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Boutroux, Émile

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THOUGHT AND ACTION

FROM THE GERMAN AND FROM THE
CLASSICAL POINT OF VIEW

THE HERBERT SPENCER LECTURE
DELIVERED AT OXFORD, OCTOBER 20, 1917

BY

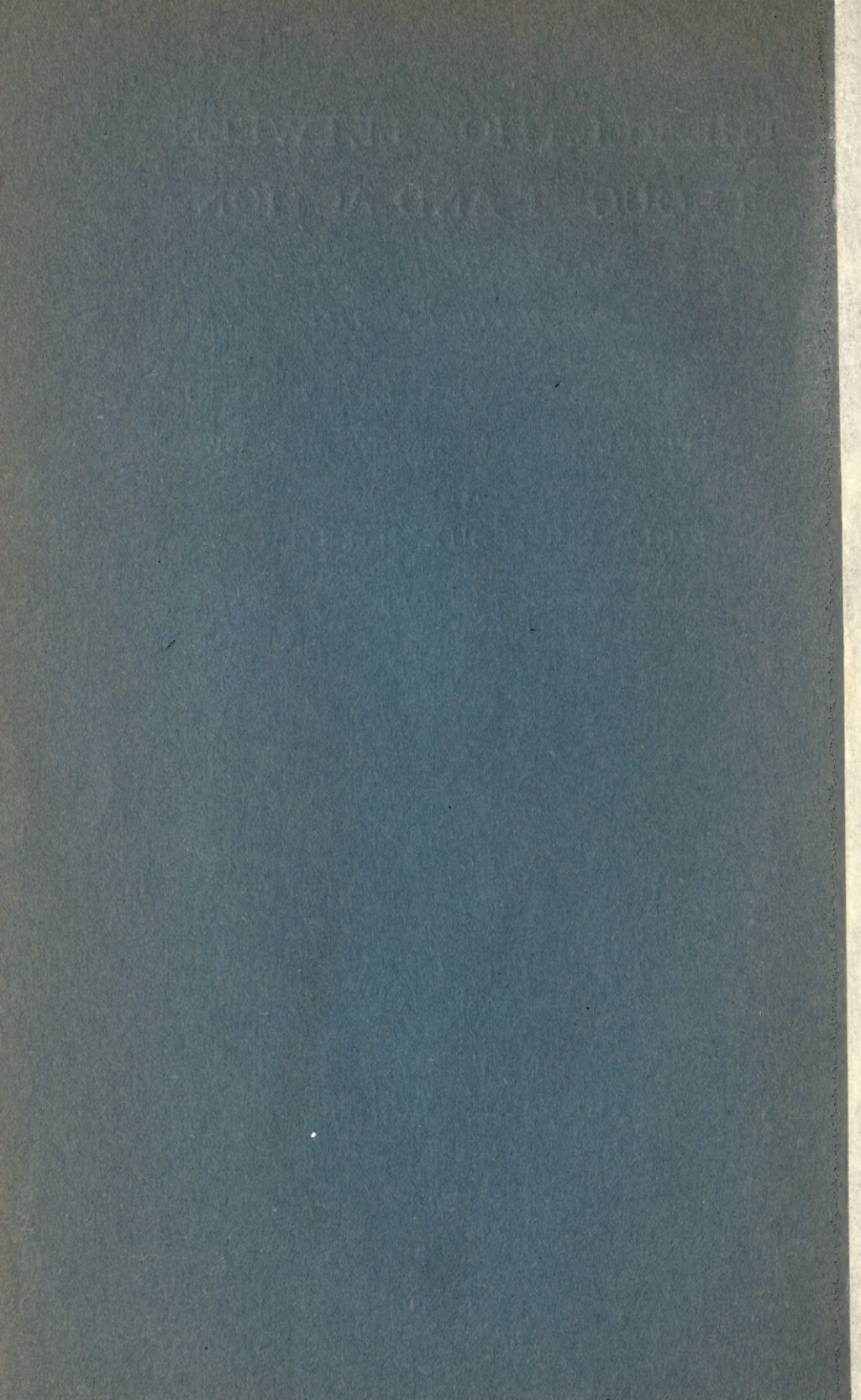
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THE RELATION BETWEEN THOUGHT AND ACTION

FROM THE GERMAN AND FROM THE CLASSICAL POINT OF VIEW

If both have bases in the reality of things, then between them there must be a fundamental harmony.—Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, Part I, ch. 1.

THERE are two ways of honouring great men. You can, by investing yourself with the prestige of their name, glorify them as the patrons of the cause you defend. Then you interpret the past in the terms of the present, you take from the past only what is valuable as a tool for the work which you have in hand. For example, we read in a famous address dated October 3, 1914: 'But for German militarism, German culture would have long since perished from the earth. . . . Believe us, we will carry this struggle to the finish, as a cultured nation, to which the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven and a Kant is as sacred as its hearth and its soil.' Yet it is questionable whether the alleged authorities would approve of those pretended disciples.

Or one may conceive the worship of 'the mighty dead' in quite a different way. One may hold a truly

great man to be a light, which death has not been able to put out, but which shines on down the ages, showing a road towards Truth. Then, instead of exploiting the authority of the great man for your own benefit, you modestly take him as your master, and strive to develop and progress by following his teaching. You earnestly endeavour to become inspired with his spirit, and to perpetuate, not his memory only, but his very action, his inward and spiritual life.

Need I say that the latter form of worship it is, not the former, that we should like to pay to Herbert Spencer's memory. By evoking it, we do not exhume a dead man, but we unite in spirit with an ever living spirit.

Let me quote, in this connexion, a sentence which runs through the whole work of Herbert Spencer, and which I would like to take as a leading idea for the present inquiry. Given, says Herbert Spencer, the antagonism of two terms, 'if both have bases in the reality of things, then between them there must be a fundamental harmony.'¹ How many difficulties, both in theoretical and practical matters, would be solved or lessened if we might learn, by applying Herbert Spencer's maxim, how to conciliate opposing claims and give each its due, instead of striving to oppress or to annihilate what we deem irreconcilable with our own trend of mind?

¹ Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, Part I, ch. 1.

* * *

The problem towards which I should like to direct your attention for a few moments is one as old as human reflection, yet, perhaps, in these days, more urgent than ever. What is, what ought to be, the relation between Thought and Action? The present war some consider an incredible abdication of Thought in the hands of Action, while others maintain that even the unloosening of the most barbarous cruelty is certain to result in promoting the ideals of Thought. Let us try to approach this problem from a purely philosophical point of view.

Man, to be sure, is at first disposed to admit a close solidarity between Thought and Action. Would one be held to act as a man, if he moved in this or that direction, without knowing why he moved thus and not otherwise? There are plenty of proverbs warning men that they are to face every disappointment and misery, if they surrender the direction of their conduct to chance or to their own blind impulse. On the other hand, what would be the value of a Thought which was alien to Action? 'Tis action awoke human reflection; striving to get the fulfilment of his desires, man made inquiries about the production of the phenomena around him and discovered the laws of nature. And his most abstract ideas are but generalizations of his practical ways of resolving and acting. An idea means a permanent disposition towards a certain line of conduct under given circumstances. To say of a man that

he is wise is to say both that he thinks well and that he acts well.

Thus it seems, at first, that Thought and Action, in human life, necessarily imply each other, and go, so to speak, hand in hand. Yet, as soon as you scrutinize the matter, you meet with difficulties.

Generally speaking, Thought aims at examining as completely and impartially as possible the nature of things, whereas any actual action is the realization of one object to the exclusion of others. With this fundamental difference many interesting oppositions are connected.

Since Thought gives itself the task of examining its object from every possible point of view, how much time this examination may require is no part of the thinker's reckoning: Action, on the contrary, must be performed within a definite time, after which it would prove impossible or result in a failure. Thus Thought may hesitate between several solutions and hold the scales even with regard to them, as long as evidence is missing. But Action is bound to choose and to take a side. However far it may carry the reconciliation between different issues, it needs must, sooner or later, elect one and exclude the others.

Thought may be content with a solution of a general character, incompletely defined: whereas Action means the realization of a quite definite, individual phenomenon.

After further inquiry Thought can cancel the con-

clusion reached, and come back to the starting-point, whereas Action is irrevertible and necessarily survives. The very fact that its consequences mingle with the continual change of things prevents it from ever being resumed under identical conditions.

The law of Thought is the pursuit of logical unity, i. e. of the ideal reduction of differences to similarities, of heterogeneity to identity ; whereas the aim of Action is efficiency, i. e. the alteration of things given, according to the purpose of human will. The end of Thought is truth, the aim of Action is success.

As a consequence of all those differences, Thought mainly appeals, for its work, to reason and liberty. But Action admits of any force, from reason down to passion, from religion down to the rudest instincts. And far from bidding reason to exert itself according to its own law, it is apt to submit reason, like any other agent, to its domination ; for its sole object is to make, with all the forces at its disposal, a well-tied bundle, as an instrument of victory in the battle of life.

In conclusion, on the one side, Thought and Action appear indissolubly connected as parts of one whole, while, on the other, they seem to be radically different and perchance incompatible. So that one might be tempted to fancy each of them as addressing the other in the well-known words of Ovid :

Nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum.

Among the many theories which were elaborated by

philosophers in order to solve the difficult problem of the relation between Thought and Action, one of the most remarkable, if I am not mistaken, is found in the speculation of the German philosophers. I will try to bring out the essential features of this theory, then to appreciate its value, and lastly to elicit from this very examination some hint of the theory which I believe should be adopted.

I

The starting-point of German reflection on this subject is to be found in the doctrine of Kant on the essence of Thought and Action. Anxious as he was to state accurately what is for every thing its very ground and internal reality, Kant developed a very precise doctrine of the essence of Thought and Action.

Actual Thought, viz. Thought aiming at knowledge proper, consists for him in considering any phenomenon as conditioned, as to its characters and existence, by another phenomenon of the same nature, according to a law of necessity which causes the present to be entirely determined by the past: *Verknüpfung eines Zustandes mit einem vorigen in der Sinnenwelt, worauf jener nach einer Regel folgt.*¹

Now the principle of knowledge is the assumption that such laws of connexion are to be found in the nature of things, and that those laws, at bottom, are but

¹ Kant, *Krit. d. r. V.*, 2nd ed., p. 560.

the various expressions of one and the same fundamental law.

Thus Thought considers every phenomenon as conditioned, from without, by another phenomenon, and as, in that respect, absolutely conditioned. As this mode of connexion is what is termed mechanism, it may be said that the law of Thought is to deal with things from a mechanical point of view.

The principle of Action, according to Kant, is quite different. If you rise from the exterior and physical action (which is but apparently an action, since all that is physical is mechanical) to the internal and moral action, as to the only veritable one, you will find that Action proper consists in unconditioned production of an effect by a subject as its cause: *Handlung bedeutet das Verhältniß des Subjekts der Kausalität zur Wirkung*.¹ The perfect type of Action is freedom, according to the meaning Kant gives to that word, viz. conditioning of the effect by the subject, and by it only: *das Vermögen, einen Zustand von selbst anzufangen, dessen Kausalität also nicht nach dem Naturgesetze wieder unter einer andern Ursache steht, welche sie der Zeit nach bestimmt*.²

Such is the Kantian conception of Action and Thought proper. From those definitions a momentous consequence follows, which Kant did not fail to deduce accurately. Thought and Action become entirely exterior

¹ Kant, *Krit. d. r. V.*, 2nd ed., p. 250.

² *Ibid.*, p. 561.

to one another. They move in two worlds, which can in no way have any part in common. Neither can absolute initiative, which characterizes Action proper, have the least influence upon the course of phenomena, nor can mechanical necessity, which rules the world of phenomena, in any degree affect the free and absolute subject that subsists, in its eternity, outside of time and space. Kant characterized by the names of 'phenomenon world' and 'noumenon world' (*Phaenomena* and *Noumena*) those two ranges of existences, which he maintains we cannot but admit, if the doctrine is to escape self-contradiction, and whose respective laws ought to be such as to exclude any influence of the one upon the other.

Thus the definitions we pointed out lead logically to a radically dualistic conception of the relation between Thought and Action.

Now an absolute dualism, according to which both terms are conceived as exactly exterior to each other, is visibly repugnant to the trend of human intelligence, which, the moment two objects are given to it, naturally seeks for some thinkable relation between them, or, if no such relation at all is to be found, causes the one to suppress the other. So the Kantian doctrine of Phenomena and Noumena brought on an evolution, whose aim was to state a relatively intelligible relation between the latter and the former, and to drop whatever appeared as absolutely irreconcilable with the main and leading principles.

It seems convenient to point out, in that evolution, three different phases.

1. Kant, after radically distinguishing and confining to two separate worlds Thought, which knows, and Freedom, which acts, deems it both possible and obligatory to invest the world of action, where freedom is enthroned, with pre-eminence over the world of knowledge, where everything is conditioned and dependent. The 'Primat' (primacy), as Kant terms it, of Practice over Theory represents the first stage in this evolution.

2. A realistic trend was congenial to the German spirit. In days of yore, the Holy Roman Emperors of the German nation had maintained that, since the power of the Pope, apart from the Imperial support, would be merely abstract and theoretical, and devoid of all true reality, the universal supremacy ought to belong to the Emperors. Now, the main question German philosophy raised about anything ideal concerned itself precisely with the conditions of its realization.

So the German philosophers were not content with defining and assigning a distinct place to the notion of the world of freedom. Kant had already asked anxiously: How will this lofty world be able to become actual? What are the conditions of its realization? Would practical reason still deserve its name, were it bound to remain a pure and inaccessible ideal?

Now the Kantian dualism, while absolutely separating the worlds of Action and Thought from one another,

had located in the latter any given and actual existence. Therefore, if ideal action was to become real, according to the intellectual meaning of the word, this could only be possible by means of the world of sense-phenomena. Yet between two things, heterogeneous but not exactly contradictory, one relation remains conceivable, namely the relation of a conditioned thing to its condition. Thus did German philosophy, after Kant, seek within the very world of knowledge, viz. the world of phenomena, the conditions of realization for the world of freedom.

Fichte showed how the absolute Ego 'posits' (*setzt*), outside itself, the theoretical Ego, in order to be able, by re-absorbing the object which this last opposes to it, to become a practical Ego. Thus Thought is given the part of a cause, not sufficient indeed, yet necessary to and operative in ideal Action.

Then another question arose: What should the content of Action be? What is in its essence the object which Freedom is able and bound to realize?

After he had completely separated Thought from Action, Kant found himself at a loss, when trying to answer this question and to determine what content should be assigned to his Categorical Imperative. Hegel solved the problem by applying also to the content of Action the law that Fichte had stated for its production. True it is, he holds that only to the absolute and independent spirit can belong the part of first motor and supreme end of things. But, what is posited at each

stage of a process which will never reach its goal, are the theses, antitheses and syntheses, the content of which is borrowed from the sense-world, the only world of existences. Thus, with respect to actual reality, the world of phenomena creates the world of freedom, matter creates spirit, devil creates God.

3. Though Fichte and Hegel might find in theoretical Thought, i.e. in the working of the forces of this our world, the condition necessary for the realization of ideal Action, neither of them ventured to state that this necessary condition was also the sufficient one. Nay, to their mind, it is Freedom itself which, in our world, is in process of realization : and this remains the true cause, first and absolute, of all things.

But the deeply realistic spirit which is congenial to their soul caused the German people to deem the idealism of a Fichte or a Hegel still too transcendent.

The great composer, Richard Wagner, somewhere wrote : 'There would be no need of Art, if one were possessed of life.' The reason why the Germans became enthusiastic for ideals, dreams, eternal beings, communion with the first principle and the last end of things, was simply because, for a long while, they were without the hope of securing the control of the visible world, which is their inmost and dearest ambition. Poetry was the temporary compensation (*Ersatz*) for a reality which, for the present, escaped them. But could reality become again attainable, could the terre-

strial kingdom appear conquerable, they would give up the control of the Empyrean without regret.

What value does Faust, in the play of Goethe, ascribe to the highest sciences, when Mephistopheles offers him the enjoyments and the realities of this material world? He is not long in making up his mind. He chooses to dismiss any good which would be an absolute, that is to say a non-temporal, one. He devotes himself to the endless change, to the successive and indefinite realization of all the modes of activity which present life affords.

Nur rastlos betätigt sich der Mann.

*Und was der ganzen Menschheit zugeteilt ist
Will ich in meinem innern Selbst genießen.¹*

Through her victories at Waterloo, Königgrätz, Sedan, Germany saw herself entitled to lay claim again to the control of this world: then she disdained the invisible one.

The latest philosophy of Action in Germany left to such men as were still imbued with the scholastic or classical spirit the care of finding in a higher world practical laws and principles. She, for her part, professes to find in this phenomenal world the conditions both necessary and sufficient for the highest and most perfect action. So she proceeded to teach that not only the condition, but the very principle and end of Action was Might, conceived as constantly striving after ever-

¹ *Faust*, Part I.

growing power and ever-increasing control of our universe.

The part to be acted by Thought was determined thereby. The dualistic principle of this philosophy does not allow Thought to prescribe any effective rules or set any limits to actual Action. The latter contains its law in itself, and this law is no other than the indefinite increase of Might. Hence the essential function of Thought will be to provide Action with such practical knowledge of the temporal and spatial world, as may be required in order to subdue and exploit it as largely as possible. Now as the law of scientific explanation is mechanism, viz. necessary connexion between antecedent and consequent, science is naturally perfectly fitted to do the service Action expects from her. For precisely in the measure in which they become mechanically explained, phenomena come within the grasp of our action and can then be artificially produced. Thus Thought in its relation to Action will be given its legitimate and necessary part, if it be enrolled as a subordinate, as a servant : *Cogitatio ancilla efficientiae*.

This does not mean, indeed, that all Thought has lost the right of working for its own satisfaction. Germany, even converted as she is to the Bismarckian realism, claims to preserve the cult of intelligence and of disinterested science. But, as she remains confined within her dualistic system, she does not allow the disinterested Thought to have any influence upon practical life, or any right to judge and rule human deeds.

Scholarship, pure science, the contemplation of ideal truth, even if they should outlive the huge modern movement of Germany towards material realization, can never be regarded there as anything but mere luxuries, a kind of intellectual sport, to be honoured with titles and decorations. Either the servant of material Action, or a useless virtuosity: such is the condition finally reserved to Thought.

II

Triumphant as the declarations of the German people may be with respect to the excellence of their philosophy and of their culture, should an impartial man feel obliged to give them his assent?

The German doctrine was very learnedly and thoroughly (*gründlich*) deduced (*deduzirt*) by German professors. The principle and the mode of that deduction are much the same in the various phases of evolution of the theory.

The common starting-point is nothing else than the famous revolution which Kant performed in metaphysics, and with regard to which he compares himself with Copernicus. 'Till now,' he says,¹ 'it was admitted that our knowledge should accommodate itself to objects. Now, every attempt which has been made, from that point of view, in order to solve the

¹ Preface to the 2nd ed. of *Krit. d. r. V.*, 2nd ed., p. 16.

metaphysical problems, proved a failure. Let us see, then, whether we should succeed better by supposing, on the contrary, that objects have to accommodate themselves to the conditions of our knowledge.' Precisely by applying this principle, Kant developed that radical dualism of Thought and Action, and that doctrine of the Supremacy of Practice, which are to be found at the foundation of all the prominent German theories.

Indeed, the moment they are posited by the subject as conditions for its own realization, Knowledge and Action can be no more considered as truly given and living realities. They become pure logical entities, whose perfection would consist in being perfectly distinct from each other. The subject sets them up before himself, assembles or separates them, much as an architect does the materials of an edifice. When thus construing the antithesis of mechanism and freedom, the subject conceives this opposition in an entirely objective manner, and, consequently, bars himself, at the outset, from ever actually reuniting the two terms at any time, in a living and effective synthesis.

Furthermore, this philosophy, from the beginning, gives Action the precedence over Thought. For the 'setting' (*setzen*) by which it starts, and through which it would explain Thought as well as Action, is itself already conceived as an action. *Im Anfang war die Tat*. So that this philosophy will be essentially a constructive one. It will construct the principles of knowledge as

well as the principles of practical life. To deduce, to explain, even to observe and to perceive, from the standpoint of German philosophy, means to produce, to elaborate, to combine the conditions for the realization of the universal Ego.

It may be acknowledged that this German system is very well put together, and that, should the Kantian principle be admitted, the general movement of ideas in modern Germany would prove largely justified. Yet ought the starting-point to be admitted?

Let us ask ourselves whether the judgement that Kant pronounces upon the method followed by all his predecessors is well founded.

Metaphysicians, he says, always took for granted that knowledge accommodates itself to objects, and this begging of the question was the general cause of their failure. Now, we may, as it seems, concede to Kant that from such a principle one could hardly deduce a theory of knowledge which could secure for knowledge any objective value. But is it true that this very principle, which is properly the characteristic of absolute empiricism, is to be found at the root of all the important epistemological systems of ancient and modern times before Kant?

Certainly this point of view does not appear in Plato's philosophy. For, while he sought for essential being outside of the sensible world, because this latter lacks intelligibility, Plato held the absolute being as possessed, not only of intelligibility, but of life, and of

'intelligence august and holy', *σεμνὸν καὶ ἅγιον νοῦν*.¹ Thus the absolute separation which Kant would draw between our knowledge and its transcendental object, viz. absolute reality, was alien to Plato. According to this latter, our intelligence feels at home in the realm of true Being.

It is the same with Aristotle. For this philosopher repeatedly emphasizes living intelligence as belonging to the order of first principles: *Νοῦς ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀρχῶν*.² *Ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζώη*.³

The classical principle was truly expressed by Parmenides in his celebrated verse:

Ταὐτὸν δ' ἔστι νοεῖν τε καὶ οὐνεκέν ἐστι νόημα,

the meaning of which, in Greek philosophy, was that, at bottom, Being and Thought are one and the same, because Being is thinkable and Thought finds in Being its proper object.

According to this principle, the rejection of the constructive dialectic of German philosophy would by no means bind us to that merely passive perception of ready-made transcendental objects, viz. *Dinge an sich*, which constitutes the other term of the Kantian alternative.

The method resulting from the admission of a natural kindred between Being and Thought should be a close and constant mingling of intuition and reasoning. Since the human mind, far from asserting itself to be outside

¹ Plato, *Sophista*, 249a.

² Aristotle, *Anal. post.* ii. 15, 100 b 12.

³ Id., *Metaph.* xii. 7, 1072 b 27.

Being and Being outside itself, is naturally akin to primitive Being, it ought to observe candidly the nature of things, such as they appear to man. On the other hand, since man, apparently, is no monster in nature and nature is likely to be somewhat analogous with him, he never ought to be content with passive intuition, but should always compare and define and co-ordinate his intuitions by judging and reasoning. In a word, he must constantly proceed from being to concept and from concept to being. Neither one nor the other of those operations comes first or second. Nay, in the words of Berthelot, 'everything ought to be viewed at the same time from near and far,' namely, everything ought to be constantly considered, both in itself and in its relation to other things, both as a distinct being and as part of a whole.

Such is, I think, if accurately defined, the classical point of view. Kant did not really demonstrate it to be untenable, since he started his discussion with a wrong definition of it by mistakenly confounding it with a sensual or intellectual empiricism. And even if, by adopting this classical point of view, we should not succeed in solving all metaphysical problems, as German metaphysicians are confident they can, we nevertheless would refuse to change it for the German standpoint, because we hold it our duty, as intelligent beings, to attempt to see things as they really are, and to follow obediently the laws which rule them, instead of dictating laws to the universe, on behalf of a supposed

transcendental or absolute consciousness, which professes to assert itself as anterior to any existence or any possibility. *Mehr denn alle Unendlichkeit* (more than all Infinity): this was the motto that the philosopher Fichte gave to his disciples. Such a maxim, if it were conceivable at all, would only suit a God, not men.

III

Let us now endeavour to construct, from the classical point of view, the doctrine about the relation between Thought and Action which we would oppose to the German doctrine.

If, instead of constructing Thought and Action outside the subject, like factitious entities, we watch them as they exist in their given reality, we do not find them so different from and exterior to one another as they appear in German philosophy.

It is of importance to note that Thought, when bent towards a mechanical conception of things, does not represent the whole of Thought. Greek philosophy was precisely anxious to distinguish from this inferior form of Thought, which it terms *διάνοια* or *τὸ λογικῶς ζητεῖν*, a higher form of Thought, for which it reserves the name of *νοῦς*. Now, while inferior Thought is governed by the idea of brute necessity (*ἀνάγκη*), superior Thought has for its standard the idea of finality, order, propriety, good, perfection. This classical distinction ought to be preserved. Thought, as is exhibited in the

mathematical or physical sciences, does not exhaust the whole power of Thought. When dealing with human things proper, with moral or religious things, Thought proves capable of providing demonstrations which, although it is impossible to reduce them to a mathematical form, are of real value to the mind of any intelligent and cultivated man. Pascal said, in this connexion, 'The Heart has its reasons which Reason does not know.' Now, the meaning of Pascal's utterance is not that the reasons of the Heart are no reasons at all, but reasons of a kind which surpasses that purely geometrical reason which some fanatical scientists would hold to be reason pure and simple, without any qualification.

The function of higher reason, according to Plato, consists in separating beings or uniting them otherwise than according to their logical or mechanical relations, namely, according to the 'ideas' which represent the perfection towards which they are tending, i.e. their respective ideals. Thus Thought composes, above the physical world, a moral, a social, a human, an aesthetical, a religious world, which, although not reducible to material elements, is nevertheless real, and worthy of subsisting and developing.

On the other hand, Action, as given in reality, is not merely the pursuit of might through might for might's sake, which, according to the latest results of German speculation, constitutes its very essence. Above Action thus conceived, classical philosophy centuries ago

set another sort of action, which she constantly emphasized, namely, that which is expressed by the word ἐγκράτεια. We act, indeed, when we restrain our own action, and obey the laws which set bounds to our desire of might, of domination, of tyranny. Nay more, in this very self-control the Hellenic-Christian tradition sees Might or Action in the highest meaning of the word, Action whose grandeur goes far beyond the value of material Action, however multiplied by science and organization. The well-known verses of Horace may be taken for the motto of classical civilization:

*Vis consilii expers mole ruit sua,
Vim temperatam di quoque provehunt
In maius.*

Classical philosophy defined this higher form of activity with sufficient precision by stating that it consists in controlling one's passions in order to let justice, order, and propriety (τὸ πρέπον) rule the individual and the social life.

This is the classical idea of Thought and Action. And it appears that, if thus considered in their full meaning, Thought and Action are far from being things heterogeneous. For the idea of good and perfection, which is the standard of superior Thought, is largely a practical idea, directly bearing on Action: and the superior form of Action, viz. self-control with a view to the realization of justice, implies the consciousness of a law, that is to say, of a principle which concerns Thought.

So far it would seem that the formal separation which German dialectics drew between Thought and Action did not exist at all.

Yet the identity of the words does not suffice to prove the identity of the things. It cannot be denied that there is a profound difference between the mere idea of order, good, justice, or perfection, which higher Thought contemplates, and the actual control which Will may impose upon passions in actual operation. We know how earnestly Aristotle maintained that between the knowledge and the practice of good there exists a formal solution of continuity. How often the words of the poet Ovid are quoted :

. . . *Video meliora proboque,
Deteriora sequor!*

Must we then confess that even between higher Thought and higher Action the analogy that is to be found remains merely exterior, and that any real mingling of Thought with Action ought to be considered as a radical impossibility ?

There is one trait of German philosophy which cannot be too carefully remembered and insisted upon. I mean the systematic depreciation of feeling, of the *Sentiment*, in the French sense of the word. The Kantian philosophy manifestly reduces to a minimum the part of sensation (*Empfindung*) in the formation of knowledge, and radically eliminates feeling from moral life proper. Just now we every day hear Germans charging any appeal to feeling (which they term *Sentimentality*) with

puerility and silliness, on the ground that in serious affairs only efficient action and positive practical thought ought to have a voice.

But the real and normal man lives by Feeling, as well as by Thought and by Will. By means of feeling he gets individuality, and this, far from being less and less appreciated, has become ever more important with the progress of human experience and culture. By means of feeling he takes interest in the beings that differ from himself, in his fellow men, in the objects around him, in every thing he discerns in the universe ; and so he indefinitely enlarges and improves his inward life. How can it be maintained that, by driving back and annihilating feeling, one will succeed in carrying human nature to its highest degree of perfection ? If ever those men, who are now unsettled by their passion for might that crushes and science that pays, should look into their own hearts, and candidly question themselves on the comparative value of what they have won and of what they have given up, would they not find that, by pursuing, as an ultimate end, what, according to nature, ought to be used as a means only, they have lost that which gives human life its true value, interest, and beauty ? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? The French poet Lamartine said, speaking of man :

*Après avoir conquis l'univers, il soupire :
Pour un plus noble but sa vie a combattu.*

Feeling is by no means an accessory, inferior, and

contemptible detail in the human soul, it is an essential part of its constitution. And if feeling be given its natural part between Thought and Action, will it not prove capable of realizing that mutual penetration between them, which remains inconceivable, whenever one tries to bring them—radically opposed as they are—into direct communication?

As a matter of fact, the superior form of Thought, which the Greeks termed *νοῦς*, already partakes of feeling. This did not escape Plato. In his Dialogue entitled *Philebus*, as he finds it impossible to seize the idea of Good as a single idea, he resolves to approach it as a blending of Beauty, Symmetry, and Truth. Now to apprehend beauty, and even symmetry, in the Hellenic, viz. hypermathematical signification of the word, means a contribution of feeling as well as of intelligence. For only through enthusiasm and love, after Plato's doctrine, can our soul rise to the sphere of true beauty.

Aristotle, for his part, in his description of the first principles, with which the *νοῦς* is dealing, does not separate τὸ τέλειον from τὸ καλόν.

Not unintentionally Blaise Pascal wrote: Through the heart are we able to know the first principles; the heart is possessed of its own order ('Le cœur a son ordre'). We see then that Pascal was aware how closely intelligence, at its very root, is interwoven with feeling.

The first principles of Reason are not to be accounted for by pure Reason, isolated from all the other parts of the soul; for those principles grow out of the primor-

dial co-operation of feeling and thought. They mean, as it were, Feeling embodying itself in Thought, and thus becoming fit to be contemplated, defined, expressed.

In a similar way the higher form of Action, viz. that action which the subject exercises upon himself, his self-control, and his increase in moral might through his submission to a moral law, become an intelligible reality, the moment it is admitted that there is a mingling of Feeling in it. For, while Action alone aims at nothing else but efficiency and} might, Feeling is capable of finding an interest in self-control and of desiring the realization of an order of things better and higher than the reign of brutal might which characterizes the material world. From such a desire a resolution may arise in the will, to control oneself and submit to ideal rules.

Thus Feeling appears as a natural link between Action and Thought. While irremediably exterior and alien one to another as long as they are considered as the sole essential faculties of human nature, Thought and Action come nearer one to another, penetrate one another, and unite intimately, the moment Feeling is introduced as a thing of eminent value in itself and as the fountain of the superior manifestations of Thought and Action. Feeling is the living medium between Action and Thought. In Feeling lie the common principles of the highest Thought and of the most generous Action.

Must we then subscribe to the aphorism of Auguste

Comte: 'The centre of human existence is neither Thought nor Action; it is Feeling'? As he uttered this, Comte yielded to that trend towards unity and simplification, which, as soon as we have discovered a well-founded principle, prompts us to state that this principle is not only necessary, but sufficient, and that all may be traced to it. Now the true nature of things does not seem to obey this injunction of the logician. And the fundamental law of things is likely to be more exactly expressed by the Platonic community (κοινωνία) of multiple principles than by the One absolute of Parmenides. Any actual being, if thoroughly scrutinized, reveals itself as a concrete unity, the elements of which, while severally distinct, can yet intimately mingle with each other: *distincte unum*.

Neither Thought, nor Action, nor Feeling can be held self-sufficient or absolutely pre-eminent within the human soul. As the development of Thought and Action implies the intervention of Feeling, so Feeling itself develops, grows higher, nobler, more definite, rich and spiritual, under the influence of Action and Thought. In an ideal life, Thought, Action, and Feeling would be at the same time first principles all three, yet each of them yielding to the penetration of the others. So that their relation would be one of reciprocity and harmony, not of linear derivation one from the other.

IV

As a conclusion to this inquiry it may be said that, if we are to give to Action and Thought their highest development and establish the right relation between them, we ought to cultivate within us, not only Thought and Action, but Feeling also. To rise above other men, it is not enough to scorn pedantically love, pity, humanity: this way of parting company from mankind leads to debasing oneself scientifically to the level of the brute forces, and to competing in might with the lightning or the Ocean. From the heart spring both great thoughts and great actions. Let us, then, give the heart its due: this should be an essential principle of education.

When Action and Thought are both of them upheld and inspired by Feeling, then at last it becomes true that they can and should react on each other.

Thought, it is true, if reduced to a mechanical conception of things, proves incapable of imposing a limit and a direction to the faculty of action, which, if left to itself, tends to extend in all directions to the utmost of its power. But it is not the same with Thought when open to the intelligence and appreciation of moral values. And those very objects are no longer with us mere objects of passive and barren contemplation; nay, they become efficient principles of action, if we embrace them with our heart at the same time as we perceive them with our intelligence, viz. if we adhere

to them with our whole soul : σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ, in the words of Plato.

Reciprocally, the classical doctrine, if taken in its totality, leads to rejecting that sort of intellectualism which would make Thought rest entirely on itself, excluding every sort of Action from its own principles. Socrates taught long ago that the necessary condition for the acquirement of the higher knowledge by intelligence resided in self-control, in moral virtue : τοῖς ἐγκρατέσι μόνοις ἔξεστι σκοπεῖν τὰ κράτιστα τῶν πραγμάτων.¹ Certain it is that discerning true from false, especially in moral matters, nay, at bottom, in all matters, requires elements which are not contained in intellectual qualities only. It is first of all necessary to bow respectfully before Truth, to offer oneself, in the words of Pascal, 'through humiliations to inspirations.' Only in so far as we are ready to give up our prejudices, our cut-and-dried views, our selfish interests, our egoistic ambitions, only in so far as we derive our happiness from the abnegation with which we submit to the nature of things, are we enabled to acquire a right knowledge, viz. a knowledge loyal to Truth. To learn means listening to, means obeying.

Yet this is, perhaps, not saying enough. What are, at bottom, the first principles of life, of being, indeed of all sciences ? Are they mere formulas, written from all eternity with algebraic characters upon unalterable tables of marble ? Or are they not rather the

¹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, iv. 5. 11.

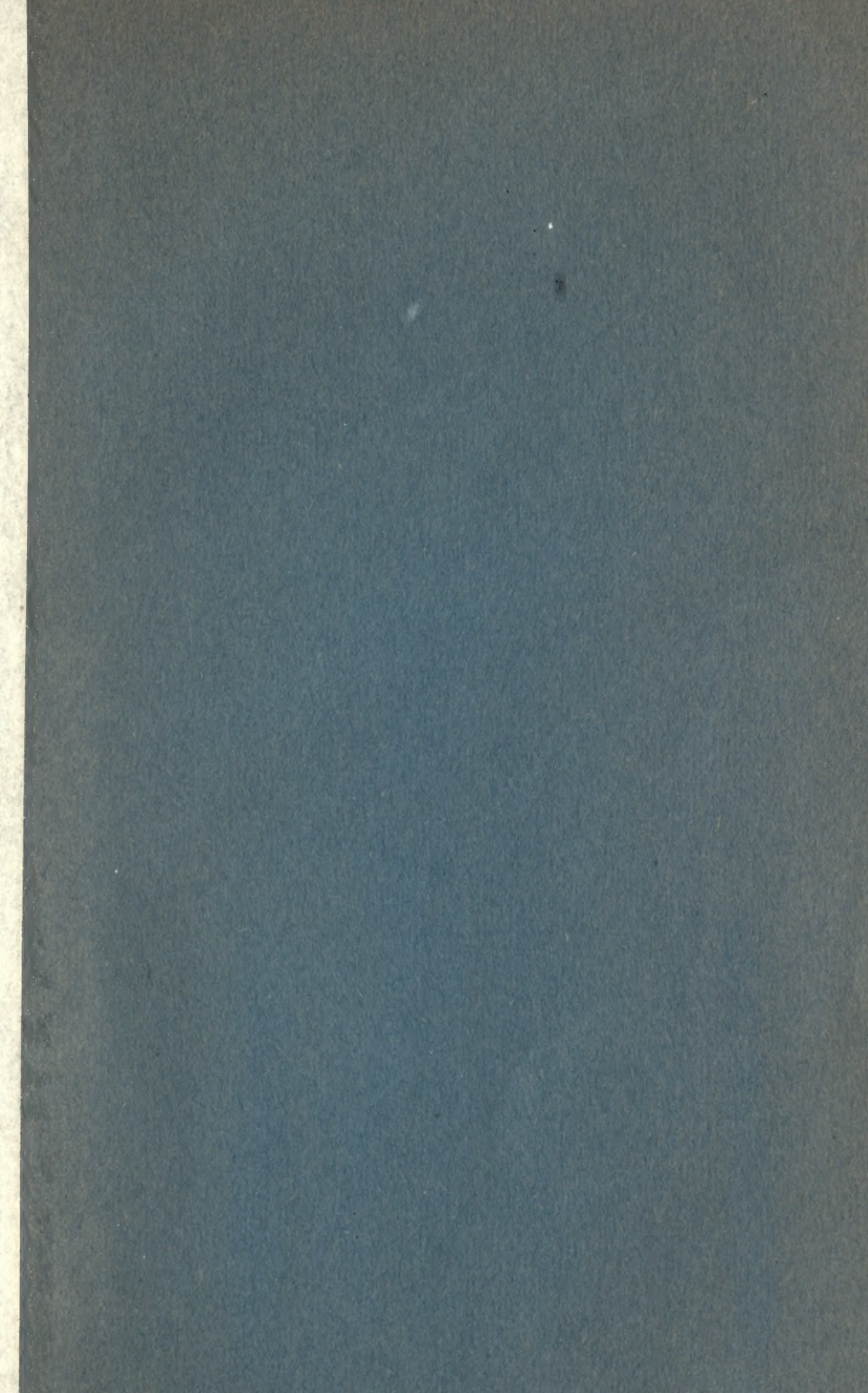
first and foremost actions, perfectly free as well as perfectly ordered, of the mysterious power which presides over the existence and the course of the universe?

If so, it seems that seeking one's inspirations in the rightness of the will as well as in the clearness of the intelligence would prove the surest way to perceive that invisible harmony which, as Heraclitus said, is the model of the visible one and still surpasses it in beauty :
ἁρμονίη ἀφανὴς φανερῆς κρείττων.

Indeed the ideal aims of Action might be devoid of interest in the eyes of a Thought not associated with Feeling, because Thought, if reduced to its narrower capacity, might be content with its mathematical and physical object. It may seem to the scientist who is only a scientist, and who has forgotten that he is also a man, that science is sufficient for him, yet he who, as Charles Darwin recommended, is anxious to preserve and to exercise all the powers with which Nature has endowed him, cannot be satisfied with positive science only, because he is still longing for that truth beyond science, which Action presupposes as the rule of its effort and the fountain of its strength. Thus, through the mediation of Feeling, Action can and must contribute to the work of intelligence in every sphere.

Thus, finally, Thought and Action appear as really capable, through their intimate union and co-operation, of promoting, not only the indefinite increase of

Might, which proves more dangerous than beneficent if conceived as an end and not merely as a means, but the reign of Truth and Justice, the full realization of which would mean the coming of the kingdom of God on Earth. Only by the full development and right use of all the faculties imparted to us can we deserve to be called, not merely rivals and imitators of matter, but, in the words of St. Paul, 'workers with God', collaborators of God : Θεοῦ συνεργοί.



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