed by a mere change of masters. The conquest of political power by a workers' party is, accordingly, of little value, so long as the capitalist remains in possession of the instruments of production. The

possession of these instruments will enable the capitalist class to ensure that a Parliament dominated by a constitutional Labour Party will only pass such legislation as will leave industrial power untouched. If such a party were to introduce measures expropriating the capitalists and transferring their property to the community, the latter would, in the last resort, fight in defence of their privileges. It is held that the growth of the power of the Labour Party in Great Britain, coupled with its comparative failure to make any substantial modification in the structure of Capitalism, fully bears out this view.

It is argued, accordingly, that constitutional means must be abandoned, the machinery of the existing State superseded, and a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat proclaimed. Modern communists have never hesitated to emphasize the severity and bitterness of the struggle which will accompany the overthrow of the capitalist class. Armed violence will be necessary on the part of the workers, not only to dispossess the capitalists, but to resist counter-revolutions designed to restore them. As Engels says, "The party which has triumphed in the revolution is necessarily compelled to maintain its rule by means of that fear with which its arms inspire the reactionaries. If the Commune of Paris had not based itself on the authority of the armed people against the *bourgeoisie*, would it have maintained itself more than twenty-four hours?"

In this connection it is pointed out that the *bourgeoisie* has all the advantages of superior education, discipline, and military talent. It has fighting materials at its disposal and money for its equipment. It is not to be expected, therefore, that, even if dispossessed by a sudden revolutionary *coup*, it will refrain from using these advantages.

"In any and every serious revolution," says Lenin, "a long, obstinate, desperate resistance of the exploiters, who for many years will yet enjoy great advantages over the exploited, constitutes the rule. Never . . . will the exploiters submit to the decision of the exploited majority

without making use of their advantages in a last desperate battle or in a series of battles." Thus "the transition from Capitalism to Communism forms a whole historical epoch".

**THE PROLETARIAN STATE.** During the revolutionary epoch, what Lenin calls a "quasi-State" of the workers is created in place of the existing *bourgeois* State. This quasi-State will of necessity be a class organization, in that it will function as the representative of the revolutionary working class. "In order to break down the resistance of the *bourgeoisie*," says Marx, "the workers invest the State with a revolutionary and temporary form." It follows that the State during this period will be oppressive and autocratic; it is described by Lenin, "not as an organization of order, but as an organization of war"; it will exercise compulsory powers, and it will not seek to represent all the parties within the State. On the contrary, it will represent one party only, the proletariat, and will be definitely used by that party to suppress the *bourgeoisie*.

"Since the State," says Engels, "is only a temporary institution which is to be made use of in the revolution in order to forcibly suppress the opponents, it is perfectly absurd to talk about a free, popular State: so long as the proletariat needs the State, it needs it not in the interests of freedom, but in order to suppress its opponents; and when it becomes possible to speak of freedom, the State as such ceases to exist."

Communist theory, therefore, does not countenance the suggestion that, during the transitional revolutionary period, democracy in the sense in which the word is understood in England and America, can ever be a practical form of government. The dispossessed *bourgeoisie* must, during this period, be excluded from the government, and the State cannot, therefore, be completely representative in the sense in which the liberal political theorists of the last century who thought of democracy in terms of universal adult suffrage, envisaged and commended representative government.

**THE COMMUNIST CRITICISM OF DEMOCRACY.** At this point it will be convenient to give some account of the criticism which classical communist theory levels against the liberal and democratic concepts which until recent years dominated the political thought of Western Europe. Briefly, this criticism is to the effect that under Capitalism democracy can never be a reality, since, in the absence of economic security, political democracy is the shadow without the substance. So long as the mass of men are propertyless, it is idle, Marx contended, to prate of the individual's freedom or of his ability to determine the order of society in which he lives. There is no freedom for the propertyless individual, since, as he has no alternative to selling his labour to the highest bidder, he can exercise no effective control with regard to the kind of life he wishes to lead, while, as regards the structure of government, however democratic this may be in form, the repository of sovereignty will be, not the government, but those who exercise economic power in virtue of their possession of the means of industrial production.

The fact that the workers are now given an apology for education, so far from putting them on an equality with their exploiters, only makes their position worse, since the existence of a semi-educated proletariat enables the exploiters to rivet its chains the more strongly. Controlling, as they do, education, the Press, the radio, the cinema and the pulpit, they use their control to engender subservience and an artificial contentment in the minds of the workers, now rendered more easily accessible to capitalist influences. It is idle, therefore, to hope to win the mass of the workers, while the instruments of propaganda are controlled by the governing class.

As for the political liberty upon which the bourgeois democratic State prides itself, this is dismissed as a figment or denounced as a sop. It is no doubt very pleasant to be able to criticize whomsoever and whatsoever one wishes, and to give the government of the day a piece of one's mind. But to the under-nourished or over-driven worker

such right of criticism is a luxury of which he has neither the wish nor the energy to avail himself. What he craves is a full stomach, not a free tongue. Lacking the former, he has neither the wit nor the inclination to make use of the latter. It is no doubt true that the worker possesses the right to vote every five years for the less unsuitable of the two grossly unsuitable persons who appear in his constituency at election time out of the blue, or descend upon it from the clouds of the party head-office. But of what value—so the criticism runs—are this freedom and this right to a man whose only alternative to starvation is to sell himself body and soul to an employer for thirty shillings a week? As Bernard Shaw puts it, in the Preface to his play, *The Apple Cart*, “the voters have no real choice of candidates: they have to take what they can get and make the best of it according to their lights, which is often the worst of it by the light of heaven”.

**LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY AS THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE.** So far, the argument has been content to dismiss political democracy and the liberty of thought and speech, which is the most valued achievement of democracy, as figments without substance. In the works of some writers, however, it takes a wider sweep and denounces them as definite impediments to the achievement of the economic equality which is the goal of Communism. Thus communist writers have been apt to represent political liberty as a drug which disguises from the exploited proletariat its true condition. Their argument runs as follows:—

Political liberty means in practice the right of voting every five years, sometimes oftener, for a representative whom one has not selected. The votes so cast either have some influence or they have none at all. In the former event, the influence is just enough to enable the workers to extort from the governing classes concessions sufficient to stave off revolution. The English governing classes, it is said, show a preternatural cunning in making these

concessions. Just as they take the revolutionary edge off material privation by the contrivance of the dole and the distribution of coal and blankets, and the revolutionary edge off spiritual discontent by endowing churches to diffuse the Christian doctrines of meekness, unselfishness, and satisfaction with that station of life into which it shall please the State to call God's servants, so they take the revolutionary edge off political discontent by series of legislative concessions such as the Trade Boards Acts, the Old Age Pensions Act, the Unemployment and Health Insurance Acts, which may be regarded in the light of sops thrown to the working classes to dull rather than to satisfy the appetite for revolutionary change, much as Mrs. Squeers doped the hungry morning appetites of the boys of Dotheboys Hall with brimstone and treacle. Political liberty is thus represented as a prop to bolster up Capitalism by making it tolerable. Alternatively, it is a safety-valve through which discontent can work off the steam which would otherwise lead to an explosion. By its means the governing classes are enabled to represent the concessions, which rivet more firmly the chains of Capitalism upon the necks of the workers, as political advances won under a free and democratic constitution by the votes of the people.

**THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION. DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS.** The influence which the workers have been able to exert in the past in virtue of their possession of political liberty, always small, is, it is said, to-day diminishing. The reason is that economic concessions by the capitalist class are possible only in a time of capitalist expansion, when the abundant profits of Capitalism leave something over and to spare. The social reforms which characterized the pre-war years of the twentieth century were crumbs dropped from the rich man's table upon which for a time the poor contentedly fed. To-day, however, the era of capitalist expansion has ceased, and there are accordingly no crumbs to drop. In those countries in

which the pinch of economic hardship has been most severely felt, Capitalism has not hesitated to reveal the contempt which it has always entertained for liberal shibboleths by destroying democracy, suppressing liberty and establishing upon their ruins reaction open and unashamed. In other words, the capitalist driven into an economic corner turns fascist, and Fascism may, therefore, be regarded as the last phase of Capitalism. Even in the more prosperous capitalist countries, the limit of the concessions which political liberty can be used to secure has already been reached. The passing of the Incitement to Disaffection Act in England is regarded as a significant pointer, showing that the tide of political liberty is even in England already on the ebb. Those who care for political liberty and wish it to be preserved are, therefore, contending for something which, from the point of view of the depressed classes, is a shadow from which what substance it ever possessed has departed. The above constitutes a brief summary of arguments which are urged with considerable force in Professor Laski's book, *Democracy in Crisis*.

Similar arguments are used by a number of communist writers to suggest that, at the present stage of capitalist development, there is a definite antithesis between political liberty and economic equality. If political liberty is a reality, if those peoples who enjoy it can make use of it to obtain economic concessions, its effect is to perpetuate Capitalism by diminishing the revolutionary ardour of the workers who benefit from the concessions. If it is not—and its reality belongs already to the past—to present it to the people as a thing desirable, is to put them off with a shadow. Those who value political goods such as democracy and liberty are, therefore, accused of mistaking the shadow for the substance. The working classes, it is said, are beginning to recognize political liberty for the imposture that it is, and show themselves as a result increasingly impatient of those who ask them to rally to its defence in face of the encroachments with which it is threatened by Capitalism in decay.

"The people", in short, "are sick of twaddle about liberty when they have no liberty."<sup>1</sup> We are presented, then, with a definite antithesis between Democracy and the shadow of political liberty and Communism and the substance of economic equality.

**RECENT CHANGES IN COMMUNIST THEORY.** On a number of occasions, I have drawn attention to the closeness of the relation between political theory and historical circumstance. Theories of politics cannot, I have urged,<sup>2</sup> be considered apart from their historical setting, and the emphasis which at different times they place upon the contentions they embody changes—even the contentions themselves change—with the needs and pressures of the times.

These generalizations receive striking illustration from the present state of communist theory.

Communist theory is in process of constant change and development, and it may well be that the considerations just adduced would be declared by a modern communist to be already out of date. These considerations were mainly derived from the classics of communist theory, from the works of Marx and Engels and Lenin, who were chiefly concerned to expose the "shams" of *bourgeois* democracy.

With the coming of Fascism new needs arise, new pressures are felt and, inevitably, there is a shift in the emphasis which is placed upon various aspects of communist doctrine. Such a shift has in recent years been perceptible in the communist attitude to political liberty. Whereas formerly the political liberties of the *bourgeois* democracies were derided, to-day they are praised. For Fascism, in destroying the structure of the political liberty, has not only deprived men of a valuable civic amenity, but has deprived them also of the opportunity of advocating Communism. The deep-seated hostility of Communism

<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister in Shaw's *On the Rocks*.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 471, 472.



to Fascism renders communists by contrast friendly to *bourgeois* democracy. Hence the value of political liberty is now stressed; it was at the cost of blood and suffering that, we are told, it was won in the past, and by blood and suffering it must, if need arises, be defended in the present. Admittedly, it is very far from being all that the workers need or have a right to demand, but it is, at least, something and, having regard to the straits to which the destruction of liberty has reduced the workers in fascist countries, something, it must be conceded, worth fighting for.

**THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.** But political democracy and political liberty are not economic equality, are not, therefore, true liberty. With the deceptive liberty which the workers "enjoy" in capitalist countries, communist writers contrast the system of democracy which is gradually taking shape in Soviet Russia. Of this system some account will be given in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup> Here it is sufficient to point out that its basis is functional rather than territorial, and that it is through the appointment of delegates by those who are engaged upon the same work, rather than through the election of representatives by those who are living in the same area, that it seeks to secure expression of the people's will. From this system the surviving members of the *bourgeoisie* are, admittedly, excluded, although even to them the new Soviet Constitution, which came into force in the spring of 1937, makes important concessions. In general, however, the Marxist would maintain that during the revolutionary period, the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, only the proletariat is entitled to political expression. During this period the State may be accounted democratic in the sense that it can only continue for so long as the mass of the workers wills its continuance; but it is not a pure democracy, if a pure democracy is a form of government which commands the assent of the people as a whole. A democracy of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 748-750.

exploited can no more express the real will of the exploiters than the existing democracy of the exploiters expresses the real will of the exploited.

Thus, before the revolutionary period pure democracy is found to be inoperative, and during the revolutionary period it is declared to be impracticable. Until the revolution is accomplished, it is upon the militant resolution and energy of will of the few, rather than upon the possibility of obtaining universal consent, that communists rely in the struggle against Capitalism.

COMMUNISM AS THE HOPE OF CIVILIZATION. To many this may seem a somewhat gloomy outlook. Communists admittedly differ from most other socialists in believing that the struggle with Capitalism is inevitable, and will be both violent and protracted. They would not, however, agree that theirs is a policy of despair. They hold, on the contrary, that revolutionary Socialism is the only source of hope in an otherwise bankrupt world. Unless Capitalism is destroyed, its struggles will, they insist, rapidly shatter civilization. War will succeed war, pestilence will succeed famine, until society goes down beneath the destructiveness of the forces of unchecked Capitalism. Each fresh war destroys all the petty gains that the forces of peaceful Socialism and Liberalism have won. These are swept aside in moments of danger, and reaction naked and unashamed takes their place. If, then, the world is to be saved from the evils of a capitalist civilization which has outlived its function in the evolution of society, salvation can come only from a strong and resolute revolutionary party, with the determination to overthrow Capitalism when the moment arrives, and the knowledge of how to replace it.

## (2) The Post-Revolutionary Stage

During the revolutionary period the State persists as the organ for carrying out the will of the triumphant working class. But once the *bourgeoisie* is finally liquidated

and the danger of counter-revolution has disappeared, there is no longer a reason for the State's existence. Thus, in suppressing the *bourgeoisie*, the State is encompassing its own downfall; for, in suppressing the *bourgeoisie*, it renders itself superfluous. Being an organization formed on a class basis to advance class interests, it ceases to have any *raison d'être*, so soon as it has abolished class distinctions; being an organization whose function is oppression, it becomes meaningless when there is nobody left to oppress. It will, then, in the classic formula of Marx and Engels, "wither away", giving place to a free society of voluntary associations formed for the transaction of public business. The advent of this society bears witness to the fact that the revolutionary era has terminated. No detailed account of its organization is, however, to be found in communist literature.

Statements with regard to contemporary Soviet Russia are inevitably controversial and require to be received with caution. Attention should, however, be drawn to the continuously accumulating evidence which suggests that the "withering away" of the State has, in recent years, been largely superseded in communist theory, and has been replaced by totalitarian ideals not markedly different from those described in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> The "withering away" doctrine still, it is true, forms part of official communist theory—as recently as 1937 the formula on the subject devised for the annual Congress of the Communist Party in Russia contained a paragraph advocating "the highest possible development of the power of the State with the object of promoting the conditions for the dying out of the State"—but it is admitted that no diminution in the power of the State has, in the twenty years which have elapsed since the revolution, been effected in Russia, nor, if a personal opinion may be hazarded, does it seem likely in the future. Towards the end of his life Lenin declared that the transitional period before the State "withered away" might be "a whole

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 647-652.

historical epoch". It seems only too probable that Lenin was right.

**Are the Implications of Communist Theory Completely Determinist?** The question is sometimes raised whether the Marxist theory of the breakdown of Capitalism and its supersession by Communism is completely determinist. Are these events bound to happen irrespective of human will, or can the human will cause them to occur, or prevent their occurrence? Again, if they are bound to occur sooner or later, can the human will accelerate or retard their occurrence? The answer to these questions is not as clear as could be wished. Marx often writes as if the human mind and, therefore, the human will, were completely moulded by the material environment whose changes it reflects. But the mind and the will are, he also held, not without their reverse effect upon the environment which moulds them.

That the general tenor of men's beliefs about religion, morals, law, justice and politics is coloured, is even determined, by a particular phase of economic development, and that to this extent mental occurrences are the products of non-mental occurrences which condition them, is true. This comparatively simple account, in terms of a straightforward determinism, is, however, qualified in various ways. In the first place, Marx held a theory of knowledge which belongs to the type known as Pragmatic or Instrumental,<sup>1</sup> according to which the human mind never merely knows anything, but always changes what it knows in the process of knowing it. If it changes it successfully, that is to say, in such a way as to further the purpose which originally led the mind to concern itself with the object known, the knowledge is said to be true. This theory enables Marx to represent man's relation to events not as that of a passive spectator, but as that of an active moulder. "Man," says Marx, "is himself the agent of

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XVII, pp. 474-476, for an account of this theory.

material production as of any other activity that he performs. Therefore, all conditions which affect man as a subject of production modify more or less all his functions and activities, including those which he performs as creator of material wealth or commodities. In this respect it can be shown that all human functions and conditions, how and whenever they may appear, exercise a more or less decisive influence on material production."

That there is a Sense in which the Human Will is Free. Secondly, the systems of men's beliefs possess, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> a life of their own which reacts upon the economic structure of society, and so causes changes in material things which would otherwise not have occurred. Even if the roots of a political system are in the economic order, political systems outrun the economic orders which give them birth, and, outrunning them, affect and modify them. Thus a system of government, by virtue of the desires and ideals which it generates in men's minds, is enabled to influence the passage of events, including those events which constitute the process of economic development. There is, therefore, a continuous two-way process between matter and mind. Matter in the shape of the raw materials of the earth—its minerals, its water, its climate—and the methods which are adopted to transform these raw materials into the commodities which satisfy human needs—the mines and the machinery which are operated by workers and technicians—determine the ideological superstructure of society and so condition men's minds. But the ideological superstructure, by virtue of the systems of thought and desire which it generates in the minds of individuals, reacts in its turn upon matter, as human inventions alter the way in which matter is worked up into usable commodities, and human tastes and desires determine the way in which these commodities will be used. Again and again Marx insists that man is in this sense and within these limits free. "Man," he says,

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 680, 681.

“makes his own history: he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand.” Material conditions, in other words, constitute the framework within the limits of which man’s freedom operates.

That Marx’s Fundamental Theory is, nevertheless, Determinist. But from the framework itself there is no escape. Although the process whereby matter influences mind and mind influences matter, is a two-way process, the ultimate determiner is matter. Economic forces make society what it is and men what they are, and, although the institutions of society and the minds of men then proceed to generate a vitality of their own in virtue of which they enjoy a quasi-independence which give them the power to modify economic forces, this influence is only a secondary and derivative cause of historical events. Human beings, in other words, affect circumstance by reason of their ideas, desires and wishes, which, on the basis of the instrumentalist view—that knowledge is not passive contemplation but is essentially bound up with action—produce effects upon matter. But these ideas, desires and wishes are not spontaneous, the products of independent thinking and desiring by freely functioning minds. They are the outcome of the legal and moral systems under which the individual lives, and the institutional and educational training which he has received. They are, in a word, such as an individual, living in a community in such and such a stage of social development, must inevitably have. Now legal and moral systems, political institutions and education are, as we have seen, themselves related to and conditioned by the particular phase of economic technique which at any given time happens to prevail. Thus the economic structure of society which is the result of the way in which men satisfy their material needs is, in the long run, the factor which determines all the others.

So far, the Marxist answer to the question which we are

considering seems to be determinist. There is, however, another point of view from which, within the framework of Marx's theory, the question can be approached, and which suggests a somewhat different answer.

**That the Operations of the Dialectic are Never in fact Determined.** This point of view is revealed by a consideration of the application of the Hegelian Dialectic to the processes of history. We have seen that Marx regards all historical events as the determined outcome of the conflicting tendencies which produce them. This again seems to suggest a determinist answer to our question. But determinism, Marx held, only applies in its completeness to those dialectical processes which proceed unimpeded. If the conflicting tendencies were operating in a vacuum, screened from the influence of all irrelevant factors, and there worked out their conflict undisturbed, each phase of the conflict would, he agrees, be determined. What is more, the rate of its development would be determined and therefore predictable. In fact, however, the two conflicting tendencies, though they may be the dominant forces at work within the matrix of any particular system, are not the only ones. There is always a variety of other forces and tendencies which may cut across the operation of the two dominating tendencies, impede or facilitate their working out, blur the outlines of their opposition and confuse the outcome of their conflict.

Moreover, the two tendencies which are distinguished in thought, do not exist in fact in the abstract purity with which thought envisages them. It is not merely that they are related to and affected by other contemporary tendencies. They contain their own distorting and obscuring factors within themselves. There is no such thing as Capitalism as such, or Communism as such; there are no pure classes and no pure individuals. Marx does not make the mistake often attributed to him of conceiving of the individual *merely* as a representative of his class, whether

proletarian or bourgeois, exclusively swayed by class ideology and invariably voicing class sentiments. From the strict standpoint of Marx's theory, we might appropriately define the individual as a focal point for a set of social relationships. But it is not with the individual, as he is in his concrete actuality, that Marx's theory is concerned. "Individuals," he says, "are dealt with *only in so far as they are the personifications* of particular relations and class interests."<sup>1</sup> Marx, that is to say, is conceding that an individual is in actual fact more than the personification of a class, and that class relations and interests are themselves unreal entities in so far as they are abstracted, as thought cannot help but abstract them, from the social context in which they appear.

It is on these lines that Marx would no doubt meet the charge which has often been brought against his philosophy, that the predictions which it led him to make have been falsified by events.

**To What Extent have Marx's Predictions been Falsified?** Marx taught, for example, that, as Capitalism develops, the lot of the proletariat will become progressively worse. In fact, however, since Marx's time, wages have risen and the working classes of the nations of Western Europe are slightly but definitely less poverty-stricken. Does the fact constitute a criticism of the Marxian diagnosis? Marx's answer would be that it does not. 'It is only,' he would say, 'in so far as Capitalism is postulated as an isolated system operating in *vacuo*, that it produces the effects I have described. In fact, the tendency, or rather the group of tendencies which, taken together, constitute capitalist society, has developed *pari passu* with another set of tendencies which make for collective control and modify, therefore, the development of the first set. As Capitalism has developed, so has Trade Unionism. The effect has been to confuse the broad outlines of the structure of developing Capitalism, and to mitigate the

<sup>1</sup> My italics.



full force of its distinctive effects. It is only of Capitalism unmodified by other tendencies—that is to say, of pure Capitalism existing in abstraction—that the doctrine of increasing misery may be truly predicted. But Capitalism so conceived is a figment. The special circumstances which modify pure Capitalism vary, of course, from case to case. In England, for example, the abstract workings of pure Capitalism have been modified by a contingent circumstance, the existence of the British Empire. Thus, the real proletariat of England has been created in her colonies and dependencies, upon the population of which the English working class is in a sense parasitic.'

**Marx's Conception of the State.** Marx's conception of the State offers another example of this rather confusing distinction between a thing as it is in concrete actuality and the thing considered *as such*, that is, the thing postulated as an abstraction by thought for its own purposes. Marx conceives of the State *as such* as the repository of power in the community; it is the supreme coercive force in the background, nor can it lose this attribute of forcefulness without ceasing to be itself. Even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the State will continue to wield such force, and the condition of Communism proper, when the necessity for force has been superseded, is, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> described by Marx as a condition in which the State "withers away". Of the State Marx continually speaks—indeed, he defines it—"as an instrument of class domination". Critics have pointed out that, even if from one point of view the State may justly be described as such an instrument, it is in fact more than this. The criticism would not disturb Marx. 'It is only to the State, in so far as it really is a State,' he would say, 'that the description can be justly applied. In so far as the simplicity of my theoretical conception of the State has been obscured in practice, in so far as the underlying structure of the capitalist State is traversed by

<sup>1</sup> See p. 699 above.

the incipient organization of social control and modified by the effects of class conflict, the State is no longer completely itself. It has become more than itself, and my definition of it is, therefore, no longer completely true of it. The State, in other words, can become more than an instrument of class dominance, but only in so far as it becomes more than itself.' Marx, in other words, would invoke the Greek conception of the nature of a thing, as that which is realized only in its purest form, to justify his refusal to regard the partially collectivized State as a State at all.

## II. COMMENT, PLATO AND COMMUNISM

**What Ultimately Determines the Nature of a Community.** The foregoing reference to the Greek conception of the nature of a thing suggests an instructive comparison between Marx's thought and that of Plato's. For Plato, what ultimately determines the structure and character of a society is the nature of men's wants. These, he held, are not invariable. They change from man to man and from age to age. Apart from the fact that one man wants different things at different times, one kind of man will want things which are on the whole and predominantly different from what another wants for most of the time. Some want wealth, some power, some knowledge. According to the type of man which predominates and holds power in the State, so, Plato maintained, will be the nature of the State. Where power-loving men predominate, there will be a tyrannical State, where wealth-loving, a democracy or a plutocracy, where honour-loving, an aristocracy.

Now, while Marx's theory of knowledge entailed the view that human beings are continuously changing, when he treats them historically, he conceives of them as being to all intents and purposes uniform, and represents the broad effect of their wants upon society as a constant effect. Treating human beings as more or less uniform and

human wants as broadly constant, Marx attributes the differences between forms of society not to differences between human wants, but to differences between the ways in which human beings satisfy what remain predominantly the same wants. If wants remain fundamentally uniform, they cannot, it is obvious, be the factor which determines differences between societies. Nevertheless, there may be great differences between the way in which raw materials are treated and between the relative efficiencies of different treatments, between, in other words, "the means and capacities of production".

Thus, while for Plato the ultimate factor in society is human wants, for Marx it is the mode of supplying human wants. It is characteristic of his outlook that the only wants which Marx considers in this connection should be wants for material things, for food and warmth, shelter and clothing, while the wants upon which Plato lays stress as primary are only partly material. Marx thinks of the satisfaction of bodily needs, Plato of the satisfaction of what he calls the soul.

The fact that Plato's ideal State is frequently invoked in support of modern Communism—no less frequently than it is declared to lend countenance to Fascism<sup>1</sup>—justifies us in taking the comparison a little further. Communism is, at any rate in the present stage of its development, an authoritarian creed and inevitably, therefore, it presents certain features in common with Plato's political philosophy. Indeed, it shares with Fascism the merit, if merit it be, of embracing within the limits of a single theory ethical doctrines as to the end and nature of man in society and political doctrines as to the end and nature of the State, thus bringing together two branches of an enquiry which, as I have tried to show, have since classical times been for the most part separately pursued. It is inevitable, then, that Communism no less than Fascism should provoke comparison with Greek thought.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 660, 661.

**Common Features of Platonism and Communism.** Among the most important of the features common both to Platonism and Communism may be mentioned the following.

(1) Both doctrines are authoritarian. The doctrine of Communism asserts that the growing intensity of the class war will bring Western civilization to an end, unless the dictatorship of the proletariat is established. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat the government will govern in the interests of the workers and in their interests only. It follows that government must be in the hands of those who accept the principles of Communism and are animated by the will to carry them into effect, while the people as a whole must, at any rate during the revolutionary period, be subjected to their dictation. The people, then, are to be dictated to in the interests of a philosophy which is seen by those who dictate to be true. It was precisely on this ground that Plato justified the domination of the State by his Guardians.

(2) Political and ethical truth is known, or at any rate is knowable. In Plato's State it is known by the Guardians and is embodied by them in the laws which they frame for the regulation of the city. Modern Communism maintains that the philosophy of Marx as developed by Lenin is true, and that it is in accordance with the principles of this philosophy that society should be organized. The truth of Marxism is recognized by communist philosophers who are in this respect in the position of Plato's Guardians. To Plato it seemed, and to Communism it seems right that all philosophies other than the true philosophy should be persecuted, and all conceptions of the State other than that which the true philosophy sanctions denounced.

(3) Both in Plato's State and in the communist State it is the philosophers, that is to say, those who know in regard to the truths revealed respectively by Plato and Marx both that they are true, and why they are true, who are entrusted with power. They use their power to frame

laws and to devise an educational system in accordance with a strictly rational preconceived plan, that plan, namely, which embodies the truths of the true philosophy. The laws prescribe a way of life and the education provides a scale of values. In effect, law and education tell the citizen what it is right to do and what wrong; what it is good to value and what bad; what it is true to believe, and what false. To the way of life and the scale of values prescribed by the true philosophy, inculcated by education and embodied in the laws, each member of the society must conform.

(4) To ensure that they will conform willingly, both Plato and Communism rely upon propaganda; for it is as propaganda that the elaborate educational systems of both States may justifiably be regarded. In the communist State, as in Plato's, the young are trained from their earliest years to revere the principles of the true philosophy upon which the State is based, and to regard all other philosophies with disfavour. Thus, they are taught to dislike Capitalism, to despise the *bourgeoisie* and to distrust Christianity. As Plato would have put it, they are taught to revere the things which the city reveres and to despise what the city despises. The use of education to produce certain beliefs and to inculcate respect for certain values is extended, in the case of the administrative class who, like Plato's Guardians, receive a longer and more intensive training in the principles of the true philosophy. The communist administrator must be not only a good Marxist in practice; he must also understand the principles of Marxist theory. Like Plato's philosophers, he must know not only what he ought to do and believe, but why he should do what he ought to do and believe what he ought to believe. He is required, that is to say, to grasp the fundamental principles of the philosophy which guides his administrative practice. Finally, like Plato's Guardians he must be trained in such a way that he will have no disposition to question the principles upon which the State is grounded.

(5) Communism also provides, as Plato provided, for the special training of a second class to protect the State, and to safeguard it against propaganda designed to undermine it. This second class in Plato's State was the class of Warriors; in the communist State it consists of the members of the Communist Party who are expected to show a special loyalty to the State. Trained to spread its doctrines and to die for its ideals, they may be likened to the watchdogs of Plato's Republic, who stand sentinel over the institutions and opinions of their society, to protect the former from disruption and the latter from contamination.

**The Degeneration of Plato's Ideal State.** The differences between Plato's philosophy and that of Communism are not less marked than the likenesses, and so far as ultimate ends are concerned, they are more profound. In respect of his attitude to ultimate ends, Plato is, indeed, in some respects nearer to Fascism than he is to Communism. In the eighth and ninth books of the *Republic*, Plato describes the degeneration of the ideal State. Various types and degrees of departure from the political and social perfection he has sought to define are enumerated. Among these degenerate States are those that chiefly value honour and those that chiefly value money, corresponding respectively to the second or warrior class in the ideal State, and the third or producing class, and to the scales of valuation appropriate to each class. The State that values honour, is that in which the warrior class is dominant, the goods which this class values being the goods which the State as a whole values; while the State which values money is dominated by the third class and values the goods which appeal to that class. Now Fascism, as I have tried to show, honours power as the chief good and considers military efficiency to be the highest glory of the State. The power lauded by Nietzsche and pursued by Fascist States, is, admittedly, not the same as Plato's "honour", which is a quality more akin to the virtue of the chivalrous knight of Christendom. But Plato would, I imagine, regard the

love of power as an end with less disfavour than the love of material goods, while a State dominated by soldiers would almost certainly have appeared to him more admirable than one dominated by the third or worker class. For the worker is, in Plato's view, always a money-grubber, and he loves money in order that he may gratify his many unruly appetites for the things that money can buy. This reflection suggests the first of three important differences between Plato's political theory and that of Communism.

**Differences Between Platonic Theory and Modern Communism.** (I) **DIFFERENCE IN REGARD TO ENDS.** The multiplication and equal distribution of material goods, which is the immediate object of Communism, would have seemed to Plato an unworthy ideal, appropriate only to members of his third class. The driving force behind the propaganda and effort of Communism is hatred of economic injustice. It is intolerable, says the Communist in effect, that the material rewards of human effort should be so inequitably distributed, and that the poverty and misery of the toiling many should be outraged by the pride and luxury of the idle few. Hence the main endeavour of the leaders of Communism, in the one country in which they have obtained power, has been to utilise man's newly-won ability to tap the material resources of the planet with a view to increasing the available wealth of the community. The results of scientific research are used to increase production, in order that the sum of desirable material commodities may be so multiplied that there is enough and to spare for all. In brief, then, the use of man's increased power over nature in order to increase wealth is the immediate object of communist endeavour. But this is also the object of Capitalism. The immediate purpose of Communism is, then, to outstrip Capitalism in production. It is true that it would seek to distribute more equitably what is produced, but by reason of the stress which it lays upon material goods

it is in effect adopting the same scale of valuation as that by which Capitalism is dominated. Communism, in short, would not set different ends before man, to serve as his ideals and to inspire his efforts; it would retain the ends of Capitalism, but it would pursue them more effectively, and it would add to them the good of economic justice. Plato would point out that wealth and, he would add, the happiness which wealth can give, are the ends appropriate to his third class. He would further draw attention to the fact that wealth, regarded as an end, divides mankind, in that, if one man has it, another cannot have it. Even the most intensive application to the processes of production of the fullest development of scientific technique that we can now envisage, would produce only a limited quantity of wealth. The members of a community which value wealth as an end will then, Plato would point out, be perpetually struggling among themselves for the largest share. A state whose members are engaged in struggle is a State divided against itself; it will harbour within its borders conflict and rivalry and nurture corruption and nepotism. Such a State is likened to the condition of a soul which is governed not by reason, but by the appetites. It is, moreover, one in which men whose souls are dominated by their appetites will come to power. In brief, then, the State that values wealth will be harassed by constant internal strife and cannot long endure. These consequences, Plato would conclude, are bound to result from the setting up of false gods, namely, material objects, wealth and economic power, as the ends of human endeavour and the objects of human reverence. The good and wise man, Plato would add, does not desire material possessions for himself, nor does he value his fellows in proportion as they possess them.

This contempt for purely material goods was characteristic of much Greek thought. To desire possessions was, for men pervaded by Platonic ideals, a mark of ill-breeding. As for social reform, writes Plotinus, who developed Plato's philosophy on its mystical side, "men complain



of the unequal distribution of wealth in ignorance that the wise man does not desire equality in such things, nor thinks that the rich has any advantage over the poor, or the prince over the subject. He leaves these opinions to the vulgar”.

That the criticism which I have attributed to Plato is, in its bearing upon the immediate ends of communist endeavour, justified, cannot, I think, be gainsaid. It should, however, be remembered that there is no ground for equating the *ultimate* end of Communism with the accumulation of material goods. In truth we are not in a position to say what the ultimate ethical aims of Communism is. Even in regard to the transitional condition of contemporary Russia, it is noticeable that the money motive operates with diminishing power on the higher rungs of the Soviet hierarchy. The efforts and ambitions of the Soviet Commissars, for example, would appear to be little fired by love of money, though much by love of power. Thus in respect of the motives of the men at the top, modern Russia approximates more closely to the State which is two degrees removed from Plato's ideal State, the State, namely, which values power, than to that which values money.

(II) DIFFERENCE IN REGARD TO CONTROL. So long as the differences between classes persist, Communism demands that the workers should control the State. It is moreover, through the aid of the workers that a communist government climbs to power, for it is by disseminating propaganda among the discontented masses which Capitalism has brought into being that members of the communist parties in all countries seek to overthrow the capitalist structure of society. The object of communist propaganda is to arouse the resentment felt by the masses against the conditions to which Capitalism condemns them to such a pitch of exasperated hatred, that they will have the courage to destroy the system which is responsible for their misery. Thus the exploited proletariat is at once the lever by means of which the communist ruler obtains

power and the foundation of the power which he obtains. The rulers once established do not constitute a closed class. Communists, indeed, would vehemently repudiate the notion that the communist party in its constitution and membership remotely resembles a caste. Membership, they would point out, is open to any person of sufficient enthusiasm and correct views. Thus the workers are not only the foundation and instrument of power in the communist State, but may themselves through membership of the communist party, become its holders. Thus the communist State is veritably a workers' State.

Now Plato would insist that a State based on the power of the workers can never be a good State; for (a) such a State would still be a class State run, not in the interests of all, but of the formerly exploited and now governing class. Thus like all States which have hitherto existed, it would be a State divided against itself and the interests of some citizens would be opposed to the interests of others.

(b) 'Communism,' Plato would point out, 'has not transcended the class war. Communism represents the victory of one side in the war, and the communist State which is dominated by the victorious party in the struggle can never be other than a warring State.'

(c) 'Not only,' Plato would continue, 'do the rulers in a modern communist State represent and govern in the interests of a particular class, they are often recruited from that class. They are not, that is to say, a caste apart, living a special kind of life and handing down their traditions of nobility, wisdom and public service from father to son. The rulers consist of those men who happen to have obtained the favour of the masses, either by winning their votes or by zeal in persecuting their enemies, the members of the formerly-exploiting class. The rulers will, therefore, be imbued by the same desires as those which sway the masses; they will pursue *their* aims, aspire to *their* ideals, value the things that *they* value, and call good what *they* call good.'

(d) 'What then, is it,' Plato would ask, 'that the masses value and call good,' and would answer 'wealth and worldly happiness.' 'These ends,' he would continue, 'were those of the third class in my State, a class which, it will be remembered, was governed not by its reason, but by its appetites, and which used its reason only in order that it might the more effectively gratify its appetites. Thus the rulers in a communist State will not guide their subjects by reason in pursuit of the true and the good; they will use reason as an instrument for the satisfaction of their desires through the increase of worldly goods. Apart from the fact that these are goods proper to slaves, there is the consideration that there will never be enough of them to satisfy everybody—or so, at least, both rulers and masses, the prey of appetites which grow with what they feed on, will think—and the State will be constantly rent by strife, as different sections and individuals seek to obtain the largest share for themselves.'

*Summary.* The foregoing considerations may be briefly summed up in the form of two objections which Plato would have levelled against the contemporary communist State. First, a State which is still a class State, although the class which is in control includes the vast majority of citizens, will be a State divided within itself against itself. Secondly, the fact that the controlling majority consist of the workers, a fact which Communism cites to its own credit—Communist Russia, it is pointed out, is the first State in which the government, though admittedly a class government, is a government of the majority, the workers, and not of the minority, the exploiters—makes the situation worse. 'For the workers,' Plato would say, 'are my third class. Members of this class are the same in all ages and in all countries; their souls are governed by their appetites and not by their reasons; they do not care for the things of the mind, and they are fundamentally incorrigible. It is such men that Communism honours. It gives them the control of the State and, accordingly, ensures that the State will be dominated by their ideals.'

These are wealth, comfort and good living, by means of which men seek to satisfy their bodily appetites. Since there will never be enough of these things, the State will be rent by continual struggle. Of that Communism which I advocated in my ideal State, recommending that the Guardians should live together and, that there might not be a distinction among them between "mine" and "thine", possess everything including their wives and husbands in common, I see no sign in contemporary Russia.'

(III) PLATO'S REPUDIATION OF PERFECTIBILITY. Plato would demur to the optimism which pervades communist theory. Communist theory would appear to be based upon the assumption that the lot of mankind must inevitably, albeit intermittently and with occasional setbacks, improve. This melioristic tendency is in part due to the influence of the dialectical background of Marx's philosophy. According to the dialectical formula the development of history takes place through the synthesis of contraries. The synthesis is itself more developed than the contraries upon whose opposition it supervenes, and whose different tendencies it reconciles and embraces. A synthesis is, therefore, not only later in point of time, but greater in point of merit. This view is perilously like the doctrine of the inevitability of progress. Yet nothing of the kind is suggested by a reading of history. In innumerable cases the outcome of conflicts has been not the establishment of a more developed system, but the complete destruction of one of the opposed forces. To quote Bertrand Russell:

"The barbarian invasion of Rome did not give rise to more developed economic forms, nor did the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, or the destruction of the Albigenses in the South of France. Before the time of Homer the Mycenaean civilization had been destroyed, and it was many centuries before a developed civilization again emerged in Greece. The examples of decay and retrogression are at least as numerous and as important in history

as the examples of development. The opposite view, which appears in the works of Marx and Engels, is nothing but nineteenth-century optimism."

The issue, as Russell goes on to point out, has practical importance to-day. The fundamental conflict in modern civilization, according to the Marxist analysis, is that between Communism and Capitalism. In the Communist Manifesto, published in 1848, Marx envisages the possibility that chaos may result from this conflict, but his usual view, the view which pervades his later writings, is that the conflict, after some partial victories for Capitalism, will end in the triumph of the proletariat. This result is in strict accordance with the dialectical theory, which teaches that the establishment of one of two opposed tendencies, Capitalism, will lead to the triumph of its contrary, Communism, which will also embody all that is good in Capitalism. In actual fact, however, the opposition may quite possibly lead to a series of wars in which, under modern conditions, there is a substantial chance that the whole of civilization, as we know it, will be destroyed. Hence not Communism, but barbarism, may well be the next stage in the development of human history.

**How Far Dialectical Development Entails Progress.** Whether Marx himself envisaged this possibility is not clear. Had he been taxed with considerations of the kind just mentioned, he would probably have insisted that it had never been his intention to postulate the operation of a necessary law of progress. 'A return to barbarism as the result of another world war is,' he might maintain, 'perfectly consistent with the tenets of the Dialectic, as I understand it, in its application to history. For a return to barbarism cannot in any sense be called a *development*, and it is only to *development* that the Dialectic applies. Now so far as *development* is concerned, all that I ever wished to maintain is that, if there is to be *development* in the historical process, then the next stage in that development must inevitably be Communism.'

Whether Marx would in fact have met the objection on these lines I do not know, but there is, I think, no doubt that it is on these lines that modern communist theory would seek to meet it. The answer, if given, would, I think, fall consistently within the general framework of Marx's theoretical philosophy. In practice, however, the general tone of communist polemics is pervaded by an optimism which is also characteristic of the communist attitude to the future. This optimism is nowhere more marked than in Marx's own work. Marx did not foresee, or, if he did, did not make allowance for, the enormous increase in men's power of destruction, from which the chief danger to modern civilization arises.

### **Plato's Inherent Pessimism in Regard to Human Society.**

Now the view that Communism is the next stage in historical *development*, coupled as it is with the belief that Communism is a good, would have been thoroughly antipathetic to Plato's whole manner of thought, for it presupposes that man is on the whole and at bottom rational and teachable, and that through teaching his rationality can be increased. 'This presupposition,' Plato would say, 'is only a particular example of that heresy which maintains that the history of mankind witnesses a progress from imperfection to perfection. The causes of this heresy, in the form which it assumes in your twentieth century world, arise from an accident of history, and are not difficult to detect. This accident is the increased power over nature which enabled mankind to multiply commodities in the nineteenth century. Man, it seemed, was in a fair way to subdue his external enemies, fire and flood, pestilence, disease and want, and his victory naturally led to a belief that an extension of his progress along the same lines would inaugurate a millennium. The world, then, as it appeared to your nineteenth century predecessors—and you communists seem to have inherited their belief—appeared to be moving towards the realization of an ever greater instalment of good. But man's true enemy is within

himself; it lies in the strength of his own uncontrolled passions and appetites. Your new-won power over nature has not tamed these; on the contrary it has rendered them more violent because it has given them greater opportunities for gratification. Thus the appetite for aggression, which could formerly be indulged without disaster, now threatens to bring your civilization to ruin. Increase of power without increased wisdom to direct the use of power is not a good but an evil.

'Now the ordinary man is and always will be incapable of philosophy. Having no acquaintance with "the Good" and "the Just", he has no bridle to tame his passions and no light to guide his steps. He must, then, be assisted to govern himself. By means of legislation framed by the wise and the good, he can be enabled to escape the consequences of his folly and stupidity. But even the best of legislators cannot improve his nature. They can only prevent him from destroying himself, and it is at the prevention of destruction that the wise statesman will aim. Statesmanship, in a word, unlike philosophy, is the art of the second best. Its object is to prevent deterioration, not to introduce betterment; to hold off disaster, not to bring to birth the millennium. To use statesmanship for millennial purposes as you communists are doing, is to pursue a will-o'-the-wisp, in quest of which you are in danger of losing, through the effects of disillusion and disappointment, such poor goods, stability and security, albeit enjoyed at a low level, as mankind has hitherto been able to achieve.'

### III. CRITICISM

To embark upon a detailed criticism of the theories outlined in this chapter would take me beyond the scope of this present book. The most that I can hope to do is to offer a few comments of a critical nature upon some of the outstanding doctrines. A criticism of the communist view of the relation between the individual and the State is contained by implication in the arguments

of Chapter XIX<sup>1</sup> and the conclusions which they are designed to support.

### (1) Inapplicability of General Principles.

On an earlier page I tried to show in what sense and for what reason the subject matter of ethics and politics is unamenable to treatment in terms of general principles whose truth is deemed to be perceived *a priori*.<sup>2</sup> Marxism affords a pre-eminent example of such treatment. From the dialectical theory of thought and the realist view of history it deduces the propositions which form the content of its political philosophy. Even if the principles of the Dialectic and the materialist view of causation are true, it is by no means certain that their automatic application to the process of history will yield a satisfactory interpretation of the multitudinous events that press for interpretation upon the historian. The view is not by any means unpalatable, though it cannot be defended here, that general metaphysical principles, such as that embodied in the Hegelian Dialectic, even if they possess some degree of abstract, metaphysical truth, are incapable of being fruitfully applied to practical affairs. Men's metaphysical beliefs have little bearing upon their conduct because their beliefs are concerned with matters remote from their conduct. Thus men of business have professed every kind of religion—Catholicism and Protestantism, Methodism, Calvinism and Quakerism, Mohammedanism and Confucianism; but their religion has never impaired their conduct of their businesses. There seems, then, to be no *necessary* reason why men's views about the ultimate nature of things should have any bearing either upon the interpretation which they give to the process of events which we call history, or to the process interpreted.

**MULTITUDINOUS CAUSES OF HISTORICAL EVENTS.** When we come to look at history in detail,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, especially pp. 777-782 and 804-806.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 558-560.



we find that it fits very ill into the ready-made framework of the dialectical and realist theories. What actually happens in history is determined not merely by the working out of fundamental principles and underlying trends, but by a thousand and one irrelevant and incidental factors whose genesis escapes detection and whose operations evade analysis. A thousand cross-currents deflect the stream, a thousand side-winds blow athwart the course of history; personal intrigues, sexual jealousy and desire, love of power, thwarted ambition, slighted vanities and injured prides, religious enthusiasm, reforming zeal, party strife, even the disinterested desire for the public good, all these on occasion play a part in determining events. Nor is the influence of the exceptionally gifted individual to be ignored; great men may be the mouthpieces of movements, but the movements are such as only *they* have made inevitable. To seek to confine all these factors, as various as human nature is various, within the Procrustean bed of a single formula, to derive them all from the working out of a dialectical process conceived in terms of material forces brought into operation by techniques of production, is to do violence to the complexity of fact in the interests of theory. Human affairs are not cut and dried, as logic is cut and dried; they are not painted in colours of black and white, but deepen and fade through innumerable shades of intermediate grey, and, as a result, their outcome is not predictable in the sense in which, if the application of the Dialectic were valid, it should be predictable. Human history hangs upon the threads of a thousand chances; let but one of these have been different, and the tale of history would have to be retold. The force and appositeness of illustration of the following quotation from Bertrand Russell's *Freedom and Organization* justify its inclusion here as a better summary of the considerations just mentioned, than I could hope to give.

"Admitting that the great forces are generated by economic causes, it often," says Russell, "depends upon quite trivial and fortuitous events which of the great forces

gets the victory. In reading Trotsky's account of the Russian Revolution, it is difficult to believe that Lenin made no difference, but it was touch and go whether the German Government allowed him to get to Russia. If the minister concerned had happened to be suffering from dyspepsia on a certain morning, he might have said 'No' when in fact he said 'Yes', and I do not think it can be rationally maintained that without Lenin the Russian Revolution would have achieved what it did. To take another instance: if the Prussians had happened to have a good General at the battle of Valmy, they might have wiped out the French Revolution. To take an even more fantastic example, it may be maintained quite plausibly that if Henry VIII had not fallen in love with Anne Boleyn, the United States would not now exist. For it was owing to this event that England broke with the Papacy, and therefore did not acknowledge the Pope's gift of the Americas to Spain and Portugal. If England had remained Catholic, it is probable that what is now the United States would have been part of Spanish America."

**THE ELEMENT OF TRUTH IN THE REALIST THEORY OF HISTORY.** This is not to suggest that the influence of social and economic environment upon the course of history is not important. On the contrary, the process of events is in the main determined not by human will and intention, but by laws which are themselves the determiners of human will and intention. In his autobiography John Stuart Mill enumerates a series of truths which, he tells us, he had learnt from continental thinkers, which have a relevance to this issue.

"That the human mind has a certain order of possible progress, in which some things must precede others, an order which governments and public instructors can modify to some, but not to an unlimited extent: that all questions of political institutions are relative, not absolute, and that different stages of human progress not only *will* have, but *ought* to have, different institutions: that government is

always either in the hands, or passing into the hands, of whatever is the strongest power in society, and that what this power is, does not depend on institutions, but institutions on it: that any general theory or philosophy of politics supposes a previous theory of human progress, and that this is the same thing with a philosophy of history."

It cannot, I think, be doubted that each of the above propositions is true, and that, taken in sum, they embody most of what is true in the realist view of history.

(2) That the Dialectical Formula is not Self-Consistent.

Even when it is applied to the actual conceptions in terms of which Marx's thought moved, the Dialectic does not yield very satisfactory results. Marx cited, as an illustration of the Dialectic in action, the process whereby slave-owning societies gave way to Feudalism and Feudalism to Capitalism. By virtue of the same process, Capitalism, he held, would in due course give way to Communism. But (a) if development is by the opposition of contraries, it is pertinent to point out that, even if Capitalism is in some sense the contrary of Communism, Feudalism is not the contrary of Capitalism, but its undeveloped form. Moreover, the slave-owning societies are not the contraries of feudal ones. (b) Each phase in the development of the Dialectic is in the nature of a synthesis, gathering up into itself, while it transcends, all that is valuable in the preceding thesis. But is there any significant sense in which Capitalism can be said to be a synthesis of what is *valuable* in the feudalistic and slave-owning phases that preceded it?

The application of the dialectical process to the interpretation of history leads to highly embarrassing results in its bearing upon the next stage of social development, which Marx identifies with Communism. The Dialectic is, as we have seen, envisaged as a process of social development, at once endless and inevitable, expressing itself in history in a series of revolutions which arise from the failure of political institutions and legal systems to transform themselves

*pari passu* with the continuous process of economic change which is going on at the basis of society. The process envisaged is, or rather should be, endless. The Dialectic suggests, in fact, that there can be no resting-place for human society, which will be continuously driven forward by the stresses which the dialectical process develops. Revolutions are caused by the uprising of a class which, according to the formula of the Dialectic, is brought into existence by the triumph of the very class which it is to supersede. Thus Feudalism created the *bourgeoisie* whose industry and commerce prepared the way for its own supersession, and Capitalism brings into existence the mass of expropriated workers whom it drives to organize for its overthrow.

But, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out, though Marx writes at length of the revolution which will result in the establishment of Communism, he is silent as to what happens thereafter. He says "it is only in an order of things in which there will no longer be classes or class antagonism that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*." (My italics.) The reason he gives for this prophecy is that, while all previous revolutions have resulted in the supersession of class by class, the communist revelation alone will bring in its train the emancipation of humanity. Once it has been successfully carried through, there will be no more suppressed classes whose struggles will lead to further revolutions. What, then, of the dialectical process? Apparently, once Communism is established, it ceases. If it be held that it will continue, but will manifest itself in the milder form of "social evolutions", we are entitled to ask how even the "social evolutions" can occur without the motive force of class antagonisms to generate them. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how on Marx's premises political and social evolution can continue at all, once the division between the classes has disappeared. Technological changes will, no doubt, continue to produce some social changes, but it is hard to see how these, if they occur, can be fitted into the framework of the dialectical

process, according to which social evolution takes place through the opposition of contraries.

**(3) That the Technique of Revolution will Lead to Disastrous Results if Applied in a Modern Community.**

A word may be added on the application to the structure of a modern industrial community of the revolutionary technique elaborated by Communism. That the struggle to overthrow Capitalism will be protracted and subject to set-backs, we have already seen. It has also been suggested that the result of the struggle may be, not the establishment of Communism, but a return to barbarism. A further possibility which must now be taken into consideration is the establishment of Fascism. This possibility arises from the development of modern military technique, the effect of which is to diminish the importance of numbers and to concentrate power in the hands of those who control the bombing aeroplane and the machine-gun. According to the theory of pre-war revolutionary strategy, the key to a revolution was to be found in the Army and the Navy. If the Army and the Navy joined forces with a militant working class, anything might be achieved; and, since they are themselves mainly composed of working-class persons, such a contingency, so runs the argument, is always possible, and, should they be asked to fire upon comparatively defenceless strikers or demonstrating unemployed, might at any moment become probable. But the Army and the Navy are no longer the key to the situation; or rather, they are so only in the sense in which the Air Force is the key to the Army and the Navy. A mutinous battleship or a regiment which refused to obey orders, a concentration of strikers, a march of organized and militant unemployed, could be blown out of existence by a few well-directed bombs. Now, the Air Forces of Europe are recruited very largely from the middle classes who have shown themselves unresponsive to revolutionary propaganda.

Whatever view may be taken of the tactical aspects of the situation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the

struggle to overthrow Capitalism and to establish Communism in its place would be bitter and protracted, and would entail a state of affairs indistinguishable from civil war. Now the effect of a prolonged civil war upon the closely-knit economic and social fabric of a modern industrial State would be disastrous. In particular, it would involve a breakdown of the social services, as a result of which a large part of the population would be brought to the verge of starvation. Under the prolonged application of such conditions, social order might itself dissolve in anarchy and chaos. If it did succeed in maintaining itself, it is only too likely that the price of its maintenance would be the establishment of an iron military dictatorship, under which the hardly-won liberties and carefully built-up system of checks and balances upon which the democracies of Western Europe and America are based would be irrevocably destroyed. Hence Fascism is, under modern conditions, the most probable outcome of a revolutionary attempt to overthrow Capitalism.

#### (4) That Power Once Attained is never Voluntarily Relinquished.

Let us suppose, however, that the attempt to introduce a socialist society by means of a revolutionary *coup d'état* were successful. If history is any guide, the government that resulted would be no friend to liberty. Liberty is always diminished during periods of violence, and the civil wars in which revolutions culminate are, if the examples of France and Russia are a guide, no less inimical to it than are wars between nations; in fact, they are more inimical.

The lesson of past revolutions is frequently overlooked by contemporary communists, who believe that the results of a successful revolution would be to place in power men of the disinterested idealistic type, who take upon themselves the unpopular task of advocating revolutionary Socialism now. This belief is a delusion. Revolutions can be carried through only by force. The employment of force

throws up a new and different type of man, the dominating, executive type, who has been found in the past to use the powers with which successful force has endowed him for ends very different from those which originally led his followers to embark upon a policy of force. These ends are normally found to be incompatible with liberty, and liberty, both during the period of revolution and during the period which succeeds it, is accordingly eclipsed.

Communists are, as we have seen, ready to admit that the suppression of liberty would follow the success of their efforts. They claim, however, that such suppression will be temporary only. A successful revolution will, they believe, be followed by a period of dictatorship, the dictatorship of the proletariat, which will firmly establish the new régime, finally liquidate counter-revolutionary elements, and defend the revolution from the attacks of external enemies. During this period the liberty (now enjoyed by the bourgeois classes, but not by the workers) to criticize the government must, it is conceded, be withdrawn, since such liberty would be used by bourgeois elements to undermine and discredit the revolution. This withholding of liberty from one class in the interests of another, from the vestigial bourgeois in the interests of the triumphant working class, is, no doubt, regrettable. But, it is contended, it is no more unjust than the denial by bourgeois governments, under the Capitalist régime, of economic liberty to the depressed workers. In fact, it is less unjust, since, while the few now deny liberty to the many, the many will then be withholding liberty from the ever-diminishing few. When the danger of counter-revolution is over, and the building-up of a classless community is complete, the State will, as we have seen, "wither away", and the restrictions which have been placed upon liberty during the dictatorship of the proletariat will disappear.

**THAT DICTATORSHIPS TEND BY THEIR NATURE TO GROW MORE NOT LESS EXTREME.** Without doubting the good faith of those who employ this argument,

it is possible to be highly sceptical of its validity. For what precisely does it involve? That after a revolutionary government has during a period of years made the suppression of liberty part of its policy, it will, at a given point in time, deliberately reverse this policy and restore the liberty which has hitherto been withheld, with the result that views distasteful to the government will suddenly obtain publicity, and those who have been hitherto immune from criticism will suddenly find themselves assailed. Is this likely? Does history afford a single example which would permit us to regard it as likely? Have those who have won power by violence ever been known voluntarily to relinquish power, those who have been above criticism voluntarily to permit criticism? Yet communist theory requires us to believe that those whom power has placed above criticism will, by their voluntary and deliberate act, suddenly permit the criticism which may lead to their relinquishment of power.

The study of history suggests that dictatorships from their very nature become, as they grow older, not less, but more extreme; not less, but more sensitive to and impatient of criticism. Developments in the contemporary world support this view.<sup>1</sup> Yet the theory of Communism postulates precisely the reverse of what history teaches, and maintains that at a given moment a dictatorial government will be willing to reverse the engines, to relinquish power, and, having denied liberty, to concede it. Neither history nor psychology affords any warrant for this conclusion.

**The Challenge to End Economic Injustice.** The purpose of the immediately foregoing criticisms is to suggest a doubt as to the wisdom, in existing circumstances, of the communist technique of revolution, and a further doubt as to its likelihood of achieving the ends which are desired. Upon the desirability of these ends, however, they cast no reflection. It is Plato, not the author,

<sup>1</sup> Consider in this connection the significance of the quotation given in the footnote to Chapter XVI, p. 626.



who suggests that economic justice is unimportant and material prosperity vulgar. That the existing economic basis for society is unjust, is self-evident. It is a fact to which no believer in democracy and representative government can afford to blind himself. It must also be conceded that, until it can contrive to concede some measure of economic security and equality to those who work for it, a democratic State is incompletely democratic. The views expounded and the positions maintained in the ensuing two chapters, and especially in the last, represent more nearly than any other of the political contents of this book the views of the author. Both arguments and conclusions owe much to the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. It will, therefore, be appropriate that I should at this stage quote Mill's strictures upon the economic injustice which Communism seeks to remedy, strictures which, but for their eloquence, might have been penned by the present writer. "If the choice were to be made between Communism with all its chances, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it as a consequence that the produce of labour should be apportioned as we now see it, almost in an inverse ratio to the labour—the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessaries of life; if this, or Communism, were the alternative, all the difficulties, great and small, of Communism, would be as dust in the balance."

### *Books*

The literature of Communism is enormous. Among the most important books are:

#### *Classical Works.*

- ✶ MARX, K. and ENGELS, F. *The Communist Manifesto.*
- ✶ ENGELS, F. *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific.*

BEER, MAX. The Life and Teaching of Karl Marx.

× LENIN, N. Materialism and Empirio-criticism; The State and Revolution.

*Contemporary Works on Communism.*

BUKHARIN. Historical Materialism.

HECKER, J. Moscow Dialogues.

× COLE, G. D. H. What Marx Really Meant.

MACMURRAY, J. The Philosophy of Communism.

× STRACHEY, J. The Coming Struggle for Power; The Theory and Practice of Socialism.

× STALIN, J. Leninism.

BURNS, EMILE (Editor). A Handbook of Marxism.

*Communist Criticism of Fascism.*

DUTT, R. PALME Fascism and Social Revolution.

## CHAPTER XVIII: CRITICISM OF THE IDEALIST THEORY OF THE STATE AND BY IMPLICATION OF FASCISM AND SOME PARTS OF COMMUNISM

**Introductory Plan of Remainder of Book.** The last three chapters have been devoted to the exposition of views which, directly or indirectly, are hostile to democracy. The idealist theory of the State and the doctrines of Fascism and Communism all repudiate, either explicitly or implicitly, the views of the individual, of the State, and of the relation of the State to the individual which were popularized in the nineteenth century by such men as J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer, who, together with Locke,<sup>1</sup> laid the foundations of the modern theory of democracy. All these views would, that is to say, repudiate the democratic view that the State is in essence no more than a contrivance whose *raison d'être* is to make the good life possible for its citizens, and that its success in doing so is the sole criterion of its merit. In this chapter and the next I propose to examine what can be said on the other side. Though democracy and individualism are in the modern world on their defence, it must not be supposed that they are without defenders, and my account of modern political theory would not be complete, unless it concluded with a survey of what might be popularly entitled the twentieth-century case for democracy. This concluding section of the book falls, therefore, into two parts. There is, first, a criticism of the doctrines which are embodied in the idealist theory of the State and have inspired the practice of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 492.

Fascism. This criticism will also touch, albeit indirectly, upon some of the presuppositions of Communism. Secondly, there is a positive statement of the case for democracy, as it is understood to-day.

The views expressed in this and the succeeding chapter represent more closely than any of the foregoing those of the author. An attempt will, therefore, be made to relate the positive statement of the case for democracy in Chapter XIX to the theory of values with which I concluded Part II; since in this Part I am treating ethics and politics as two aspects of a single branch of enquiry, and to suggest a theory of the latter without reference to conclusions reached in regard to the former, would be to ignore the presuppositions upon which Part IV is based.

The idealist theory of the State embodies or implies three important propositions. First, that the State is a final form of human association; secondly, that its nature can be adequately understood without taking into account its relations with other States; thirdly, that it is a unique and distinctive form of organization, possessing a being of its own in virtue of which it is endowed with rights and powers over its members of a quite peculiar kind, and that it is exempt from moral considerations in its dealings with them. As a result, the Nation-State comes to be personified as a living being with passions, desires and susceptibilities. Its person is superhuman in size and energy but sub-human in morality. I will consider each of the three propositions which lead to this conclusion separately. Consideration of the third, which, in the light of its consequences, is the most important of the three, will suggest an alternative theory of the State and of the relations of the State to its individual members, which takes into account the existence and significance of voluntary associations, and will serve to introduce the positive statement of democratic theory which is contained in the next chapter.

**(A) That the State is not a Final Form of Human Organization**

The conclusion that the State is a final form of human organization, a conclusion which is certainly implied by idealist theory, seems to be falsified by a plain reading of the evolutionary process as it is believed to have taken place upon this planet. This suggests that the State is simply one particular form of human organization among many which have been historically evolved, that it is provisional, and that in all probability it will be superseded. The course of evolution, as Dr. Langdon Brown pointed out at a recent meeting of the British Association, consists in increasing the size, not of the cell or of the individual, but of the unit of organization. Evolution, in fact, is a process by which ever more numerous and diverse units are integrated into ever richer and more comprehensive wholes. The earliest forms of life are unicellular. An advance takes place when numbers of unicellular units unite together to constitute an individual, who is a colony of cells. At an early stage in the evolution of vertebrate mammals individual joins with individual to constitute a family. At an early stage in the evolution of human beings, family integrates with family to form a larger whole, the tribe; later tribe joins with tribe to constitute a yet larger whole, the Nation-State. Thus in the history of England, the men of Dover are superseded by the men of Kent, the men of Kent by the men of East Anglia, the men of East Anglia by the men of Southern England, the men of Southern England by the men of England, the men of England by the inhabitants of the British Isles.

Whatever may have been the case with the earlier integrations, desire for security appears to have been the main factor in effecting the later ones. It was the motive of security, for example, which led to the alliance of king and people against the feudal nobility, as a result of which the Nation-State was established in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages. It is something of an historical accident

that the tendency to larger integration inspired by this motive has not already proceeded to its logical conclusion in the construction of a World-State. Rome nearly succeeded in paving the way for this further integration, and the beginnings of other attempts have subsequently been made. But always hitherto, the factors which make for perpetuation at the existing level of the unit of integration actually reached, have proved too strong for the drive of evolution in the direction of this further integration. For, whatever the unit which at any particular level of the evolutionary process happens to have been attained, whether family, tribe or Nation-State, it becomes the focus of a number of influential human sentiments. Patriotism and enthusiasm are evoked on its behalf, self-sacrifice in its service, pugnacity in its defence, jealousy for its honour. These sentiments combine to resist its absorption into a larger unit, and such absorption has been achieved in the past only at the cost of an appalling price in terms of human suffering. Nevertheless, it cannot, I think, be reasonably doubted that a further stage of integration lies before mankind, and that State must eventually combine with State to constitute the final unit of integration, which is World-State. This step will have to be taken sooner or later by our own civilization, if it is to survive, and it involves the surrender of the claims to sovereignty and absoluteness by the Nation-State.

If I am right in supposing that the State is in no sense a final form of human association, there would seem to be no adequate basis for the view of it put forward by the idealist theory and acted upon by modern dictatorial governments.

**(B) That the State has Necessary Relations to Other States and that its Nature cannot be Considered apart from These.**

In Chapter XV<sup>1</sup> I drew attention to the tendency of writers of the idealist school to treat the State, as if

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, pp. 584, 585, 600, 601.

it were an isolated entity existing in a vacuum, "the guardian", as Dr. Bosanquet puts it, "of our whole moral world, and not a factor within our organized moral world." It is this view of the State which is largely responsible for the corollary that the State is exempt from moral obligations in its relations with other States. That the State often acts *as if* it knew no morality but that of expediency is true, but it is difficult to discover on what basis of fact or theory the claim that it alone among organizations is entitled so to act, rests. That the State is not identical with the whole sum of human society, that it exists in a world of many States, and that it has important relations to these other States which negotiate with it upon a footing of equality, are obvious facts. When idealist theory recognizes these facts, as from time to time it cannot help but do, it assumes that the normal relation of States to one another is a relation of hostility.<sup>1</sup> This assumption is one of the reasons for the insistence upon the value and necessity of war which is so marked a feature both of idealist theory and fascist doctrine. In war, it will be remembered, the State enhances its being, and it is the condition of war which exhibits its "omnipotence . . . in its individuality". In order that the State may make war there must, it is clear, be other States to fill the rôle of enemies and victims. Hence the hostile relation between States is the only one which the theories under consideration take into account, for the reason that this relation plays an integral part in the development and glorification of the State, and enhances its being in ways of which they approve.

So long as emphasis is placed upon the hostile relations of sovereign States, the kind of development envisaged in (A) above, a development which entails the existence and growth of peaceful relations between States whose absolute sovereignty has been superseded, becomes impossible. The practical effect of idealist theory in its bearing upon the relations between States is, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, pp. 584, 601.

to create a double standard of morality. There is one system of morals for the individual and another for the State, so that men who, in private life, are humane, honest and trustworthy, believe that, when they have dealings on the State's behalf with the representatives of other States, they are justified in behaving in ways of which, as private individuals, they would be heartily ashamed.

**EXISTENCE AND GROWTH OF PEACEFUL RELATIONS BETWEEN STATES.** In fact, however, the hostile relation between States is very far from being the only relation. Not only is there common action by many States for the control of disease, of prostitution, and of conditions of labour, and for the establishment of postal, telegraphic, railway and air communications; there are also quarantine regulations, standardizations of weights and measures, and informal arrangements for the repatriation of aliens. There are even inter-State agreements which presuppose the mutual recognition of moral considerations, such as regulations for the control of the white slave traffic, of drugs and of disease, and the adjudicative provisions for the award of the Nobel Prize. As a rule such inter-State relations find expression in actual modifications of State structure only at a considerable period after they have attained concrete form. Although, however, the outward structure of the State may remain unaffected by this *de facto* transgression of its territorial boundaries, it would be nonsense to contend that the nature of the modern State has not been profoundly modified by the growing intercourse between its own citizens and those of other States. Hence, any political theory which seeks to give an account of the nature of the State must find a place for these modifications, and so define the State as to embrace them in the account. This the idealist theory, regarding the State as an isolated entity, fails to do.

Finally, the presuppositions of the League of Nations entail the recognition of the principle that the State is



an element in a political complex which is or may become world-wide, and that it stands in moral relations to other members of the complex. The fact that this principle is frequently flouted in practice by constituent members of the League no more disproves its validity, than the fact that men frequently act immorally in practice disproves the validity of the moral imperative.

The idealist theory which insists that the State has no obligations to the citizens of other States and, except for the purposes of defence or aggression, no official cognizance of their existence, fails in all these respects to take account of obvious facts.

RELATIONS OF THE STATE TO CITIZENS OF OTHER STATES. Once the identity of the State with the sum total of human society is repudiated, once the view that the relations of the State with other States (when these relations are recognized at all) must be hostile is disavowed, a number of the conclusions of the idealist theory, which assume this identity and presuppose this view, are seen to be vitiated. Even if the claim of the State to complete omnipotence in respect of its relations with its own citizens be admitted, it is clear that this claim can only be sustained on the assumption that the State represents and transcends in its own will the wills of all the individuals who compose it. Now there is no suggestion that the State represents the wills of citizens belonging to other States: it is not, therefore, omnipotent in respect of them. Since the claim to omnipotence is used to justify the further claim to exemption from moral obligations, it follows that the exemption does not in any event extend to the relations between the State and the citizens of other States. The State, so far as its relationship with the citizens of other States is concerned, is assuredly *not* "the guardian of our whole world" and is "a factor within our organized moral world". It follows that the State has no more justification for non-moral action in its dealings with the members of other States, than has a voluntary association

formed for a particular purpose in its dealings with the members of other such associations.

If, in fact, the principle of morality be recognized as a guiding principle in the relations of one individual with another, there is no reason why it should suddenly cease to be acknowledged as a guiding principle in the relations of a number or group of individuals with members of another group. But if this is granted, it becomes difficult to see why it is any harder for the State "to commit theft or murder in the sense in which these are moral offences" than it is for a church or a trading company to do the same.

The duties which a State has to its members are no doubt different from those which an individual has to other individuals; it may, indeed, be urged that the State, not being a person,<sup>1</sup> cannot properly be said to have duties at all. When men talk of the State's duties, what they mean are the duties which lie upon those who compose the government and the administration to carry out the wishes of those whom the government governs, and justly to administer the laws which the government makes. Now there is no ground whatever for supposing that individuals who are members of a government or an administration cannot commit moral offences towards those whom they govern and for the administration of whose affairs they are responsible.

**HOW FAR THE "STATE AS SUCH" IS A TENABLE CONCEPTION.** It may be asked how competent philosophers can have been found to subscribe to the conclusions which rest upon such an obvious falsification of fact. How, in other words, did the practice arise of speaking of "the State as such" and ignoring the relations of "the State as such" to other States? Defenders of the idealist theory would answer, and have answered, these questions by bringing forward two considerations. In the first place, they have said, when expressions such as

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 757, 758 below.

"the State" or "the State as such" are employed, their use is that of a class name intended to denote any member of the class to which they belong. The State is considered as a representative of its class and, in Dr. Bosanquet's words, "is a brief expression for 'States qua States'. Would my critics," asks Dr. Bosanquet, "find the same difficulty in the title of a book on 'the heart', or 'the steam engine'?"

But the analogy does not hold. The nature and functions of the heart are not modified by the existence of other hearts. The nature and structure of the State is, as I have already indicated, profoundly influenced by the existence of other States and by its relations to them; nor can we hope adequately to describe the nature of the State, unless these relations and the modifications they entail in the State's practice and structure are taken into account.

Secondly, it is conceded that the account of the nature of the State which is given by idealist theory is not strictly true of States as we know them, existing, as they do, in imperfect actuality; it is true, it is explained, only of the State, in so far as it realizes its true or ideal nature.

**THE SO-CALLED TRUE OR IDEAL NATURE OF THE STATE.** The "true or ideal nature" of the State is, presumably, a teleological expression<sup>1</sup> to denote an organization which approximates far more closely to the State's real nature than any existing State with which we are acquainted. It is, then, only to this ideal organization that the theory purports to apply. If we enquire what the State in its "true or ideal nature" will be like, we may find some indication in the writings of fascist theorists, which suggest that its model is to be found in the totalitarian States of the modern world. These at any rate represent a closer degree of approximation to the State in its "true or ideal nature" than any States which have hitherto existed. Totalitarian States are regarded as approximating more closely to the perfected or "ideal nature" of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 30, 31.

State, because they are more complete, powerful and pervasive than other types of State.

The significance of the assertion, that the only State which really is a State is the State in its true or ideal nature, lies in the use which is made of it to justify a demand for a greater development of the State and an increase in its powers. Thus Dr. Bosanquet tells us that "more of the State . . . and not less, is required within communities". Whatever tends to restrict the State is, therefore, to be deprecated, and any proposed diminution of its powers to be resisted.

But (i) the argument entails a re-introduction of the fallacy exposed in (A) above, that the State represents a final form of human organization. If it does not, and if its power and prestige constitute a hindrance to the movement of mankind in the direction of a more embracing type of political organization, the conclusions that the most ideal State is that which is the most complete, that is the most totalitarian, and that what is required is more of the State and not less, do not follow. (ii) Even if we were to admit that the most complete State is the most totalitarian, and that this kind of State is desirable, the admissions do not constitute a ground for Bosanquet's conclusion that the ideal State will be "the supreme community" having "no determinate function in a larger community". So far as the realization of the "true or ideal nature" of the State in actual practice is concerned, it is a matter of common observation that contemporary totalitarian States which seek to embody the principles of idealist theory do in fact have relations to other States; it is also noticeable that these relations tend to be more and not less hostile than those subsisting between non-totalitarian States. Nor is it hard to see why this should be so. The more complete discharge of the functions claimed for the State by idealist theory can only result in the State becoming more efficient as a State, more absolute in respect of its powers, and, therefore, more devoid of morality in its external relations and more menacing to the freedom of

its component members. We must conclude that the realization by States of a greater measure of the nature of "the State as such" would not remove the incentive to conflict between States—except in so far as a State which was more efficiently organized, might deter its neighbours from attack through fear—but it would render the more State-like State more likely to prevail, should conflict arise. It is for this reason that totalitarian States prepare for war. War is, as we have seen, held in esteem, both by idealist theory and in fascist doctrine. It seems to follow that the increased perfection of States, a perfection to be interpreted in terms of an ever-growing exercise of function and an ever greater arrogation of sovereignty, will exacerbate and not ameliorate the relations between one perfect State and another. This no doubt lends countenance to the view that the normal relations between one really State-like State and another are hostile, but it is difficult to see why the fact should lead us to conclude that what is "required is not less of the State but more", why, in fact, we should wish the State to progress in the realization of its "true or ideal nature". Even, therefore, if we assume with Dr. Bosanquet that it is only to the "State as such", that is to the ideal State, that idealist theory applies, it is not clear why the greater perfection of States should be regarded as a good. In existing circumstances it seems likely that it would destroy civilization.

### C. That the State is Not a Personality endowed with Unique Claims

#### (I) That the State is not Exempt from the Obligations of Morality in its Dealings with its Own Members

I have so far considered the assertion that the State is exempt from moral obligations in its bearing upon the relations of the State to other States and to the citizens of other States. But is the case materially different as regards the relationship of the State to its own members? We may grant the propositions that it is participation in

society which alone enables a man to develop his full nature, and that it is only, therefore, as a member of society that he can be really free; we may add that the freedom of the castaway is a purely abstract freedom, since, though he is at liberty to do whatever he pleases, there is practically nothing that it pleases him to do. But the admission of the truth of these propositions does not entail the omnipotence of the State. The State exists for individuals; individuals do not exist for the State. Liberty has meaning only for the individual, and the welfare of the State has neither meaning nor value except in terms of the welfare of the individuals who compose the State. The State, in short, is not an end in itself, it is a means to the well-being of men and women.

Once this is realized, it follows that any theory of the State which admits the possibility that the welfare of the State may be achieved, apart from or at the expense of the happiness of individuals, and justifies its admission on the ground that the personality of the State contains and transcends that of the individual, is, in effect, putting the cart before the horse. Nor is it legitimate to meet this criticism, as supporters of the theory do, with the contention that it is not possible for the State to promote its welfare at the expense of that of the individual, or even to tyrannize over the individual, since the welfare of the State is that of the individual, and the will of the State, even when tyrannizing, is the will of the individuals who are the victims of the tyranny. A decision does not become my personal decision because it is carried against my will and vote by an association of which I am a member. The fact that a man is a member of a society with which his will is on a particular issue in disagreement, does not make him the victim of a social miracle whereby his will is transformed into its direct opposite, any more than, when a minority is outvoted on the committee of a cricket club, the decision of the committee represents the will of the minority.

Nor is there any substance in a distinction between a "real" will of which I may be unaware and a so-called

"unreal" will of which I am ordinarily aware, the alleged "real" will being defined as a will to carry out every decision of the majority of the association to which I belong, when the will of which I am actually conscious expresses itself in a conviction that the decisions in question are wrong. It is, indeed, difficult to escape the conclusion that the attribution of a "real" will to the individual which is necessarily and always in accord with the General Will in which it is presumed to be merged, is little more a device for giving an appearance of legitimacy to what must otherwise appear the purely arbitrary and tyrannical acts of a sovereign State. By means of this device, supporters of the idealist theory of the State are enabled to conclude that, whenever a conflict occurs between an individual and the State, the latter must inevitably be right.

**RELEVANCE OF THE THEORY OF GROUPS.** At this point some account must be given of the political theory of groups. For it is not only the claims of the individual which must be considered in relation to the State, but the claims of individuals organized in groups other than the State, whose members are also members of the State. For the question inevitably presents itself, if the State, which is an organization of individuals for certain purposes, has a being and a will of its own in which the beings and wills of individual members are merged, and by which they are transcended, why have not other organizations of individuals also beings and wills of their own, and why are they also not entitled to claim that *their* corporate being and *their* General Will transcends the beings and wills of their individual members? The consideration of these questions introduces the theory of groups.

**(II) That if the State owns a Personality, other Associations also own Personalities**

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of writers did in fact put forward the view that all groups possessed "real personalities". Among these was F. W.

Maitland whose *Political Theories of the Middle Age* was published at the beginning of this century, and J. N. Figgis, whose *Churches in the Modern State* claims for ecclesiastical groups the independent being or personality which Maitland had attributed to political and legal groups. The theory is primarily a legal one. Let us suppose that a group of human beings is more or less permanently associated in pursuance of some permanently desired end. The question is then raised, whether it is necessary that this group of human beings should obtain the approval of the State and the sanction of the law before it can possess rights and exact the performance of duties. The answer suggested by the theory of groups is that it is not necessary. The argument is as follows:—The group constitutes a "person" with a being and will of its own. Since this "person" was not created by the State and does not come into being at the behest of the State, it does not derive from the State its status as an entity entitled to claim rights and to exact duties. Moreover, to the group so conceived the various doctrines associated with the idealist theory of the State can be applied. Like the State, the group is a whole which is more than the sum of its parts. No more than the State is a group artificially created from without; equally with a State it grows from within as the expression of the purpose which its members have in common.

The existence and nature of the group's alleged personality can be most clearly realized in relation to law. The group—not any one of its members, nor their mere arithmetical sum—can own land, sue in court and be sued. Since it is not dependent for its existence upon creation by the State, it is not necessary that the group should be formally recognized by law in order that it may be subject to legal obligations. It is enough that it should be socially recognized by society as something which does in fact exist. This was the gist of the famous Taff-Vale Judgment which in 1904 made Trade Unions responsible for the collective acts of their members. Thus, whatever view we



may take of the nature and reality of the so-called "real personalities" of groups, that they have "juristic personalities," that they may, in other words, make claims which are legally enforceable, consider themselves to be the repositories of rights which are legally recognized, and be held guilty of misdemeanours for which they may be prosecuted, is a position accepted by the theory and practice of law.

**THE STATE AS AN ASSOCIATION OF GROUPS.** The State, then, is not only an organization which is composed of individuals united in a common life; it is also an association of groups of individuals, many of whom are already united in a common life for the pursuit of various purposes which seem good to them. The relevant questions for the critics of idealist theory are, why, if we are to countenance the attribution of "real personality" to the State, are we to discountenance the application of a similar doctrine to the group, and why, further, if "real personality" gives a claim upon the service and allegiance of the individuals who are considered to be integral parts of that personality, are such service and allegiance only to be accorded by individuals to the personality which belongs to the State? What view, finally, are we to take of the case in which the claims of two such personalities, for example, that of the Society of Friends and that of the State, conflict, as they do in war-time?

### (III) That the Idealistic Theory takes no Cognizance of the Importance of Voluntary Associations

**THE STRENGTH OF THE STATE IS RELATIVE TO THE STRENGTH OF CUSTOM AND TRADITION.** In order that we may be in a position to answer this question, let us consider to what extent the existence of voluntary associations does in fact affect the lives of individuals who are members of a modern State. The last hundred and fifty years have seen the growth of many factors in the life of the individual which are hostile to the State and calculated to diminish its influence. The sphere of the

State is essentially the sphere of custom and tradition. The existence of a State entails that there is a society which is a whole in the sense described in the second Chapter;<sup>1</sup> and in order that a society may be a whole, there must be a certain degree of cohesion, among its members. Such cohesion entails in its turn an ability to "get on with" and to understand one another on the part of the members of a cohesive society, and of this ability common customs and traditions are the surest foundations. Common customs, common traditions and the resultant social cohesion are, as Burke rightly pointed out, the products of slow growth; they take time. It is to this circumstance that the slowness in the development of the political organization which we know as the State is attributable. Just as the existence of a State entails that its members follow common customs and subscribe to common traditions, so its strength is relative to the prevalence of custom and the authority of tradition. Hence a contraction of the sphere of custom and tradition in a community militates against the power of the State.

**SHRINKAGE OF SPHERE OF CUSTOM AND TRADITION.** During the last century, as the result largely of the invention of machinery, the sphere of custom and tradition in the life of the average individual has in fact contracted.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the way of life which was followed by the citizens of European States had, with unimportant modifications, remained unchanged for centuries. People performed the ordinary operations of life in a traditional manner, and the operations which they performed were themselves traditional. Consequently, a general basis of constant, customary behaviour among citizens could be assumed, and it was on this basis that the power of the State rested. The industrial revolution and the resultant increased facilities for communication were responsible for rapid changes in social life. Towns grew up, populations were uprooted, a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 52-54.

new moneyed class was created and social strata subscribing to new codes of thought and conduct cropped up everywhere on the surface of society. People's lives rested less on habit and custom than was formerly the case, and no general way of life could be taken for granted. As a consequence, those of the individual's interests and that part of his behaviour which were common to him and to other inhabitants of the same State, but not common to him and to the inhabitants of other States—the interests derived from common custom, the part of behaviour which was dependent upon habit—decreased both in importance and extent. As they decreased, so did the influence of the State.

On the positive side, new modes of conduct came to take the place of the habitual behaviour which had been based on custom and tradition. As a result of the individualist thinking of the nineteenth century, aided by the rapid changes in material circumstances referred to above, the Greek notion that one kind of good life could be prescribed for all individuals in the State, a good life, which it was the business of the statesmen to define and by means of the laws to promote, came to be abandoned.

For Plato, as we have seen, there was a contrast between the life of the statesman and that of the ordinary citizen; the former set the moral standard; the latter followed it. Christianity taught that insight into moral goodness may come from any member of society, that there is no one good life applicable to all individuals, and that it is vital to leave to the individual the power of determining within limits for himself the kind of good life that he will lead. Thus it is no longer possible to formulate a single all-embracing theory, comparable to the theory of Natural Rights or the Social Contract theory, which will define and govern the relations of the members of a modern democratic state to the State.

**GROWTH OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.** The liberty which individualist and democratic modes of thought have claimed for the individual to choose his own way of

life, extends also to the making of his own contracts and the forming of his own relations with other individuals. Freedom of contract is in a democratic State universally conceded, and this freedom finds concrete expression in the formation of numerous associations of individuals for non-political purposes which have no necessary relationship to the State.

These associations are mainly of two kinds; associations of individuals for economic purposes, and associations of individuals for ethical purposes. They may, like the Roman Catholic Church, be of world-wide extent, embracing citizens of many States, or they may lie wholly within the boundaries of one particular State. In no case, however, do they contain all the inhabitants of one local territorial division. Having for their object either the production of wealth or the promotion of ethical or religious views, they include a large part of the desires and interests which go to make up the individual's life. Before the War, and in democratic societies since the War, these voluntary associations were tending to squeeze the State out of the life of the ordinary man to such an extent that by far the largest part of his social activities were carried on within the bounds of associations non-coterminous with the State. The State, in fact, only entered into the life of the ordinary man when he had to pay taxes, serve on a jury or vote. These associations cutting, as they do, right across the boundaries of the Nation-State have begun profoundly to modify its structure, and present in the possibilities of their ultimate development an alternative to the totalitarian Nation-State envisaged by idealist theory. Hegel, indeed, recognizes the existence of voluntary associations, as he cannot help but do, and concedes that loyalty to them is a good which may not be incompatible with a man's overriding allegiance to the State; but by Hegel's followers a man's loyalties to other institutions, when recognized at all, are dismissed as being of negligible importance, and Dr. Bosanquet, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> looks forward to a time when they will disappear altogether.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV, p. 593.

My criticism, is then, that the idealist theory of the State develops its conclusions, as though the nature of the State could be considered *in vacuo*, without reference to the innumerable voluntary associations within which an increasing number of the individual's activities take place, and with which his interests are increasingly bound up.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF ECONOMIC ACTION.**  
Let us examine a little more closely the nature of these associations. Among the most important are economic associations for the production of wealth. Between the aims and activities of economic and political associations there is an important difference. Economic action is dictated by individual ends; political action by ends which are the concern of society as a whole, even when these ends are pursued for selfish reasons.

It is not intended to suggest, as economic theory has frequently suggested, that man is a creature motivated purely by economic interests. If this were true, if, in fact, everybody were selfish, appeals to the good of society at large would fall on deaf ears, whereas, if no other instance were forthcoming, the self-sacrificing patriotism that marked the opening of the War proves that individuals can on occasion be influenced by altruistic considerations touching the good of society as a whole. The doctrine that men acknowledge only self-interested motives is, moreover, a special case of ethical Egoism whose limitations have already been pointed out on a previous page.<sup>1</sup> It may, however, be conceded that all men do on certain occasions and in certain connections behave in the way which the pre-suppositions of orthodox economic theory postulate as their invariable way of behaviour; it may, that is to say, be conceded that all men behave selfishly on occasions. They behave selfishly in their own interests and—a fact which, from the point of view of society, has the same implications—they behave selfishly in the interests of those for whom they care. The fact that a man cares for some

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 342, 343 and Chapter XI, pp. 391, 392.

people more than for others, means that on some occasions and in some relations he will act *vis-à-vis* society, as if he cared only for himself. It has been said that there is no crime which a family man will not commit; "*Un père de famille*," in fact, "*est capable de tout*". The truth which the aphorism enshrines is that men will often "act economically", that is to say, they will act solely with a view to the advancement of themselves and of those for whom they care, when to "act economically" is to act from motives other than, and often antagonistic to, those which the idealist theory of the State takes into account. It is to the growing prevalence of action from economic motives in the sense defined, that the increase in modern society of associations for economic purposes is due.

**NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTARY ECONOMIC ASSOCIATIONS.** The importance of these associations has so impressed certain writers that they were at one time inclined to regard them as making war between States improbable, if not impossible. Thus Cobden's ideal of Free Trade depended on and was conditioned by an amicable society of free nations affording a secure background for international trading companies and financial associations. To increase the maximum of available wealth, was his chief object, and he thanked God "that Englishmen live in a time when it is impossible to make war profitable".

Sir Norman Angell describes a society so enmeshed by the net of financial organizations that the economic welfare of almost any part of it is dependent upon the economic welfare of the rest. To take a single example, where many might be given, he points out that "the telegraph involves a single system of credit for the civilized world; that system, of credit involves the financial interdependence of all States".

The single system of credit is reinforced by a synchronized bank-rate and associations of international finance. All these are factors hostile to the power and

exclusiveness of the Nation-State, as idealist theory conceives it. Sir Norman Angell has conclusively shown that "it pays men better to think and feel as members of the universal society", to behave, that is to say, as if territorial State boundaries did not exist, or would shortly be superseded, than to behave as if these boundaries were unsurmountable and irremovable. "In banking, and for that matter in other economic things also," he continues, "the world is one Society. Politically it is several distinct societies tending to compete with one another. Of these two facts the former is more important, and determines action to a greater extent."

When it is remembered that these associations' economic purposes cut right across the boundaries of the Nation-State, the possibility of a new division of mankind on the basis of community of economic interests, in place of the existing political division based on territorial proximity, is one that cannot be overlooked. Marxist theory, as we have seen, regards the economic division between class and class as fundamental. The typical effect produced by the new economic stratification of mankind is exemplified by the fact that the member of a company whose object is the production and importation of oranges from Brazil tends to be more concerned in the interests and welfare of the Brazilians who export the oranges, than in those of his next-door neighbour in a London suburb whom he probably does not know. In other words, there is substituted an economic international bond based on money-making, for the old local and national bond based on the chances of birth in the same square mile; such substitutions are hostile to the power and cohesion of the Nation-State.

#### (IV) That the Existing Political Organization of Society is already to some extent an Anachronism

The foregoing considerations introduce a new factor into the situation which bids fair to destroy many of the pre-suppositions upon which the idealist theory of the State is based. On a previous page I drew attention to the fact that the national State is a particular organizational mould into

which the social relations between human beings happen to have been cast at a particular stage in the evolution of our species.<sup>1</sup> This, the national, form of organization, is already beginning to wear the appearance of an anachronism. Increasingly the world becomes a single economic unit, with the result that events which happen in any part of it tend to produce reverberations in all parts of it. Thus a lady living in a Bournemouth boarding-house is unable to pay her bill because a strike in a Japanese silk factory has wiped out her dividends, while coal-miners in South Wales are thrown out of employment by the tapping of oil wells in Persia. To take another example, the waning of the Victorian taste for mahogany furniture has brought economic hardship to British Honduras, whose chief export was mahogany. Since mahogany went out of fashion, the white population of British Honduras has halved, while many of those who remain have fallen victims to consumption.

Because of the growing economic inter-dependence of mankind, the forces which determine events are increasingly set in motion by factors of which the national State has little cognizance. Thus the inability of nations to control the events which affect their destinies gives to much recent history a determinist appearance. So vast are the contemporary political and economic fields, so far-reaching the forces which determine current history, that, so far from controlling, statesmen seem unable even to understand them. Reflecting upon the history of the past twenty years, one is driven to adopt the interpretation of phenomena with which Thomas Hardy's philosophy has made us familiar, and to contemplate, as he does in *The Dynasts*, events moving to their predestined conclusions unaffected by the cerebrations of statesmen in council. Of the major events of this period—the War, the Coal Strike, the General Strike of 1926, the growth of unemployment, the economic collapse of 1929, the financial crisis of 1931—few have been such as human beings have willed. Most

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 727, 728 above.



have taken place in direct opposition to human will and intention.

**CAN THE NATION-STATE INDEFINITELY SURVIVE?** The economic stage, then, is world-wide, and those who would control the flow of contemporary events must be prepared to regard nothing less than the civilized world as the area relevant to their concern. Upon this world stage strut the symbolic figures of the Nation-States, Britannia and The Fatherland, La France and Uncle Sam, unaware that the foundations are shifting, that the boards are rotten, and that their convulsive movements, their nervous and agitated gesticulations, threaten to bring down the whole structure in ruins.

A world which technical factors are welding increasingly into a single economic system requires, it is obvious, a single political organization to give effect to the underlying economic unity. Across this world run the frontiers of anachronistic national States. Many of these were fixed in the distant past; even the more modern date for the most part from the eighteenth century. They represent an organization of the life of mankind very different from that which obtains to-day. It is only by means of artificial barriers, by tariffs and customs, by exchange and currency restrictions, by trade quotas and favoured nation clauses, that the modern Nation-State is enabled to maintain itself intact against the logic of an economic situation, which points increasingly in the direction of international political organization. Meanwhile the stresses which these anachronistic national divisions of mankind increasingly engender visibly threaten with war the civilization which maintains them. It is difficult to believe that they will continue permanently to withstand the pressure of the forces which are making for economic integration, that the world-wide organizations within which the economic activities of mankind increasingly take place will remain indefinitely cut across by the innumerable political boundaries which hamper or even prohibit them, and that

the political division of mankind into sovereign Nation-States will persist for all time in the face of the economic need for a single World-State or a world federation of States. If it does not, the presuppositions of the idealist theory will be shown to have been falsified by the facts. Indeed, the growth of economic activities which cut across the bounds of the Nation-State is already exposing their falsity.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADE UNIONS.** The foregoing considerations relate to those economic groupings of mankind which traverse the boundaries of the modern Nation-State. Not less important for our present purpose are those that fall within the Nation-State. Pre-eminent among these are labour organizations; and of these the Trade Unions, because of their functional basis, have a peculiar significance. For the Trade Unions are organizations, not of men who happen to live in the same place, but of men who happen to be engaged in the same work. In other words, Trade Union organization substitutes for the geographical grouping of mankind, which is the basis of the Nation-State, a functional grouping. The development of Trade Union organization on these lines can be most clearly observed in Soviet Russia.

**FUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN SOVIET RUSSIA.** The basis of representation in Soviet Russia is not geographical but functional. Starting from the assumption that the office or the factory rather than the tenement block or the village is the centre of the lives of most workers, the Russian electoral system organizes representative bodies on the basis of place of work rather than of place of residence. It is at the place of work that contacts are made, problems discussed, opinions canvassed, and the collective will formed. In every State, moreover, there are certain classes of citizens—soldiers, sailors and airmen are the most outstanding examples—who have no fixed place of abode. The Soviet system of democracy accordingly

provides that the units of the armed forces shall elect councils to express their wishes and to watch over their interests. These directly elected councils deal with all matters appertaining to the welfare of the unit which elects them, concerning themselves with questions of pay and of hours, with the quality of work performed, with duration and dates of holidays, with pensions on retirement through old age or injury. They also elect delegates to other councils, which are in effect federations of functional councils, and exercise jurisdiction over a whole town or region. The federating regional councils elect delegates to a supreme council, the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in which Sovereignty resides. The executive committee of the All-Russia Congress of Soviets is elected by the Congress to carry on the actual business of government, and appoints individuals from among its members, the Russian Commissars, to take charge of the various administrative departments.

This brief sketch of the machinery of Soviet democracy has been inserted here as evidence of the fact that systems of democracy based not upon geographical constituency units, but upon functional organizations, are not only possible, but are actually at work. I am not concerned to maintain here that systems of representation based upon community of occupation are either superior or inferior to those which embody the principle of proximity of residence. It is sufficient for the purpose of the discussion to point out that they are different. Their difference derives from the recognition that common interests, based upon economic solidarity and functional association, constitute a pattern of organization which is at least as valuable as, if not more valuable than, the pattern which results from common interests based upon geographical proximity. It is a difference which points once again to the conclusion already reached, that there is no ground for accepting a division of mankind into Nation-States whose members are organized upon the basis of territorial proximity as being either final or absolute. Moreover, it is

a difference for which the idealist theory of the State makes no provision.

**NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTARY ETHICAL ASSOCIATIONS.** Trade Unions in Russia perform a further function. They are centres of community life. It is their business to ensure that the factory, mine or store is not merely a place where work is done, but a place where cultural development is provided for those who are doing the work. Clubs and educational institutions, crèches, restaurants, theatres, music, sports and games—all these are in Russia organized by the Trade Unions to cater for the cultural and recreational needs of the people. These cultural centres organized on a functional and not a territorial basis will serve to direct our attention to a second class of voluntary associations which, during the last hundred years, has enormously increased in number, associations, namely, of individuals for cultural and ethical purposes. The relevance of these associations for our present discussion is that, as in the case of the economic associations, they owe little or nothing of the spirit which inspires them, of the purposes which they serve or of the functions which they perform, to the Nation-State to which their members happen to belong. Since the Renaissance the moral and religious aspects of the individual's life have become increasingly dissociated from the State. The result, as I have already pointed out, is that it is no longer considered to be the business of the law-giver, as it was in Plato's State, to decide what the good life for the individual shall be. It is only during the last century, however, that the importance of individual choice in ethical matters has received general recognition. Ever since Mill insisted upon the value of individual initiative in the sphere of belief,<sup>1</sup> there has been an increasing disposition to recognize that it is only through individuals that the vague aspirations and religious insight of a particular age gain expression; it is even conceded that

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 524-526.

these individuals may be, and usually are, other than and hostile to those who hold political power.

As a result, the citizens of democracies are diminishingly prepared to accept authority in matters of morals and religion, unless it is self-chosen. The reason why Utopias, for example, produce such feelings of repulsion in the modern mind is that the average reader does not happen to want to live the kind of life which their authors advertise as the best. "Mankind," to quote again one of Mill's basic principles of liberty, to which most of us in theory subscribe, "are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest."

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL INDIVIDUALISM.** As a result of the liberal postulates which, owing in part to the influence of Mill, dominated the outlook of the Western democracies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men and women have grown accustomed to take religious and ethical freedom for granted. The directions in which a man will find ethical and spiritual satisfaction are, they hold, his own concern, nor can we avoid remarking that, as a matter of historical fact, the ordinary citizen has, in England at least, during the last hundred years, found diminishing satisfaction for his ethical needs in the State-controlled church of the political organization to which he belongs. Increasingly he has tended to form independent associations for the purpose of satisfying his spiritual needs. The significance of these associations, more particularly in relation to the ethical pretensions of the idealist theory of the State, lies in their claim to set a higher standard of morality than that with which the State is satisfied. People are heard to complain that politics is, on the whole, "a dirty game" into which they do not wish to enter, a game which observes in public life a lower standard of conduct than that which they maintain in private. They point out that a mere outward observance of the laws of the State does not demand a high degree of

morality. A law-abiding citizen is not necessarily a moral man, and a law-making citizen is frequently an immoral man. No man would dream of voluntarily submitting his intimate personal relations to the handling of the law; indeed, it is widely felt that the morals of the individual are not only outside the State's concern, but above its level. 'Why should I,' argues the individual, 'who have a high standard of moral obligation and a high ideal of personal relations, conform to the law, which has a low one?' Dissatisfaction with the ethics of the State has led to the growth of all kinds of associations of individuals for ethical purposes which ignore the State in theory and transcend its boundaries in practice. Theosophy, Christian Science, the Society of Friends, and the Oxford Groups are all representative movements which tend to substitute a loyalty to groups for a loyalty to the State, and make claims upon their members other than, and sometimes antithetic to, the State's claims.

**SUMMARY.** Associations of individuals for economic and ethical purposes embrace all that is most intimate in the individual's life. Broadly speaking, every activity that fills his pocket or enriches his soul is sponsored by associations non-coterminous with the State. Thus individuals engaged in the pursuit of material profit or spiritual satisfaction pay no heed to the pretensions of the Nation-State, and ignore the divisions upon which it is based. It is inevitable, therefore, that, when the claims imposed by voluntary associations upon the individual are increasing both in complexity and intensity, there should come a clash. And the clash between the claims of the State and those of voluntary associations is an expression of the clash between the philosophy which regards the power and perfection of the State as the only legitimate development of social organization, and that which regards the State as only one, and not necessarily the most important one, of the forms which the more complete organization of society may ultimately take.

(V) That the Claims which the Theory Authorizes the State to make upon the Individual are Unjustified

The difference between the group theory of society just outlined and the idealist theory of the State is thrown into relief by the answers which they respectively give to the question, "What are the limits to the claims which the State may justifiably make upon the individual?" The answer of the idealist theory is unequivocal. "It is an error, I think, resting on a confusion regarding the sphere of the State," writes Dr. Bosanquet, "to suggest that obedience to it can conflict with the existence of loyalty to associations . . . at home or abroad. The State's peculiar function is in the world of external action, and it does not enquire into the sentiments of men and women further than to establish the *bona fide* intention which the law includes in the meaning of the act. But whatever loyalties may exist in the mind, the State will undoubtedly, when need arises, of which it through constitutional methods is the sole judge, prohibit and prevent the expression, in external acts, of any loyalty but that to the community which it represents. Absoluteness in this sense is inherent in the State."

It is here laid down that, when the conflict of claims which is in question has to be decided in the field of external action, the State is in all cases entitled at its discretion to overrule the claims of other associations and to enforce obedience to its own; and furthermore, that it is, and must necessarily be, the State's nature so to do. The whole-hearted enthusiasm with which fascist States have carried into practice the principles of Dr. Bosanquet's theory is common knowledge.

Now it is precisely the absoluteness of the claims which totalitarian States make upon the individuals who compose them that group theories of the State, taking their stand upon the number and importance of the voluntary associations to which the individual belongs, are disposed to challenge. It must, they point out, be remembered that

of all the associations to which the individual belongs, the State is the only one which he does not join by his own voluntary act. The individual joins ethical and economic associations by choice. He belongs to them because they satisfy a need of his nature, or a want of his pocket. To the State he belongs because he happens to have been born in a certain locality, an event over which he had, we must presume, no control. The origin of the claim which a State makes upon its individual members is thus a topographical accident.

**THE CASE OF THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR IN WAR-TIME.** It not infrequently happens that a man's motive for joining a particular association is his feeling of the inadequacy of the provision made for his spiritual or ethical needs by the State. In such a case it is hard to believe that the State is entitled to assume that, in time of conflict, the individual should yield unfaltering allegiance to the organization which has failed to satisfy his needs, and flout the claims of the particular association which may be presumed not to have so failed. The case of the conscientious objector to military service in war-time affords a good instance of the point at issue. The conscientious objector says in effect, 'I recognize that I am a member of a political association called the State, and that this association from which I derive my social consciousness has important claims upon me. At the same time I am a member of another and larger association, namely, the human race. In certain cases the claims of the State and the claims of humanity may conflict; such an occasion has now arisen, and I am bound to consider to which of the two I owe the greater allegiance. It is not a foregone conclusion that I should in all circumstances obey the claims of the State, and I must above all retain the right to decide according to the dictates of my conscience.'

In coercing such a man, the State is exercising a power to which only the idealist theory of State entitles it to lay claim.



In sum, then, the idealist theory of the State takes no account of the fact that ethical obligations may conflict, that an individual may owe allegiance to more than one association, and that he may with good reason insist that he has the right to decide for himself to which of the different claims which, in times of emergency, may be made upon him, he should give heed. In the face of this right, the theory assumes without question that the State is entitled to coerce individuals who decide to disown its authority, and it assumes that such coercion is not only legitimate in theory, but is bound to be successful in fact.

**THE RIGHT OF REVOLT.** In making this assumption it falls into the same error as that to which I have already pointed in criticism of Hobbes's absolutist theory;<sup>1</sup> it overlooks, that is to say, the right of revolt. There are certain oppressions and interferences, rather than tolerate which, people, as history shows, have been prepared to die. When they are in this mood, they will revolt. Their revolt may be either against the exercise of the State's claims, or against the State's denial of their right to choose between conflicting claims.

It is this factor of revolt that renders it impossible for the State to be absolute in anything but name. So long as people have the will and the power to deny its jurisdiction on any particular issue, it is not, in fact, absolute; and the fact that on occasion they have had both the will and the power convicts the theory of falsehood.

Were it not so, were the absolutist theory founded on fact, the State would be entitled to inflict whatever arbitrary humiliation upon its members it chose, and they would be morally bound to acquiesce without demur. Were the State, for instance, to decree that every citizen should be branded with the letter "T" on his left cheek, on the ground that this was for the State's good, or that a need had arisen "of which", in Dr. Bosanquet's words, "through constitutional methods is the sole judge" there would be no

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 411-412.

logical ground for resistance to such a decree. The enormity of such a position has produced an inevitable reaction from the theory which contemplates it as possible.<sup>1</sup> The countries of Europe had experience of the State's power in war-time, and the experience was neither pleasurable nor elevating. We may, then, suggest as a substitute for the "more of the State", which Dr. Bosanquet postulates as a panacea for existing defects, the further development of voluntary associations formed for non-political purposes.

As an increasing number of the individual's interests and energies is devoted to the purposes of non-political organizations, the State may, it is to be hoped, recede into the background of his life and become, in the end, a purely administrative mechanism for maintaining the minimum conditions which are necessary for the pursuit of Green's ideal ends, and for regulating the effects of the actions of voluntary associations upon those who are not members of the associations. Of these necessary functions of the State, functions which only the State can perform, some account will be given in the next chapter.<sup>2</sup>

**SUMMARY.** To sum up the foregoing discussion, I have tried to show: (i) that the idealist philosophy of the State is in error in failing to see that, if moral considerations are applicable to the relations of individual to individual, of company to company, of Trade Union to Trade Union, and of family to family, they are also applicable to the relations of State to State. There is nothing, in fact, unique about that particular grouping of human beings called a State, which entitles men, when grouped in a State and acting as representatives of a State, to disregard that moral code by which they consider themselves bound in their other relations.

(ii) That the idealist theory is falsified by facts which it disregards. It disregards (a) the existence of numerous associations of individuals for non-political purposes, the

<sup>1</sup> This assertion, true during the decade succeeding the war, has, it must be admitted, been weakened by the events of the last few years.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 774, 781, 782.

indifference which these associations manifest to the State, the alternative line of development for human society which they suggest—alternative, that is, to the realization by existing States of an ever greater degree of “the true nature” of the State—and the conflict of claims upon the allegiance of the individual which the existence and growth of these associations entails. It disregards (b) the existing amicable relations between States, and the extent to which the rigid demarcation between the boundaries and authorities of different States, entailed by the isolating tendencies of the theory, is in practice blurred and cut across.

The considerations indicated above reinforced by the chaos to which the competing claims of absolute States has reduced the Western world have produced of recent years a powerful reaction against the idealist State theory. Writers have gone so far as to deny the necessity of the Nation-State, and to predict its extinction. This view is, I believe, mistaken and reasons for thinking it to be so will be given in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

#### (VI) That Only Individuals have Personalities and Exercise Wills

Part of the argument developed in Section C. (II)<sup>2</sup> is based on a certain assumption. The assumption is the following: it is assumed that the argument in favour of the view that the State has a being and personality of its own, and that this being or personality has a will of its own, is a valid argument. Granted this assumption, I have pointed out that the same conclusion can be applied to associations other than the State. These too, if the argument is valid, must have beings or personalities; these too must own wills; and these too, therefore, are entitled to make claims upon the individual members whose personalities they in any form, incorporate and transcend. But the notion that society of human beings, whether State or voluntary association, has a being and personality and exercises a will is

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIX, pp. 774-787.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 737-739 above.

open to serious doubt. If the doubt can be substantiated, then the assumption cannot be made. In the course of the discussion of Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will,<sup>1</sup> I advanced reasons for regarding with suspicion the conception of group personalities and group wills. The line of criticism there followed has been widely urged by modern thinkers especially since the War. That groups may be endowed with the juristic personalities which the law imputes to them,<sup>2</sup> the critics are prepared to concede. But these juristic personalities are, they insist, in a quite literal sense of the word, legal figments. Ernest Barker has expressed this view with admirable conciseness. "To talk," he says, "of the real personality of anything other than the individual human being is to indulge in dubious and perhaps nebulous speech. When a permanent group of ninety-nine members is in session in its place of meeting, engaged in willing the policy of the group, it is permissible to doubt whether a hundredth person supervenes". The view that groups have personalities has been historically invoked to justify the conclusion that these personalities have rights, and a theory of the inherent natural rights of group personalities has been put forward on grounds similar to those adduced in support of the theory of the natural rights of individual persons. But the criticisms to which the doctrine of the natural rights of individuals is exposed apply with even greater force to the doctrine of the natural rights of groups. No rights, I have argued,<sup>3</sup> are so inherent that they may not have to be modified in the light of circumstances and adjusted to the rights of others. Any plea for the inherent rights of individuals or groups must, in fact, be considered in the light of time, place and circumstance. This is true also of the so-called rights of the so-called group personality which belongs to the State. These are not absolute, fixed and inalienable, but relative, provisional and limited.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, pp. 508-510.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 738, 739 above.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 565-567.

**(VII) That the Analogy Between the Body Politic and the Human Body is False.**

The idealist theory of the State derives much of its plausibility from the analogy which it invokes between the State and the living organism, and more particularly, between the body politic and the human body. The various organs of the human body have no rights apart from the body, no ends apart from the body, and no function except to contribute to the welfare of the body. Moreover, they stand to it in the relation of parts to a whole which both transcends and pervades them, so that, as parts, they are different from what they would have been, had they existed in isolation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is argued by analogy, the individual members of the body politic have no rights, ends or functions save such rights as are derived from the State, such ends as are proper to the State, and such functions as arise out of their relation to the State and in pursuance of their duty to the State. The State, moreover, determines their natures, pervading their beings with its own, so that they are literally different, when regarded as incorporated members of the State, from what they would have been had they existed in isolation. This analogy, it will be remembered, was frequently resorted to by Plato<sup>2</sup> although he did not use it to justify the extreme conclusions of the idealist theory of the State. The analogy is partly valid, partly invalid, and it is important to distinguish those parts of it which may be accepted from those which are misleading.

**HOW FAR THE ANALOGY IS VALID.** What is valid is, first, that a society is more like a living organism than it is like a mechanism; it resembles a human body more than it resembles a machine. It comes into existence wherever there are human beings, and it springs naturally and inevitably from their association. It is not, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II, pp. 52-54, for a discussion of the relation between wholes and parts.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, p. 25.

imposed from without; it grows from within in response to the needs of its members. Moreover, as Burke insisted,<sup>1</sup> it derives its characteristics from the needs of its members. Burke was also right in pointing out that, because it is a living growth resembling an organism rather than a machine, a society cannot be violently and rapidly changed without being destroyed, or at least seriously damaged in the process. Society, then, is a growth; further, it has a character, so that it is permissible—always provided that we bear in mind the fact that we are using a metaphor—to ask, what does *it* want, what are *its* claims, what is *its* destiny? Moreover, if we are still careful to remember that we are using metaphorical expressions, we are entitled to add that a society is a whole and not a mere accumulation of persons. Secondly, society, as has already been pointed out, is necessary to the fulfilment of the individual's personality. It is necessary in two ways. In the first place, there is the fact upon which I have already enlarged,<sup>2</sup> that it is only in contact with his fellows that a man can develop his personality and realize all that he has in him to be. A man on a desert island, a man in the wilderness, a man in prison, is a man maimed, since his specifically human qualities remain undeveloped through lack of opportunities for their exercise. But this is not all that is meant by the statement that it is only in society that the individual can realize his full nature.

VALUE OF THE DEVELOPED PERSONALITY. As to the ultimate end of human existence there is, as I think the discussions of Part II have conclusively shown, no general agreement. I have suggested in Chapter XII that there may not be one end but several, and that the good life consists in the pursuit of any one or more of a number of absolute values.<sup>3</sup> Whatever view we take on this issue, we cannot, I think, withhold our agreement from

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 574, 575.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter I, pp. 34, 35.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter XII, pp. 455, 456.

the general proposition, that the living of the good life entails the full development of the best elements in our personality. The agreement on this point among ethical writers is, indeed, impressive. Aristotle specifies the full development of faculty as an ingredient of the good life; Mill demands the maximum development of the intellect; T. H. Green finds the end in "self-realization". This much may, then, be taken as agreed, that by an imperfectly developed personality no good life can be lived; completeness of life is at least *one* of the ends of good living. Practical experience confirms this conclusion. It is a matter of common observation that a man whose character wins respect is one who seeks to make the best of himself, to advance beyond his imperfections in the direction of an added perfection, to reach out beyond his present and to grow. He desires some particular kind of experience, or he desires merely fulness of experience, and the effort to attain his desire stimulates his capacity and confirms his manhood. The fulfilment of such desires is an enrichment of life, nor can they be denied without harm to the personality. "Human life," as Bergson puts it, "is a perpetual becoming," and human nature, therefore, cannot find satisfaction in what is static. Thus the right of the individual to realize all that he has in him to be constitutes one of the foundations of the claim to personal freedom; for an individual must be free to choose his own mode of self-realization.

THAT PARTICIPATION IN AFFAIRS IS NECESSARY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY. Now, many would hold that, whatever mode of self-realization he chooses, some degree of participation in public affairs is an important condition of the full development of the individual's personality. The Greeks would have said that it was a necessary condition. Young men are moved by what may loosely be called "political impulse". They feel impelled to take a hand in the running of the community; they want to feel that they count; that their wills and wishes matter; that it is not beyond the

bounds of possibility that they may come to deflect, however slightly, the course of events, and mould the world nearer to their heart's desire. Pursuing these ideals, they participate in public life, rub shoulders with their fellows, learn when to compromise, when to insist, plan and scheme to frustrate the wills of others, and to further their own, and experience the delights of co-operation with their fellows in a common task. The more numerous the avenues through which their personalities are expressed, the more varied the demands upon their faculties, the richer is the life of the State, and the richer the lives of the individuals who compose it. It is for this reason among others that self-government is a good, since the effort of a community to govern itself enlarges the capacity and develops the personalities of those who are engaged in it. Hence, too, democracy, which calls its members to the exercise of their capacities in a hundred organizations—in churches and in guilds, in Trade Unions and in clubs, in local affairs as in national—possesses an advantage over other forms of government, just because the citizens who, in a democracy, both govern and are governed, are more developed as human beings than the citizens of authoritarian States who are deprived of this opportunity for the development of their public capacities. J. S. Mill has finely described the enrichment of the individual's personality that is conferred by the active participation of the citizen in the affairs of the State, concluding that "the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being . . . it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things". Such free development, he continues, is only possible in a society where men are entitled to a voice in the conduct of affairs and given their chance of participation. Now the development of human nature through active participation in public affairs requires, as its necessary condition, that the individual should be both a member of a society and a member of a free society.



**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HUMAN BODY AND THE BODY POLITIC.** Although in these respects the analogy between the human body and the body politic is fruitful, it has done harm to political theory rather than good. For between the human body and the body politic there are highly important differences. First, the organs of the human body have admittedly no rights of their own and no ends of their own. The individual members of the State have both individual rights and individual ends. Secondly, the organs of the human body have no purpose apart from the whole, for their sole purpose is to contribute to the well-being of the whole. But society has no purpose save such as is realized in the lives of its members.

Thirdly, while the organs of the human body have no life outside the human body, but derive their life from that to which they belong, the members of a society have a life apart from it, whereas society has no life apart from that of its members. Society, in fact, subsists in the wills, the desires, the sympathies and the thoughts of the men whom it knits together. It is constituted by comradeship in work, by fellowship in purpose and in hope, by general inheritance of thought; in other words, by a common life and by the social consciousness in and through which men become aware of the common life. Apart from these things, it is nothing. Herbert Spencer sought to express this distinction between the body politic and the human body by the phrases "discrete organism" and "concrete organism", a society being classed as the former, the human body as the latter.

Fourthly, society only comes into being through the association of its members. The existence of its individual members is, that is to say, logically prior to that of society, even if they do not precede it in point of time. But there is no sense in saying that the organs of a human body precede the body. The organs of the body and the body logically entail each other in precisely the same sense as the sides and angles of a triangle and the triangle logically entail each other.

**DEGREES OF WHOLENESS AND THEREFORE OF REALITY IN SOCIETIES.** That society is a whole which is in a certain sense more than the sum of its members has been conceded; but the whole is never complete. Some societies are more integrated than others. In an imperfectly integrated society some parts may wish to secede and to form societies on their own; others will refuse to recognize themselves as members of the society; others, again, from whom recognition of membership is enforced may, like the Austrian inhabitants of the Italian Tyrol, still cling to the customs, ways of life and language appropriate to some other society from which they have been forcibly separated. In these respects a society is like a work of art. The wholeness of a picture is something that "becomes"; one can see it coming into existence as the picture is painted. When the picture is half painted, it is less of a whole than when it is finished, while, even in the case of finished pictures, the wholeness of some is more obvious than that of others. The degree to which his work has achieved wholeness is, indeed, one of the criterions of the artist's success. But in the case of the human body there are no degrees of wholeness, nor can it be said that its wholeness "becomes". There is never, that is to say, a time during its period of growth when the human body can be said to be more of a whole than it was at some preceding time.

All these considerations point to the same conclusion, which is that the wholeness of a human body is at once different in kind from, and more complete in degree than, the wholeness of a society. The rights of a human body in relation to those of its organs are more clearly established and better founded than those of a society in relation to its individual members. Hence there is justification for the pursuit and realization of the ends of a human body at the cost of sacrifice on the part of its organs, as when an inflamed appendix may be removed in the interests of general health, which does not exist in the case of a society which claims to pursue ends that entail sacrifices

on the part of its members. In so far, then, as the idealist theory bases the claims of the State to transcend the beings and override the wills of the individuals who compose it on an assumed analogy between the State and the human body, the claim cannot be sustained.

(VIII) That the Implied Identification between the State and Society is Misleading

The idealist theory tends to identify the State with society; or rather, it presupposes an implicit identification by reason of its failure to distinguish the one from the other. As a consequence, claims which can be justified when made by society are tacitly transferred to the State, which has neither the right nor the authority to make them. The distinction between the State and society was first insisted upon by Locke who pointed out, in opposition to Hobbes, that to change the government is not to dissolve society.<sup>1</sup> It was again made by Green.<sup>2</sup> What is the distinction? The State is the nation organized politically; it is in essence the machinery of central and local government. Society includes all the multitudinous activities, religious, social, economic and political, which determine the mental and physical well-being of the people. The family, the school, the university, the church, the club, the athletic society, the Trade Union or professional organization, the impalpable influence of environment, whether that of home, of village, or of town—all these blend together to constitute what we should call the life of society. The State may be artificial in the sense that, like Austria-Hungary before the War, it consists of component parts held together by force and prepared to fly apart so soon as the restraining force is removed; but society is a natural growth and cannot exist apart from the consent of its members.

In practice, the false identification of society and the State has important consequences. If the State, in contradistinction to society, is simply an institution equipped

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 487.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 553.

with governmental machinery, central and local, the institution is, it is obvious, liable to be captured by interested parties. Marxists, for example, contend, as we saw in the preceding chapter,<sup>1</sup> that all existing States are in the hands of an economically privileged class which uses the State as an executive organ for administering the affairs of that class. It is not necessary to subscribe to all the implications of the Marxist hypothesis to recognize that the machinery of government can be captured and subverted to personal or sectional ends. It follows that to idealize the State, to concede the existence of a State sovereignty which is entitled to override individual rights, and to insist upon the real being of a State personality which informs individual personalities, is to hand over the individual, bound hand and foot to whatever party happens to have gained control of the forces of government, and has the wit to use the idealist theory of the State to convince the people that it is "forcing them to be free", and that it alone knows "their true good", whenever it wants an excuse for tyranny. The theory has thus been a godsend to parties which, succeeding by force or stratagem in obtaining control of the machinery of government, and seeking to legitimize an authority which owns no better foundation than the bayonet and the machine-gun, first identify themselves with the State, and then proceed to make inordinate claims upon its members which the idealist theory, by reason of its further identification between the State and society, enables them to justify.

**THE IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN SOCIETY AND THE STATE EXEMPLIFIED IN FASCIST PRACTICE.** This transition from the concept of society to that of the State, and from that of the State to that of the party which happens to have control of the State, is exemplified by Nazi Germany. The idealist theory of the State identifies morality with the State's will, but the pronouncements of the leaders of the National Socialist movement identify

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 683-685.

morality with Hitler's will. As Herr Wagner, the Bavarian Minister of the Interior recently announced: "What Hitler decides is right and will remain eternally right."

Again, the idealist theory proclaims that the State, embodying, as it does, the General Wills of all its citizens, cannot act wrongly and is, therefore, above criticism; but it is for criticism of the Nazi party, for passing rude remarks upon the leaders of the party, or commenting disrespectfully upon its decrees, that contemporary Germans are sent to concentration camps. The idealist theory holds that the State possesses divine attributes and that we owe it gratitude as the source of all the values and virtues of our lives, but it is to Herr Hitler that the first of the Ten Commandments for Nazi workers, drawn up by the Minister of Labour, enjoins gratitude:—"We greet the Leader every morning," it runs, "and we thank him each night that he has provided us officially with the will to live"—and it is service to Herr Hitler that is equated with service to what is divine:—"To serve Hitler is to serve Germany; to serve Germany is to serve God" runs the creed which appears in the *Confessional Book of the Germans*, the official publication of the German Faith Movement. Quotations could be multiplied indefinitely to show how the claims which idealist theory makes for the State, claims which, if the foregoing criticisms are valid are in any event unjustified, and which derive such plausibility as they possess from a false identification between society and the State, are in totalitarian States put forward by the particular government which happens to control the State. Owing no better foundation than the successful force of a particular party, they lose whatever semblance of justification they may in theory have once possessed.

**Summary.** The above criticisms of the idealist theory of the State apply with no less force to those political doctrines which derive their tenets from the idealist theory and base themselves upon it. I shall not, therefore, attempt a specific criticism of fascist doctrines. The conclusions

which I have reached may, however, be fruitfully applied to concrete expressions of the theory as they manifest themselves in the contemporary world.

If, however, I may permit myself an expression of personal opinion, I should like to put on record my view that the growth in power of national States is one of the greatest menaces to man's happiness. Like the gods of old, they are jealous, violent and revengeful. They bear, indeed, a frightful resemblance to the Jehovah of the Old Testament, whom they have supplanted. To them belong the energies, the thoughts, the desires, the very lives of their citizens. They are the gods; the officers of the army and navy are their high priests; the people their sacrifice. In war-time they claim to be omnipotent, and would make the same claim, if they dared, in peace. Yet in spite of their power and prestige, these States are figments, owning no reality except by virtue of men's belief in them. There is, in fact, no political reality except in the individual, and no good for the State other than the good of the living men and women who call themselves its citizens. And because they are figments, and because living human beings are realities, the alleged good of the State, as such, is not worth the suffering of a single individual. Those abstract ends of the State for which wars are fought are of less value than a single man's blood, or a single woman's tears. How long, one cannot help wondering, will men continue to sacrifice their lives and happiness on the altar of a nonentity? This much at least is clear, that until mankind has outgrown the worship of these idols, curtailed their powers and transferred their jealously-guarded sovereignties to some supernational authority, there will be neither peace nor lasting progress in the world.

#### *Books*

*Books critical of the Idealist Theory of the State.*

HOBHOUSE, L. T. *The Metaphysical Theory of the State; Elements of Social Justice.*

× LASKI, H. J. *Authority in the Modern State.*

× LASKI, H. J. *Grammar of Politics.*

MACIVER, R. Community.

COLE, G. D. H. Social Theory; Self-Government in Industry.

WALLAS, G. The Great Society.

\*RUSSELL, BERTRAND. Principles of Social Reconstruction.

*Theory of Groups.*

MAITLAND, F. W. Political Theories of the Middle Age.

FIGGIS, J. N. Churches in the Modern State.

*Internationalism.*

\*ANGELL, SIR NORMAN. The Great Illusion.

\*LOWES DICKINSON, G. The International Anarchy.

## CHAPTER XIX: THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

**Introductory.** The criticisms of democracy whether implied or expressed in Chapters XVI and XVII amount in sum to a formidable indictment. In this chapter I propose to consider what may be said in democracy's defence. The task is not an easy one. When he comes to defend his belief, the advocate of democracy finds himself at a disadvantage. Whereas authoritarian doctrines of the State are clear-cut, definite and systematic, the theory of democracy is vague, tentative and fragmentary. Indeed, it is not a theory at all so much as a number of principles, each of which the democrat takes to be true, but which he would be hard put to it to substantiate. He believes in individual freedom and self-development; he believes that the State was made for man and not man for the State, and he has an instinctive distrust of the State. If, however, he is asked for a theory of the State, it is feeling rather than reason that is apt to reply. And his feeling is that the beginning and end of the State's function is to give individuals the equipment, the scope and the leisure to develop the best that is in them. The democrat does not, at any rate in the twentieth century, regard democracy as an ideal form of government, but as the least objectionable form of government that is practicable. It is not a best so much as a second-best, embraced because of the frailties of human nature and accepted less for its own merits than for fear that worse may befall, if it be rejected. Thus no systematic defence of democracy is possible, for the reason that democracy is not itself the product of a systematic theory.

For the fragmentary nature of the contents of this chapter I make no apology. Bearing in mind Aristotle's



warning that we must not expect too much of conclusions relating to ethics and politics, which must at best be piecemeal and tentative, true on the whole rather than true absolutely, I should regard with distrust any completely logical and clear-cut theory whose validity could be demonstrated like that of a proposition in mathematics. It is, indeed, the fact that the principles of democracy make no such claims that seems to me to constitute one of the strongest arguments in their favour. The following exposition falls into two parts; first, a discussion of the status and function of the State in a democracy, and, secondly, a statement of the general principles, both ethical and political, which democracy would be generally held to embody, and of some of the conclusions which follow from them.

## I. THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF THE STATE IN A DEMOCRACY

**Modern Reaction Against the State.** I begin with the question of the status and function assigned to the State by the postulates of democracy because of its relevance to the matters discussed in the last chapter, where theories hostile to democracy were criticized. My criticism of the idealist theory of the State challenged the powers with which idealist writers endow the State, and repudiated the claims which they make for it. Communist theory, which regards the State during both the bourgeois and the revolutionary periods as an instrument of class dominance, looks forward to its gradual liquidation, so soon as a true communist society is established. The State, it will be remembered, is to "wither away". The questions then arise, "What function, if any, are we entitled, on the basis of our criticism of idealist theory, to claim for the State as a *necessary* function", and "Is communist theory justified in its view that the State, as the repository of force in the community, will ultimately disappear"?

In democratic countries the excessive powers exercised by all modern States in war-time, and by the totalitarian

States which have been established since the war at all times, have led to a reaction against the State. "Left wing" thinkers in particular evince a profound distrust of the State and are apt to be impatient of all State claims; many press for such a reorganization of society as will enable the functions and powers of the State, as we know it to-day, to be assumed by bodies of a different character. Are there, then, we must ask, functions which the State and the State alone can perform? If so, what are they? The answers to these questions will disclose what, I would suggest, are the minimum necessary functions of the State, which most democratic thinkers would, I think, be prepared to admit as its functions. They will also contain an implied criticism of the communist view, that all political activity is an expression of economic forces and a by-product of economic circumstances.

**Are there Necessary Functions for the State?** In the seventeenth chapter, I developed the communist view that historical events are the resultants of the interplay of economic forces. If this view is true, political activity is, with certain reservations, always the effect, never the cause of, economic events, and political organizations are merely the forms in which economic forces express themselves. This view receives reinforcement from the growth of voluntary associations for economic purposes, to which I drew attention in the last chapter. If voluntary associations for economic purposes continue to increase in power and number, they may, it is said, ultimately come to usurp most of the functions usually assigned to political bodies such as the State. Advanced theories such as Syndicalism and Anarchism hold that the usurpation of State functions will be complete. Is this view true and is this development likely? If so, political democracy in the form in which we have known it during the last two hundred years will disappear.

In opposition to these theories I propose to suggest—and I think that the view is one in which most democrats

would concur—that political activity is not correctly regarded as merely a by-product of economic activity; and to maintain, further, that even if we assume an indefinite growth of voluntary associations, there will nevertheless remain for the State a set of functions which only some form of political organization can discharge. The need for the performance of these necessary functions constitutes the basis of that minimum conception of the State to which, I have suggested, most democrats would be prepared to subscribe.

**Characteristics of Economic Action.** The nature of these functions may, I think, most clearly be seen, if we consider for a moment the “blind” nature of economic actions. The epithet is used to indicate two rather different characteristics; first, that economic action as I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> is concerned with individual ends, and not with the ends of society as a whole; secondly, that the results of economic action, though they affect society as a whole, are not willed either by society or by any individual. This apparent paradox arises as follows. Assuming that free will is a fact, we may say that deliberation and choice in economic matters are expressions of the individual’s free initiative. The individual does not, however, choose the results of the actions he has willed. Now these results affect society as a whole. Hence, although the general conditions of society at any moment are the result of the ways in which numbers of individuals have willed and chosen, they are themselves not chosen by individuals or by society. Instances will make the point clearer.

As a result of the shortage of foodstuffs that occurred during the war, the prices of commodities rose. People complained and went out of their way to find shops where they could purchase cheaply. They wanted, we will suppose, cheap sugar, and hearing a rumour that at a certain shop sugar was being sold at less than the prevailing rate, repaired thither *en masse* to buy. As a result, the sugar either went up in price or was sold out; this result,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 743, 744.

which was the exact contrary of what each individual had willed, was the direct outcome of their combined willing. Similarly, if there is a rumour that a bank is in difficulties, depositors will be anxious to withdraw their money. As a consequence, there will be a run on the bank and the bank will fail. This result, which nobody wants, is nevertheless due to what everybody has individually willed.

Generalizing from these illustrations, we may say that although the economic conditions of society are the accumulated results of individual action, they are not willed by individuals. Thus the apparent "blindness" of economic forces arises from the fact that the ultimate outcome of the action of individuals is outside the control of any individual. In sum, the effects of an individual's action extend beyond his immediate intention, his will and knowledge being more limited than his effective environment.

**Necessity for Political Action.** It is because of this fact, because the collective social conditions which any particular action will tend to create are hidden from its author, because in fact economic action is "blind", that political action becomes necessary, necessary, that is to say, to check the blind results of economic action.

This need for check will always remain. Indeed, in proportion as the ends of human beings are increasingly set by economic considerations, in proportion as their actions are increasingly determined by economic motives, and less by habit and custom, the checking and limiting function of the State will become increasingly important. It is only in highly developed societies that the motives of the actions of groups of individuals are predominantly "economic", a fact which renders the economic interpretation of history largely inapplicable to the societies of antiquity, which were based mainly on habit and custom.

**Defects of Economic Individualism.** The social legislation passed in England at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries affords a good

illustration of the obligation which is laid upon the State—an obligation which, however distasteful, the State finds that it cannot avoid shouldering—of intervening to check the blind effects of purely economic actions on the part of individuals. The necessity for the Factory Acts, Trade Board Acts, Shop Hours Acts, and similar legislation, exposed the shortcomings of that particular form of political individualism which dominated political thought during the nineteenth century, and which is most favourable to unrestrained economic action. The Egoistic Hedonism popularized by the utilitarians, coupled with the theories of the Manchester economists, issued, as I have already shown,<sup>1</sup> in the doctrine that each individual could be trusted to look after his own interests far better than anyone else, and that, in consequence, it was not the business of the State to interfere in the relations between individuals. This doctrine rests upon two assumptions. It assumes (1) that each individual has an equal opportunity and equal power of choice, and (2) that each individual is equally far-sighted and has equal power of giving effect to his choice. Taken together these assumptions entail that the proposition, each individual can be trusted to look after his own interests, is true and equally true of each individual.

In fact neither assumption is correct. Owing to the differences between their economic circumstances people have different ranges of choice, and in consequence different opportunities of choosing. Moreover, people see the results of their actions in very different degrees; no man is able to see all the results of any particular action, but some men can see further than others.

Because of the inferiority of their powers of choice and foresight, the many were in the nineteenth century exploited by the few in the interests, not of the many or of the community at large, but of the few, exploited so unashamedly that the State was compelled to step in and check the "blind" results of economic action by political action.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX, pp. 348, 349.

The admission of the necessity for legislation such as that embodied in the Factory Acts, the Trade Board Acts and the Shop Hours Acts is also an admission that the voluntary pursuit of economic ends by some members of a society may have consequences which adversely affect society as a whole. These consequences are such as are rarely foreseen and, we may hope, are never willed by those whose actions have engendered them, and it is to minimize their disastrous effect on society as a whole that political action is necessary.

**Characteristics of Political Action.** Political action, then, as opposed to economic action, is concerned with the good of society as a whole. It must include within its purview not economic action as such, but the effects of economic action upon those who are not directly engaged in it. If we grant that the "blindness" of the effects of economic action will be liable to produce effects upon society as a whole which are often undesirable, we must grant also the necessity for controlling the effects of the economic actions of private individuals by a will which is more far-sighted than that of the individuals in question. And we must also grant the desirability of inducing individuals to behave in ways that are other than economic. The necessary control can only be exercised, the necessary inducement can only be brought to bear by the State. The State may appeal to individuals not to act in certain ways because, as the sole body in the community which is concerned with the welfare of society as a whole, it foresees that the effects of their actions will be injurious to society as a whole. Alternatively, when appeals fail, it may initiate controlling and checking action of the kind exemplified by the Factory Acts. The object of such legislation is to prohibit individuals from embarking on the course of action which purely economic motives would dictate, because the effects of such action are such as will militate against the welfare of society. The justification for this function of checking and controlling which I am

assigning to the State, lies in the facts that its foresight is greater than that of any purely economic association and its purpose more comprehensive. The greater foresight belongs to it by virtue of its greater knowledge, the more comprehensive purpose by virtue of its concern with the welfare not of any section of society, but of society as a whole, a concern which places upon it the necessity of safeguarding the interests of all its members from the "blind" effects of the activities of some of them.

It follows that the need for political activity is not diminished, but intensified by the increased scope and frequency of economic activity on the part of individuals and groups of individuals. The fact that the forces which now determine the occurrence of economic events are world-wide in their incidence<sup>1</sup> does not lessen the need for political organization to regulate their effects. It does, however, suggest that the political organization best fitted for the purpose may be one which transcends the bounds of the nation State; it may even, in the last resort, be one which has become world-wide. The expression "the State" in the foregoing should, then, be taken to denote some form of political organization, and not necessarily that particular form which we know as the sovereign nation State.

**The State and Ethical Associations.** In Chapter XVIII, I emphasized the growth of voluntary associations for ethical and religious purposes. The question must now be considered, "What should be the function of the State in relation to these associations"? Both Fascism and Communism concur in holding that ethical and religious associations must take their colour and direction from the State. In Germany religion must submit to the domination of National Socialist ideals and Christianity, in so far as it claims to be an international religion, placing allegiance to God before allegiance to the State, is persecuted. In Russia religion of any kind is regarded with disfavour

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 745-748.

and morals are treated as the by-products of economics. Democratic and liberal thinking differs from both Communism and Fascism in holding that a man's ethical and political views are his own concern, and that he should be free to hold them and to practice the conduct which they enjoin without interference by the State. The question therefore arises, whether, granting the presuppositions of democratic theory, the State has any part to play in the spheres of ethics and religion and, if so, what part. Once again it will, I think, be found that the function of the State in this regard is what, in its relation to economic associations, I have called a background function. The need for a political organization to discharge this function arises from two sets of considerations.

(1) I have stressed on an earlier page the importance of spontaneity in ethical and religious matters.<sup>1</sup> A man should, democrats and individualists have urged, be free to choose for himself both creed and code. I have also drawn attention to the frequency with which original insight in the sphere of ethics and religion brings the prophet, seer, preacher or original moralist into conflict with the State.<sup>2</sup> The question accordingly arises, "In what circumstances, if any, the State has a right to suppress ethical or religious beliefs"? The friends of liberty would maintain that there are none. The question at issue here is one of ultimate values,<sup>3</sup> and I do not see how it is possible to settle it by argument. Where, however, the effects upon others of the dissemination of original ethical and religious beliefs are concerned, a different set of considerations arises.

It is a commonplace that the effects of an individual's teaching and example extend into spheres outside his personal cognizance, affect the conduct of men whom he may never know, and often result in lines of conduct of which he would be the first to disapprove. The fact that he may be ignorant of the effects of his teaching upon

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, pp. 524, 525.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VIII, pp. 308-310.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 788 below for a development of this contention.



society, and that he would disapprove of them, if they were brought to his notice, does not, however, mean that the State can remain indifferent to them. As I have already pointed out in the case of actions proceeding from economic motives,<sup>1</sup> the individual's will is more limited than his effective environment, and for this reason and in this sense the effects of ethical teaching may be "blind", just as the effects of economic action may be "blind." Ethical beliefs may in fact be regarded from a double point of view; from that of the extent to which they satisfy the individual, and from that of their effect upon the lives and conduct of other individuals. It is from this second point of view that the State takes cognizance of ethical beliefs; that is to say, it takes cognizance of their social effects, and because these may be unintended, subversive and anti-social, it may be the business of the State to set bounds to their spread. Obvious examples are the effects of anarchist teaching upon policemen and civil servants, and of pacifist teaching upon the armed forces of the Crown. Now most States, including democratic States, would regard these effects as matters of which the State is bound to concern itself in its own defence.

**Difficulty of Drawing the Line of State Interference.** It may be granted that the line where State interference is justified is hard to draw. Most democrats would urge that in recent years it has been drawn too tightly, and assert that even in democratic countries there has been an unjustifiable restraint of individual liberty in the fancied interests of the welfare of the State. The English, for example, are supposed to set store by liberty, and Great Britain is generally regarded as a stronghold of individualism. Yet reflecting upon the tendency of such post-war legislation as the Public Order Act which seeks to prohibit the wearing of political uniforms, the Incitement to Disaffection Act known as the Sedition Act, the Trade Disputes Act regulating the use of Trade Union funds for political

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 773, 774.

purposes, the Emergency Powers Act and the Official Secrets Act, it is difficult not to conclude that what Locke would have called a man's "natural rights", and what Mill would have insisted on regarding as his right to explain his views to all-comers on matters of contemporary public importance, has in recent years been considerably infringed. Nevertheless, the most ardent individualist would, I think, concede in principle the State's right to the suppression of such sentiments and opinions as are liable to undermine its existence as a State, however warmly he might denounce the practical abuse of that right by existing States. If, for example, the effects of a particular doctrine were such as to cause servants of the State to be unwilling to perform what the State regards as their duty, inducing policemen to refrain from arresting criminals, and soldiers from obeying officers, the State would, in the opinion of most democrats, be justified in taking the view that it had a right to suppress the doctrines in question as seditious. Each case would, however, need to be judged on merits.

**Need for Uniformity of Conduct.** A further consideration to be borne in mind in this connection is the need (referred to on a previous page) for uniformity in spheres which are ethically neutral. To revert to an illustration already used in connection with the philosophy of Locke,<sup>1</sup> from whose theories, together with those of Mill, the line of thought developed in the present chapter is largely derived, it is a matter of ethical indifference whether traffic proceeds on the left or on the right hand side of the road. It is, however, essential in the public interest that, whichever side the accepted rule of the road prescribes, should be universally adhered to. The community cannot, that is to say, permit a particular individual to hold up traffic and endanger life because of its respect for freedom and recognition of his inalienable "natural right" to drive on whichever side of the King's highway he pleases. Again, it is a manner of small ethical, though of great

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIII, p. 485.

climatic moment, whether clothes are worn or whether they are not. There is nothing intrinsically disgraceful about the human body, as is shown by the various areas of it which different civilizations have thought proper to expose to the public gaze. But if a particular community holds that a particular area of the body ought to be covered, it cannot, it may be said, permit individuals to outrage the prevailing sense of "decency" by asserting their right to walk about the street naked. In those spheres, then, in which uniformity is important, some person or body must be charged with the function of maintaining it. To insist that the most appropriate body for the purpose is the State, is not to concede the claim of idealist theory that the State has the right to prescribe the good life for the individual. It is only to recognize in another connection the need to maintain that minimum background of accepted behaviour by all, which is the indispensable condition of the living of the good life by any, and to point to the State as the most appropriate body for fulfilling that need.

**Democratic Theory of the State.** It would seem, then, that the function which democratic theory is prepared to recognize as belonging of necessity to the State is a background function. The State should not prescribe men's business and economic activities, and it should not presume to tell them how they should live. It should, however, be prepared to step in to check the adverse effects of men's industrial and economic activities upon other citizens, and it should make it its business to establish the conditions in which a man can choose for himself his way of life, and then live consonantly with his choice. The relegation of the State to what is in essence a background position does not mean that it will not be continuously engaged in positive action. In its rôle of checker and modifier of the blind effects of economic action, the State will be committed, as we have seen, to social legislation to protect the workers from economic exploitation.

Socialists would claim more extended functions for the democratic State. Pointing out that the material conditions of the great mass of the people in all European countries are considerably worse than they need or should be, they would maintain that the reason why they are worse is the persistence of the economic system known as Capitalism. This system, they hold, has shown itself manifestly unable to make available for the people as a whole the material benefits of applied science. In this view the recent slump of 1931-3, with its celebrated paradox of want in the midst of plenty, has confirmed them. In pursuance of its "background" function of protecting the individual from the effects, at once unintended and unrestricted, of economic action, the State should, then, Socialists maintain, take steps to end the capitalist economic system, and to substitute an organization of the material resources of the nation on lines similar to those which have been followed in Soviet Russia. The discussion of this highly controversial view would take me beyond the scope of the present book. It is sufficient to point out here that the recognition of the essential nature of political activity, as concerned with the background rather than with the foreground of the individual's life, is not intended to rule out, and does not rule out, the introduction by the State of such legislation as would be necessary to supersede Capitalism and to introduce Socialism. On the contrary, if it be true that under Capitalism the individual can never be assured of economic security because of the adverse effects upon the community as a whole of the competitive activities which Capitalism recognises and encourages, the adequate performance of the function which I have postulated for the State would entail such legislation.

**Political Democracy not an Impediment to Economic Change.** It is sometimes said that political democracy, which champions the individual and seeks to safeguard his freedom and to protect his rights from encroachment

by the State, is hostile to Socialism.<sup>1</sup> The main ground for this charge is that the benefits which political democracy has succeeded in obtaining for the working classes, by taking the revolutionary edge off poverty and discontent, militate against the effectiveness of socialist propaganda. The charge seems to the present writer to be unjustified. The goods which political democracy has obtained for the mass of the people are admittedly political rather than economic goods, but they are none the less important. They include equality before the law, the right to elect representatives, and freedom of speech, of reading and of writing. The right to elect and the right to freedom of speech, reading and writing have a special relevance in this connection. The fact that they exist and are enjoyed means that those who desire economic change are able freely to propagate their opinions, freely to choose as their representatives those who, if elected to Parliament, will voice their opinions, and freely to vote for the representatives they have chosen. If they send to Parliament a sufficient number of those who share their desire for economic change, then there is at least *some* prospect of the change being effected. Nor is the prospect necessarily chimerical. Changes of the kind in question have been effected in the past, and are being effected in the present with such rapidity that what is known as social reform legislation has been the distinguishing characteristic of the present epoch. As a consequence, the lot of the working classes has substantially improved during the last hundred years. It has also improved relatively to that of the moneyed classes. A steeply graded income tax, an excess profits tax, death duties, and estate duties have depressed the economic position of the wealthy, while the provision of social services in the shape of Old Age Pensions, Unemployment and Health Insurance benefits, free education and State-aided grants and scholarships has improved the economic position of the poor. That some levelling of income has resulted is generally agreed. Nor is there any

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 687-689, for a development of this view.

reason to suppose that these economic changes have reached their limit. On the contrary, if we may trust Mr. Keynes's prophecy that "in a hundred years' time the standard of life in progressive countries will be between four and eight times as high as it is to-day," they may, if we are spared the catastrophe of war or revolution, be expected to continue. How have they been effected? By arguments addressed to men's reason, by appeals to their sense of justice, and by the resultant pressure of voting power exercised through the ballot-box—in a word, by the exercise of precisely those political liberties which the inspiration of liberal and individualist thought won for the democracies in the nineteenth century, and which the Continental dictatorships deny.

**The Method of Change in a Democracy.** Nothing, indeed, in this connection is clearer than that the methods, by which in democratic countries social reforms have been effected and the resultant economic amelioration of the position of the working classes has been achieved, could not have been followed under a dictatorship. Social reforms are born initially of a burning sense of resentment against the injustices and inequalities of the existing régime, expressing itself in a stream of speeches, articles and books. Men listen to the speeches; they read the articles and the books, and some are converted to the views of their authors. In course of time sufficient converts are made to elect representatives to Parliament, and presently, if the process continues, sufficient representatives are sent to Parliament to constitute a government which introduces the reforms. In countries governed by dictatorships there are permitted neither speeches, articles, nor books critical of the existing régime. There are no free elections, there are no workers' representatives in Parliament, and a government pledged to the economic changes that socialists desire would not be permitted. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that to destroy the liberties won by political democracy, is to destroy the instruments of peaceful social change.

Political democracy in fact is not an impediment to, but a condition of the realization of economic equality; Liberalism in the widest sense of the word is not the foe, but the indispensable ally, of Socialism.

This section may appropriately be concluded with a quotation from John Stuart Mill who, himself an individualist and a democrat, was in the concluding years of his life moving rapidly in the direction of what would be now called Socialism.

“It appears to me that the great end of social improvement should be to fit mankind by cultivation for a state of society combining the greatest personal freedom with that just distribution of the fruits of labour, which the present laws of property do not profess to aim at. Whether, when this state of mental and moral cultivation shall be attained, individual property in some form (though in a form very different from the present) or community of ownership in the instruments of production and a regulated division of the produce will afford the circumstance most favourable to happiness, and best calculated to bring human nature to its greatest perfection, is a question which must be left, as it safely may, to the people of that time to decide. Those of the present are not competent to decide it.”

**Positive Function of the State in the Ethical Sphere.**  
To return to the sphere of ethics, it is, I have suggested, the business of the State to provide that background of order and security in which alone the individual can live the good life, as he sees it. Such a background has a negative and a positive aspect. Its negative aspect is a guarantee against personal violence and security for possessions; its positive aspect is the provision of the minimum training for body and mind which are necessary, if the good life is to be lived. Training for the body includes hygiene. In this connection the democrat looks to the State to establish an adequate drainage and sewage system, hospitals for the sick, a public medical service, and a minimum

standard of nutrition. If it is difficult for a sick man to pursue the good life, it is not less difficult for an uneducated one. The background function which I am assigning to the State includes, therefore, such training of the mind, such refining of the spirit, as will fit a man to pursue truth and apprehend values. Minimum necessary educational requirements are that the democratic citizen should be made free of the inherited knowledge and culture of his race, that he should be given an acquaintance with what great men have thought and said memorably about life, and that his critical faculties should be developed so as to emancipate him from a slavish dependence upon the thought of others and equip him with the means of thinking for himself.

**The State as a Developer of Personality.** The view that the function of the State should be to remove impediments to the living of the good life by its members, rather than to prescribe the nature of the good life which they should live envisages, it will be seen, a wide area of activity for the State. Wide as it is, it remains, from the point of view of the individual, a background activity. The State has, however, one positive rôle to play which enables it to assume a place in the foreground of the individual's consciousness. Of this rôle, some indication was given in the last chapter.<sup>1</sup> The good life, I have suggested in Part II, is to be identified with the pursuit of certain absolute values. Of these values, happiness and moral goodness are two. Now both these values may be realized in the service of the community. To many individuals, indeed, a life of vigorous and useful public service is the most easily accessible avenue to happiness. Such a life, moreover, develops their best qualities and evokes the highest that they have in them to be. It is in the service of the State that this kind of life may be most fully lived—not necessarily in the maintenance of the State as it is, but in the endeavour to transform the State as it is into something which is nearer the heart's desire. This is the truth

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVIII, pp. 761, 762.



that lies at the root of the idealist theory of the State, though, the truth is, as I have tried to show, distorted out of all likeness to itself. The recognition of this truth requires us to assign to the State a more positive sphere in the realm of ethics than we have hitherto envisaged. For in providing the individual with opportunities for the development of virtue and the realization of happiness, the State is not merely supplying the background of the good life; it is assisting to fill its foreground.

In conceding this much it is, however, important that we should bear in mind that the State is not a unique or final form of human organization, and that the functions both negative and positive which have been claimed for it in the preceding paragraphs could be discharged by other forms of political organization. Indeed, there is some reason to suppose that the development of moral virtue and the realization of happiness in public work will, in the twentieth century, be best promoted by service to the international ideal. It is certainly the case that the function of providing the background for the good life in the guise in which it presents itself to the citizen of the modern European or American State, can be most adequately discharged by some form of international, or, at any rate, of federal organization, which will supersede the aggressive nationalism of existing sovereign States. Patriotism, in fact, is not enough just because the State is not the whole or, rather, because there is a larger whole of which the whole, which is the State, forms part. Once it is admitted that the individual may fulfil his personality by serving ends other than his own, and feel interest in and make sacrifices for the welfare of wholes of which he is a member, there seems to be no logical reason for stopping short of the whole which is mankind.

## II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY

**Preliminary Observations.** I turn to the positive principles which a democratic and individualist theory of society would be generally held to embody. Their statement needs to be prefaced by three preliminary observations.

(1) I drew attention at the outset to the fact that there is no systematic democratic theory of society in the sense in which there are systematic communist and fascist theories. Hence the principles that follow are not related by any necessary logical connection. They are generally maintained together, but the acceptance of any one of them does not necessarily entail the acceptance of all, nor does the rejection of one entail the rejection of all.

(2) As in the case of the ultimate principles<sup>1</sup> upon which our ethical judgments are based, these political principles are intuitively apprehended. I do not mean to assert that everybody assents to them; indeed, divergences of view in regard to them are certainly not less marked than in the case of ethical principles. In so far, however, as they are seen to be true, they are also seen to require no arguments in their support. Hence, if they are questioned by somebody who wishes to deny them there is, so far as I can see, no method of proving their truth which will bring conviction to the questioner.

(3) Some of the principles are political, others ethical; in some cases, that is to say, certain ethical propositions are seen to be true, from which certain political propositions follow as their corollaries; in other cases the position is reversed. Starting, that is to say, from the premise that the purpose of the State is the maintenance and promotion of the conditions within which the good life for the individual is possible, we may proceed to assert either that the good life involves such and such elements,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters V, pp. 166-170, and XII, pp. 418-420.

and that, if these elements are to be realized by the individuals who are members of a State, such and such political principles must be accepted by the State; or, we may insist that such and such political principles must be accepted, if the State is adequately to fulfil the purpose assigned to it.

### A. The Principle of Democracy.

THAT ONLY THE WEARER KNOWS WHERE THE SHOE PINCHES. This may be most succinctly stated in the form, "it is only the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches". It follows that the wearer should choose his shoe and that he cannot afford to allow others to choose for him. Why can he not? Because history shows conclusively that human beings cannot be trusted with unchecked powers over the lives and destinies of other human beings. I shall elaborate this point under principle B. For the present it is sufficient to point out that, since they cannot, those who have to obey the laws must also in the last resort be those who decide what laws they are to obey.

Suppose, however, that we grant that those in authority are not only endowed with supreme wisdom, but are imbued with the best intentions; we must still insist that to govern a state efficiently, to frame good laws, is not enough. The efficiency must be such as is compatible with people's happiness; the laws such as they wish to obey. It is better for imperfect men to live under imperfect laws that fit them, that reflect their desires and suit their needs, than that they should be disciplined to the requirements of legislative perfection. Twentieth century human nature is a loose, untidy, ample sort of growth, full of unacknowledged needs and unsuspected oddities. And just as a foot which is ill shaped cannot, without unhappiness to its owner, be thrust into a perfectly formed shoe, so a community of imperfect human beings cannot, without unhappiness, be thrust into the straight-jacket of perfectly conceived laws. We must, then, cut our legislative coat

according to the cloth of human nature, which means that we must have the right to cut it for ourselves.

For centuries our ancestors fought for this right against power, against privilege and against the passive obstruction of vested interests. Eventually they triumphed, winning for all men the right to share in determining the sort of community in which they should live, and the sort of laws by which their lives should be governed. If we value this right, it follows that it is our duty to see that we do not through shortsightedness—for the benefits of democracy are long term benefits—or impatience—for the workings of democracy are slow—or indifference—for democracy makes no spectacular appeal to the imagination—throw away the heritage which our ancestors bequeathed to us.

**THAT INEXPERTNESS IS NO BAR TO SELF-GOVERNMENT.** Moreover, granted that uninstructed men entrusted with political initiative make blunders, there is yet virtue in the method of trial and error. Indeed, it is difficult to see how a people which is unfit for self-government can become fit save by the inexpert performance of duties for which it is admittedly at first unfitted. It is better, in other words, that a man should do a good job badly than that he should not be given a chance to do it at all, for it is only by doing it badly that he will learn to do it well. The issue raised by this principle is, broadly, the issue between the Platonic theory of the State and the democratic theory. Plato points out that the ordinary man has neither the knowledge nor the self-discipline to enable him efficiently to exercise the powers of government, and argues that he should not be given the opportunity of meddling with that of which he is ignorant, and for which he is unfit. The democrat replies that he should be given the chance, even though he is ignorant and unfit; partly because no recipe for the production of Plato's Guardian-governors has yet been discovered, partly because he may himself become fitter

and more knowledgeable through experiment and experience. Plato says, again, that in a democracy the State is captured by sectional interests who run it for their own advantage. The democrat replies that the society which he advocates is, to quote Professor Laski, "one in which the incidence of policy is not biased in the direction of any particular group in the community—in which, therefore, the interest of any individual in the operation of the State is approximately equal to that of any other." The democrat admits, of course, that this is an ideal, never yet realized; but he insists that it is an ideal to be realized. The point at issue here is not, I think, one which can be settled by argument. The following quotation from Lowes Dickinson's book, *After Two Thousand Years*, states the democratic principle in its bearing upon this issue better than I can hope to do.

"PHILALETHES: . . . Granting, I would say, that your philosopher-kings could be put into power, and that they knew Good perfectly and truly, and introduced their censorship to preserve it uncontaminated, yet still I should say they would be defeating their own object, or at any rate mine. For what I would wish to create is not men like statues, beautifully shaped for someone else to contemplate, but living creatures, choosing Good because they know Evil. And if they are to know it, it must not be silenced. Rather, just as you would have trained your soldiers by the perpetual presence of danger, so would I my citizens, by the perpetual solicitation of evil.

PLATO: And if they succumb to it?

PHILALETHES: And if your soldiers succumbed to the enemy? They would succumb, and so doubtless many of them will. Others will slip and recover themselves, some few will never fall. But always Goodness will be being tested, as in a free society is truth, by the method of trial and error."

**THAT UNINSTRUCTEDNESS IS NO BAR TO SELF-GOVERNMENT.** The acceptance of this principle carries with it an answer to some of the criticisms of democracy summarized in the preceding chapter. (a) 'The electorate is stupid, ignorant, and uninterested,' say the critics, 'therefore, it is not fit to govern itself. What it needs is not self-government, but leadership.' But the man in the street is interested, and interested of necessity by virtue of the effects upon him of legislative enactments. He may not belong to a political party, read the political news, listen to political speeches, or trouble to cast his vote; but because what the Government decides may, and probably will, affect him profoundly, determining whether anything, and if so how much, will stand between him and starvation if he loses his employment, whether and when his body may be dismembered by a shell or disembowelled by a bullet—and by whose shell and by whose bullet—if it decides to go to war, it is right that he should be given a chance to form the State's policy by his vote and to express his view of it when formed. He may not avail himself of the chance—that is a matter which concerns himself; but that he should be given it, however apparently "uninterested" he may appear, is a plain deduction from the principle.

**THAT EXPERTS ARE NOT ENTITLED BY VIRTUE OF THEIR EXPERTNESS TO GOVERN.** (b) It is often said that government, being complex, should be entrusted to experts. Experts may be of two kinds: men who, in comparison with ordinary men are possessed of (i) superior knowledge; (ii) a general unspecified superiority.

(i) In support government by experts the critic of democracy points out that the man who possesses superior knowledge knows what ought to be done and how to do it, on occasions when the man in the street and the Member of Parliament whom the man in the street elects do not. The implication is that, since the expert knows what ought to be done, the expert should have power of decision. The

implication is not justified. In regard to economic issues, which are those chiefly relevant to this particular criticism of democracy, the expert emphatically does not know, or rather, as the history of recent years has only too plainly shown, what he "knows" is often diametrically opposed to what is "known" by a rival expert. In a general sort of way, no doubt, economic experts are in a position to tell us what we must do, if we wish to prosper. We must not, for instance, impose tariffs and exchange restrictions, if we wish to increase international trade. But the tariffs and exchange restrictions of one country are always represented as regrettable necessities which are imposed upon it by the provocative tariffs and restrictions of its neighbours. To deal with the difficulty, international and not national action is, it is obvious, required; but how to persuade the nations collectively to take the steps which the self-interest of each individually demands, is a problem no more within the competence of the economic expert than of the man in the street. The expert, then, often does not know; his knowledge is often opposed to that of other experts while, more often still, considerations lying entirely outside the expert's province make it impossible for the government to take the action which his knowledge suggests.

THAT THE ENDS OF THE EXPERT MAY BE OTHER THAN THOSE OF THE COMMUNITY. Though the expert may have knowledge which the community lacks, he may also acknowledge values which the community disavows. The ends which the expert desires to promote may be, indeed they often are, different from those of the ordinary man. An economic expert, for example, concerned only with the increase of efficiency, may conceive and plan a community of willing industrial slaves, owning no desires save such as are consonant with the speeding up of production with a view to the maximization of output; a hygienic expert, concerned only with health, may demand that men should be required to live

on rice, rusks, and vegetables; a military expert, that they should be drilled daily and sleep with gas masks hanging to their bedposts in the interests of security.

Or again, though the ends of the expert may not be other than those of the community, the means that he proposes to adopt in order to secure them may be other than those which the community wills. Most men, no doubt, desire a plenitude of goods, health and security. It does not, however, follow that they are prepared to turn themselves into robots, vegetarians, or soldiers; and it does not follow, because they may and do acknowledge other ends with whose realization machine-minding, vegetable-eating and drilling conflict. Thus measures proposed by an expert, although ancillary to ends which the community desires, may nevertheless be unacceptable because their adoption conflicts with other ends which the expert does not recognize.

**THAT THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ENDS AND MEANS IS OFTEN INVALID.** It is frequently contended that the expert's primary concern is with means. In a democracy, it is said, the community should will the ends, the expert determine the means for their achievement. But the considerations just mentioned suggest that in the political sphere the distinction between means and ends may break down. For means may themselves be ends in disguise. To take a concrete example: in the spring of 1931 the Labour Government set up, at the instance of the Liberals, a Committee—the May Committee on National Expenditure—to advise the Government in the matter of effecting economies. It was the Report of this Committee that precipitated the financial crisis of 1931. The report recommended, among other measures, cuts in State expenditure on education. But to advise that this generation should save its pocket by restricting the education of the next is not, as it at first sight appears to be, to recommend means to an end; it is to prefer one set of ends to another set. Now, where a conflict of ends



arises, the views of the man in the street are entitled to receive as much weight as those of the expert; moreover, on this particular issue—the issue of expenditure on education in relation to the need for economy—the man in the street may well take a different line from the economic expert and profess himself, with Macaulay, unable to believe that “what makes a nation happier and better and wiser can ever make it poorer”. Thus the apparently innocuous doctrine, that in a democracy the community should prescribe the ends and the expert determine the means, results in practice only too often in conferring a charter upon the expert to impose upon the community under the name of means, ends upon which it has had no opportunity of pronouncing judgment; and this danger, it is suggested, arises because in a modern community so-called means frequently reveal themselves on examination to be not means at all, but ends masquerading as means. The conclusion is, not that the expert should not be consulted and used by a democracy, but that vigilance is required, lest his employment should become a pretext for foisting upon the community measures which it has not willed.

THAT THE GENERALLY SUPERIOR PERSON IS NOT ENTITLED BY VIRTUE OF HIS SUPERIORITY TO GOVERN. (ii) The argument against permitting those who are possessed of a general unspecified superiority to govern because they *are* superior, is quite simply that there is no means of determining their superiority. Nietzsche held that superior men were distinguished by their will to power. In Germany they are distinguished by virtue of their membership of the Nazi, in Russia by virtue of their membership of the Communist, party. But in the absence of such automatic criteria how, we may ask, are the claims of superior persons to superiority to be made out save by the self-assertiveness of the claimants? In practice, as I have already suggested,<sup>1</sup> the rivalries of the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVI, pp. 658–660.

self-assertive can only be decided by force. The principle that those who can organize the greatest amount of force on their behalf should rule, has been the principle of government which has chiefly operated in the history of mankind. It is directly opposed to the principle of democracy, and I do not see any way of proving that the one principle is superior to the other. If the superiority of the democratic principle is not intuitively seen, there is, I think, nothing that can usefully be said in its defence. It is, however, pertinent to point out that the results which have historically attended the operation of the former principle have not been such as to commend it to an impartial mind. If it be conceded that there are absolute values such as truth and moral virtue, then we may say that those human beings are superior who apprehend these values and embody them in their lives. We may also say that by reason of their ability to apprehend values they ought to govern the State. This was Plato's view. It contradicts the principle of democracy which I have here enunciated, but there is, none the less, much to be said in its favour. Those who in modern times have proclaimed the right of the superior to rule have, however, as a general rule, repudiated the conception of absolute values; nor have they shown any tendency to base the ruler's claim to rule upon his superior knowledge of truth and moral goodness. There is, therefore, in Totalitarian States, no absolute standard by reference to which the superiority of the superior can be tested, and would-be superior persons have been driven to substantiating their claim to superiority by force.

### B. The Principle of Human Frailty

I mention this principle here not because it is as important as some of those which follow, but because it is based upon principle A, and is in some sense an extension of it. In opposition to all totalitarian and absolutist theories, democrats have contended that human beings cannot be trusted with power over their fellow human beings with-

out being liable to be called to account for their use of it; for if men are in a position to use power without check, they will abuse it. Plato shows his awareness of the truth of this contention, by his avowal that it is only when philosophers are kings, that an ideal State will become possible. If philosophers, that is to say, those who really know the principles of goodness, truth, and justice, and wish to embody them in the government of the State, were or ever had been available, a democrat, persuaded by the charms of Plato, might perhaps have been willing to permit them to exercise the powers of kingship. But, in fact, no such ideal governors have ever presented themselves, and, in the absence of philosophers, the democrat regretfully insists that we must do without kings. It is because men's abuse of power has been notorious and flagrant, so notorious and so flagrant that, if history is to be trusted, there is no more subtle corrupter of human character than the possession of irresponsible power that, the democrat insists, no superior individual, no party of superior individuals, however strong their wills, steadfast their convictions, devoted their efforts and determined their good intentions, can be safely entrusted with power which is not subject to check, revision and withdrawal. The careers of Nero and Caligula in Ancient Rome, of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great in Russia, of Louis XIV and Louis XV in France, to take but a few names, where history records a hundred, bear witness to the fact that men whose position raises them above human station fall in character below it. To give men the power of gods is, in fact, to afford a reasonable presumption that they will behave like beasts.

**THAT GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NO BAR TO THE MISUSE OF POWER.** But it is not necessary to be a king, in order to bear witness to the disastrous effects of the possession of power upon human character. Every slave-owner who has beaten and starved his slaves, every mill-owner who has over-worked and under-paid his

employees, every charity school or workhouse master who has bullied and starved the wretches whom indigence has placed in his power, illustrates the same truth. Squeers and Bumble, Mr. Murdstone and Mr. Brocklehurst, have their counterparts by the thousand, and the sum of human misery which has resulted from their exercise of power is past telling. "Power always corrupts and absolute power absolutely corrupts. All great men are bad," wrote Lord Acton. Lord Acton was surveying men's record in the past. Yet there is no reason to suppose that it is different in the present, or that the same causes are failing to produce the same results, merely because they happen to operate in the twentieth century.

Nor is it necessary for the holder of power to be evilly disposed; he need not be, even unconsciously, a sadist to make those who are subject to him miserable. On the contrary, he may be filled with the best intentions. He may be a moral reformer anxious to make men good in this world, or a religious enthusiast intent on saving their souls in the next. He may believe in what is essentially harmless—in temperance, for example, or vegetarianism, or the virtue of wholemeal bread. Yet his possession of unchecked power will transform his individually harmless belief into a public menace. He will misjudge men's desires, misunderstand their purposes, flout their wishes. He will make what he believes to be the best possible laws and hold up his hands in horror at men's ingratitude in repudiating them. In a word, with the best intentions in the world, he will make men miserable simply because he cannot put himself in their place.

The principle which I have cited as the central principle of democracy, the principle that "it is only the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches", here receives a new application. We must not give men irresponsible power, not only because it corrupts them and they abuse it, but also because they do not experience the effects of their use of it; they do not, in other words, have to live under the laws they make. It follows, first, that in the last resort

only those must be entrusted with the making of the laws who have to obey them; secondly, that those who have to obey them should have the opportunity of altering them, through the right of public criticism and the ventilation of grievances; thirdly, that holders of power should be elected for a period and called to give an account of their stewardship at the end of that period.

### C. The Principle of Liberty

This is the principle that men and women should be free to live their own lives, think their own thoughts and speak the thoughts that they think without hindrance from the State. Liberty is an ultimate political value as goodness, beauty, truth and happiness are ultimate ethical values. If we assume that the democrat is right in holding that the function of the State is to make the good life possible for its members, the political value of liberty is, he must further insist, a necessary condition for the realization by the individual of those ethical values in the pursuit of which the good life consists. Political liberty is a good for which men have striven hard and long in the not too distant past. At the present time it is taken for granted in democratic countries and denied in totalitarian countries.

Communist theory, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> tends to regard political liberty in capitalist countries as of no account, or, as of worse than no account, on the grounds that it distracts the mass of the people from the contemplation of economic injustice and takes the revolutionary edge off their discontent. In order that we may be in a position to consider how far this criticism is justified, it is necessary to ask in what political liberty consists.

**Content of Political Liberty.** That we should be able freely to express our thoughts and desires, on the platform, at the street corner, or in the press; that we should be entitled to worship whatever God we please and to worship

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XVII, pp. 687-690.

him how we please, and that we should equally be entitled to worship no God at all; that we should be able, if wronged, to invoke the law in our defence against the highest in the land; that no official of the State, no representative of the law, should be allowed unjustly to oppress us with impunity; that we may not be accused, or our persons detained, save for offences determined by the law of the land and in accordance with the procedure which the law prescribes, and that, should we be so accused, we may not be held in custody without being brought to trial; that the law should be one which we ourselves through our elected representatives in Parliament have a voice in determining, and that, if we dislike it, and can persuade a sufficient number of our fellow citizens to our way of thinking, we should be able to change it—these things and others like them taken together are the content of what is known as political liberty. Having enumerated them it is difficult to deny oneself the pleasure of asking those who make light of liberty as a thing of no account, regarding it as a superfluity, or even seeing in it a dangerous distraction from the pursuit of economic justice, what there is in the content I have described that militates against the economic changes they desire. The answer is, I submit, not easy to find. There is, indeed, good ground for thinking that, as I have suggested on a previous page,<sup>1</sup> the possession of political liberty, so far from being a bar to economic equality, is a necessary condition of its realization.

It contributes to the current belittlement of liberty that its enjoyment is a negative rather than a positive good. When we have it, we do not realize that we have it: we realize it and realize that it is a good only when we are deprived of it. In this sense liberty is like health or air. We normally value health only when we have lost it, or, having lost it, have just regained it, when the memory of illness is still vividly with us. Similarly with air; we value it only if it is taken from us, when we value it so much that we proceed to die unless it is restored to us. So men

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 782-784 above.

normally value liberty only when it is denied to them; but its denial is a denial of all that makes life worth living, so that the spirit of the prisoner cries out for liberty, and again for liberty, as the lungs of the man who is choking cry out for air; for liberty is the air of the spirit.

It is, indeed, only when they lose their humanity that men cease to mourn the loss of liberty. But if men and women are not free to think as they please, they do indeed lose their title to humanity; for it is by our power of thinking that we are chiefly distinguished from the beasts. If they are not free to speak as they please, men become gramophone records for speaking the thoughts of others. If they are not free to act as they please, they become automata doing the will of others.

The man who may at any moment be arrested without warrant, imprisoned without trial and left to languish in prison at the pleasure of the government, lives under the shadow of a fear which takes all the sweetness from his life. For the indispensable background of the good life is security, and there is no security where liberty depends upon the fiat of unchecked authority.

Nor is it an answer to say that the welfare of the State demands the suppression of certain individual freedoms: the freedom, for example, to criticize the government. For the welfare of the State is nothing apart from the good of the citizens who compose it. It is no doubt true that a State whose citizens are compelled to go right is more efficient than one whose citizens are free to go wrong. But what then? To sacrifice freedom in the interests of efficiency, is to sacrifice what confers upon human beings their humanity. It is no doubt easy to govern a flock of sheep; but there is no credit in the governing, and, if the sheep were born as men, no virtue in the sheep.

#### D. The Principle of Equality

The principle of equality includes a number of different conceptions. No democrat is so foolish as to suppose that all men are equal, though some have maintained that they are

all *born* free and equal. He holds it, however, as self-evident that every man has an equal right to develop his potentialities and to realize all that he has it in him to be; an equal right of access to the inherited knowledge and culture of the community to which he belongs; and an equal right to training and equipment for life, both as an individual and as a citizen. He holds it in fact as self-evident that every man has an equal right to be educated, and that it is the business of the State to see that this right is enjoyed. Now a man's right to education does not entitle authority to fill his head with hypotheses presented as truths and ideas inculcated as dogmas, turning out as a result a standard, manufactured mind, guaranteed to think rightly, that is, as the Church or the Government thinks, on all subjects. A man's right to education means that the community should give him the indispensable minimum equipment to enable him to think for himself. It involves teaching him not what to think, but how.

The principle Equality entails further that every man has an equal right, subject to the reservations indicated above,<sup>1</sup> to express what he thinks in writing or by word of mouth; and that every man has an equal right to listen to him and to answer him, if he can; not some men merely—for example, members of particular parties (Fascists), races (Aryans), or religions (Christians)—but all members of the community, irrespective of party, race or creed. For in those matters which most nearly touch human interests—politics, religions and ethics—the truth is not known, and to give a privileged monopoly of expression to any form of opinion is to sterilize truth and to canonize falsehood.

Equality means further that every man is equal before the laws, Jew as well as Aryan, bourgeois as well as proletarian, and that justice, instead of being identified with the interest of any man or group of men should be extended equally to all, irrespective of the desires of powerful persons.

Equality means finally the right of combination, that all should be entitled and equally entitled to combine, to

<sup>1</sup> See p. 779 above.



agitate and to work for such ends as seem good to them—to raise wages, to improve conditions, or to form political parties hostile to the Government. For all men have an equal right to try to determine for themselves the social and political conditions under which they shall live.

### E. The Principle of Rationality

This principle asserts that men are reasonable in the sense that, if an opinion is true and evidence can be brought forward to show that it is true, then in the long run they will embrace it. This view, which was taken for granted by the democrats of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> is widely denied in the modern world. Unless, however, we are prepared to agree with John Stuart Mill that it is possible to “make men believe according to evidence, and know what was their real interest, which when they once knew, they would we thought by the instrument of opinion, enforce a regard to it upon one another”, we have no adequate ground for believing that they can be entrusted with the privilege of self-government.

### F. The Principle of Individualism

This is the principle that individuals and only individuals are ends, and that it is never right to treat them merely as means to ends beyond themselves, such as, for example, the power of a person, party or a class, or the prestige of a State. To the right of the individual to be treated as an end, which entails his right to the full development and expression of his personality, all other rights and claims must, the democrat holds, be subordinated. I do not know how this principle is to be defended, any more than I can frame a defence for the principles of democracy and liberty. The nineteenth century would have said that the principle is “grounded in the objective moral order of the universe”, and that it is, therefore, one that is recognizable by every human being. The right to be treated as an end is not, if this view is true, derived from law and custom:

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XIV, p. 534.

it is prior to law and custom, and it is their business to give expression to it. It is on these lines that writers in the nineteenth century would have argued for the right of the individual to the full development and expression of his personality.

But what if "the objective moral order of the universe" be denied. The twentieth century, with the experience of the war behind it, lacks the confidence which imbued the nineteenth. It does not feel certain that the universe is friendly to man, conformable with his wishes, or responsive to his aspirations, and, if it recognizes an order at all, it is inclined to doubt whether it is moral. I do not, then, know how to substantiate this principle save by a direct appeal to the conscience of mankind.

**THAT THE INDIVIDUAL IS AN END IN HIMSELF.** For the last two thousand years the conscience of mankind has insisted, at any rate in theory, that the individual should be treated as an end in himself. For what, it may be asked, is a man for, or, as the Greeks would have put it, what is the true end of man? We do not, the fact must be admitted, know. But there is one thing upon which that part of mankind which still accepts Christ's teaching is agreed; it is that the true end of man includes the maximum development of his personality. We expect it, in other words, of a man that he should develop his faculties to their utmost capacity, utilize his powers to the full, and realize all the potentialities of his nature; that he should, in short, become as completely as possible himself. And since he cannot do these things alone, it is the business of the community to help him to do them. It is, then, the business of the community to make the good life possible for all its citizens: not any sort of life, be it noted, but the sort of life that seems to men individually to be good. "Political societies," to repeat Aristotle's aphorism, "exist for the sake of noble actions and not merely of a common life."

Now the principle of individualism insists that each

citizen has the right to form his ideals, to choose his way of life for himself. The citizen of a democracy is entitled to resist the right of any to impose upon him his way of life from above. "The purpose of our training is to enable us to fight, for fighting is the duty and chief glory of man. He who does not want to fight is not fit to live." This announcement made and repeated daily at one of the new Nazi educational establishments, admirably illustrates the imposition of the conception of the good life from above. The good life, in fact, consists of fighting, whether the individual likes it or not. Now, it is the essence of individualism that no man should be in a position to dictate to another the ideal of good-living which he should set before himself.

And if no man, then also no form of government. The State, then, is not entitled to impose its conception of the good life upon its citizens. All that it may do is to establish the conditions in which the living of the good life by its citizens is possible; that is to say, in a modern community, freedom from violence and redress of grievances at law, the minimum of training for the mind (education), and of health for the body (sanitation, hospital and medical service), and the chance of employment. The State in short—the fact, one would have thought, is obvious enough—is made for man, to enable him to achieve happiness and to develop his faculties; man is not made for the State. It is this doctrine more than any other of those which democrats have come to take for granted which is denied in the world to-day. One government insists that a citizen is a drop of blood in an ocean of racial purity; another, that he is a cog in a proletarian machine; another, that he is an ant in a social territory.

**That Biological Science does not Countenance the Subordination of the Individual.** These views of the individual are sometimes reinforced by appeals to science, and particularly to biological science. Human beings, it is said, are important only in so far as they fit into a biological

scheme or assist in the furtherance of the evolutionary process. Thus each generation of women must accept as its sole function the production of children who will constitute the next generation who, in their turn, will devote their lives and sacrifice their inclinations to the task of producing a further generation, and so on *ad infinitum*. This is the doctrine of eternal sacrifice—"jam yesterday, jam to-morrow, but never jam to-day". For, it may be asked, to what end should generations be produced, unless the individuals who compose them are valued in and for themselves, are, in fact, ends in themselves? There is no escape from the doctrine of the perpetual recurrence of generations who have value only in so far as they produce more generations, the perpetual subordination of citizens who have value only in so far as they promote the interests of the State to which they are subordinated, except in the individualist doctrine, which is also the Christian doctrine, that the individual is an end in himself. The Christian would add that he is also an immortal soul. I do not know how to prove this, but to deny it is to blaspheme against the essential dignity of the individual human being, and to degrade him to the level of a machine or a slave.

**Conclusion.** The conclusions reached in other parts of the book enable me to supplement the above statement in two ways. In Part II, I suggested that the good life for the individual consists in the pursuit of certain absolute values. If I am right, if, that is to say, it is by the pursuit of values that a man develops his personality, we may add that the object of the State is to establish those conditions in which the individual can pursue absolute values, and to encourage him in their pursuit. We are thus enabled to establish a principle of progress in society, which is also a standard of measurement whereby to assess the relative worths of different societies. The principle will be that one society is more advanced or, if the expression be preferred, is "better" than another, if its members more clearly apprehend the values of truth, moral virtue,

beauty and happiness, and embody them more fully in their lives. Two of these values, namely, those of moral virtue and happiness, are, however, pursued and realized in the service of the community. We must add, then, that a good community is one which offers to its citizens opportunities for the development of their personalities and the realization of these absolute values in its service. If we define democracy as a method of government under which every citizen has an opportunity of participating, through discussion, in an attempt to reach voluntary agreement as to what shall be done for the good of the whole, we shall conclude that in offering to its members opportunities to shape its policy and to realize in action the policy they have shaped, it offers them also opportunities for the development of their nature. It is not true that democracy subordinates the State to the individual; on the contrary it enables the individual to realize himself in service to the State, while not forgetting that the true end of the State must be sought in the lives of individuals.

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