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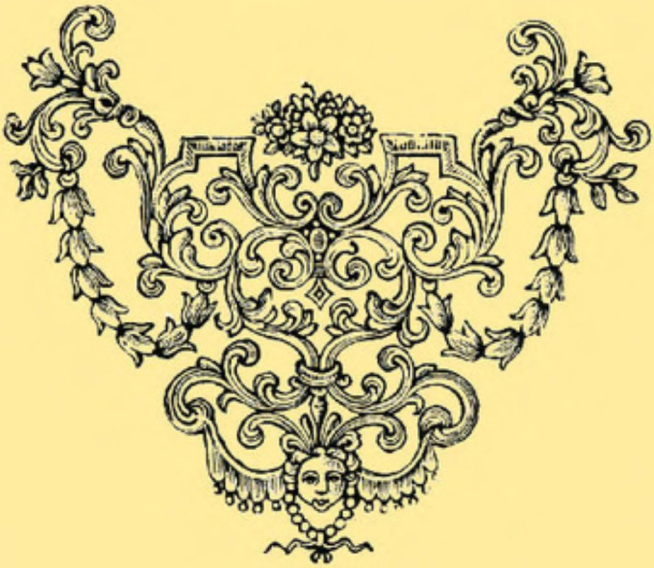
THE METHODS OF ETHICS

HENRY SIDGWICK



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The Methods of Ethics

Henry Sidgwick

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THE METHODS OF ETHICS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. ETHICS may be defined as the Science of Practice or Conduct: the latter term is preferable, as Practical Science is more conveniently used to include along with Ethics the cognate studies of Jurisprudence[1] and Politics.

All three alike are distinguished from speculative[2] sciences by the characteristic that they attempt to determine not the actual but the ideal: what ought to exist, not what does exist.

An objection is sometimes taken to the application of the term "Science" to such studies as these. It is said that a Science must necessarily have some department of actual existence for its subject-matter: and there is no doubt that the term "Moral Sciences" is frequently—perhaps more frequently—used to denote studies that deal with the actually existent: viz. Psychology, or a portion of it; what Mr Mill calls Ethology, or the inquiry into the laws of the formation of character; and Sociology, or (as it has been also termed) the Physiology of Society.

[1] I use this term in its older and wider signification, to denote a science or study that deals with the *matter* as well as the *form* of Law.

[2] There is no term that will exactly express the distinction needed, without some limitation of its usage. We commonly speak of Ethical speculations. But some term is required, and "speculative" seems to me on the whole the best. "Positive" I should have chosen, if it were not too much identified with a special system.

It is the object of such studies to classify and explain the actual phenomena, exhibited either by individual human beings considered separately, or by the larger organizations of which they are elements. At the same time, comparatively few persons pursue these studies from pure curiosity, in order merely to ascertain what actually exists. Most men wish not only to understand human action, but also to regulate it; and indeed almost all writers on man and society introduce at least incidentally practical suggestions, and criticisms passed from a practical point of view. They apply the ideas "good" and "bad," "right" and "wrong," to the conduct or institutions which they describe; and thus pass, sometimes half unconsciously, from the point of view of Psychology or Sociology to the point of view of Ethics or Politics. It is true that the mutual implication of the two kinds of study is, on any theory, very close and complete. Our view of what ought to be is derived, at least in all details, from our apprehension of what is: and the means of realizing our ideal can only be thoroughly learnt by a careful study of actual phenomena. But the determination of the first principles of practice, of the End or Ideal itself at which we are to aim, seems necessarily to lie outside of all investigation of the actual. It is the systematic determination of such End or Ideal which forms the essentially distinct portion of all branches of Practical Philosophy, and most prominently of Ethics proper: and it is merely a verbal question whether we shall apply the name "science" to such systematic studies: though it is, of course, important that we should not confound them with the purely speculative studies to which they bear respectively so close a relation.

§ 2. There are two essentially distinct forms of putting the fundamental question of Ethics, the difference between which, as we shall presently see, leads to important consequences: and goes deeper (at any rate when the science is considered in its formal aspect) than any differences among the answers given to either question. Ethics may either be regarded as an inquiry into the nature of the Good, the intrinsically preferable and desirable, the true end of action, &c.: or as an investigation of the Right, the true rules of conduct, Duty, the Moral Law, &c. The former view predominated in the Greek schools, at any rate

until the later developments of Stoicism: the latter has been more prominent in English Philosophy since Hobbes, in an age of active jural speculation and debate, raised the deepest views of morality in a jural form. Either view can easily be made to comprehend the other: but the second seems to have the widest application. For the good that Ethics is understood to investigate is limited to practicable good, as Aristotle says: that is, good that can be obtained by the voluntary action of human beings. Now this end might conceivably be that to which all human action is actually directed: and indeed the school of moralists which regards Pleasure as the Good, maintains that this is in a certain sense the case; but not in a practical sense, as no one maintains that the actions of all men are such as a scientific Hedonist would approve. Even in the view of pure Epicureanism, action aimed at the true end, directed towards the attainment of that which is truly good, is an ideal to which actual human conduct only approximates. The science of Ethics, therefore, necessarily treats of action which to a great extent *is* not: action therefore which (we may say) *ought* to be. Its affirmations are also precepts: indeed, if it were not so, the distinction just drawn between Ethics and Psychology would vanish.

On the other hand, the first view of Ethics is not naturally applicable to those systems which consider rightness of conduct to consist in conformity to absolute rules, or (as Kant calls them) "Categorical Imperatives." It is true that here we may say with Aristotle that the end is the action itself, or a certain quality of it (conformity to a Rule), and not something outside of and consequent on the action: but in common language, when we speak of acting for an end, we mean something different from the action itself, some consequence of it. Again, while most moralists hold that right action is always (whether through natural laws or supernatural appointment) followed by consequences in themselve desirable, which may be regarded as in a certain sense the end of the action: still many of the school called Intuitivist or Intuitional hold that our obligation to obey moral rules is not conditional on our knowledge of the end and of its connexion with the actions prescribed. The end, they say, is a Divine end, and not to be scrutinized by men: the rules are

for us absolute. And this is probably the commonest conception of morality (as expressed in propositions): that it is a system of absolute rules, prescribed by God through conscience for obeying which no reason is to be asked or given, except that they are so prescribed.

Hence it seems best not to assume at the outset that Ethics investigates an end at all, but rather to define it as the study of what ought to be done: or, more precisely, of what ought to be as far as it depends upon the voluntary action of individuals. For it may be said that the marriage-law ought to be altered or a Republic introduced: but it cannot be said that I ought to alter or introduce, as I cannot do so without the cooperation of others. What *I* ought to do must be something that I can do. It may be objected that we commonly apply the notions of "right" and "wrong" not only to the voluntary actions of individuals, but also to their motives and dispositions. But I conceive it is only in so far as these are thought to be at least indirectly within the control of the will, that they become the objects of strictly ethical judgments.

§ 3. We must observe, however, that an entirely different view is sometimes taken of the scope of Ethics. It is said, as for example by Dugald Stewart, that the inquiry into the Theory of Morals—which Stewart distinguishes in a manner which seems to me essentially popular and unphilosophical from the inquiry into Practical Doctrines—may be subdivided into two inquiries: (1) into the "nature of the moral faculty" and (2) into the "proper object of moral approbation": and it is in fact upon the former that Stewart and others expend the greater part of their energy. The second corresponds to the province of Ethics as just defined. The "proper object of moral approbation"=what those who think rightly think ought to be done: which is only a roundabout way of describing what ought to be done, as everything obviously *is* what it is rightly thought to be.

Now it is evident that the first inquiry, 'By what faculty we know what ought to be done,' is quite distinct from the second. Every one is interested in the latter: it is of immediate practical importance. But if we were only agreed as to what we ought to do, the question, 'How we come to know it,'

out to inquire what this is, we ought to recognize the fact that there are many natural methods.

§ 4. The question, what these methods are, may be conveniently answered by noticing another sense in which "ought" is said to be a relative term: relative, it is now meant, to some end in view which has to be presupposed. If we take the end as our end, the ultimate effect which we wish to realize by all our action or a part of it: and if we ascertain that certain courses of action are necessary to its realization: our reason makes these courses of action imperative on us: it is evidently irrational to choose the end, and not to choose the indispensable means. But such precepts are merely, what Kant calls them, Hypothetical Imperatives; they are not addressed to any one who has not first accepted the end.

Now there is no doubt that the word "ought" is frequently used in this way: and moreover that it is often so used when the end is tacitly supposed, not expressed. A teacher of any art assumes that his pupil wants to produce the product of the art, or to produce it excellent in quality: he tells him that he *ought* to hold the awl, the hammer, the brush differently. A physician assumes that his patient wants health: he tells him that he ought to rise early, to live plainly, to take hard exercise. If the patient replies that he prefers ease and good living to health, the physician's precepts fall to the ground: they are no longer addressed to him. A man of the world assumes that his hearers wish to get on in society, when he lays down rules of dress, manner, conversation, habits of life. In the same way many rules that are commonly regarded as rules of morality: many, for example, that form part of the proverbial code of precepts handed down in an early stage of civilization: may be plausibly viewed as merely Counsels of Prudence (to use a Kantian term again). They are given on the assumption that a man desires Happiness: if any one should be so exceptional as not to desire it, they are simply not addressed to him: and so the "ought" in such formulæ is still implicitly relative to an optional end.

It seems, however, that this account of the matter is not exhaustive. We do not all look with simple indifference on a man who declines to take the right means to attain his own

happiness, on no other ground than that he does not care about happiness. Most of us would regard such a refusal as irrational, with a certain disapprobation: would think, in other words, that he *ought* to seek his own happiness. The word "ought" thus used is no longer relative: happiness now appears as an end *absolutely* prescribed by reason.

So, again, many Utilitarians hold all the rules of conduct which men prescribe to one another *as moral rules*, to be partly consciously and partly unconsciously prescribed as means to the end of the happiness of the community. But here again it is very commonly held that while the rules are relative, the end is absolutely prescribed. It is held that we *ought* to seek the happiness of the community. In the case of men's own happiness it may be said with a semblance of truth that as they naturally do seek it, and cannot help seeking it, the idea of "ought" is inapplicable: but in the case of the general happiness, no one has ever urged that it is natural to all men to aim at it: it is obvious that they do not, or do not adequately.

We might of course inquire into the means of attaining individual or general happiness, without deciding whether the end to be attained be optional or prescribed by Reason to all mankind: in this case the study might be called (as has been proposed) *Eudemonics:* but as it would not claim to determine the absolute rightness and wrongness of actions, it would not be properly an Ethical inquiry (in the sense in which Ethics is here understood). It would however be convertible into Ethics, by the acceptance of the end as absolutely prescribed.

We see then that there will be as many different methods of Ethics, as there are different views of the ends which men ought to seek. Now if all the ends which men actually do seek, subordinating everything else to the attainment of them (under the influence of "ruling passions"), laid claim to be absolute ends, the task of the ethical student would be hopelessly complex and extensive. But this is not the case: we do not find that men regard most of the objects which they seek, even with persistency and vehemence, as morally prescribed. Many men sacrifice health, fortune, happiness to Fame: but no one has deliberately maintained that Fame is an object which men

ought to seek, except as a means to something else, either as the best stimulus to the attainment of Excellence, or because its pursuit affords, on the whole, the keenest Happiness. Whether there are any ends besides these two, which Reason regards as ultimate: or (to put it otherwise) whether any other objects are properly included under the notion of "intrinsically good" or "desirable": it will hereafter be an important part of our business to investigate. But we may perhaps say that *primâ facie* the only two ends which clearly claim to be, as some would say, *rational ends*, or ends absolutely prescribed, are the two just mentioned, Perfection or Excellence and Happiness. And we must observe that on either of these ends two quite distinct methods may be based, according as either is sought to be realized universally, or by each individual for himself alone.

There is, however, another view of Ethics, mentioned above, which dropping into the background the notion of an *end*, takes as First Principles of practice certain *rules* absolutely prescribed. Such a system would seem to be generally meant when we speak of an Independent or of an Intuitive system of Ethics: and morality in the view of Butler, and of the Common Sense School generally, is conceived in this manner.

We have then Five Methods to distinguish, which, however, by no means require equal attention. In the first place, no systematic moralist has seriously taken universal Perfection (as distinct from Happiness) as the ultimate end to which all moral rules should be explicitly referred. Again the method which seeks the individual's perfection as ultimate end is closely akin to that which aims at conformity to certain absolute rules: virtue being the most prominent element in our notion of human perfection. It will therefore be convenient to treat these together as two varieties of what we may call Intuitionism. There remain the two systems which make Happiness an ultimate end. Both of these are frequently called Utilitarianism. We may distinguish them as Egoistic and Universalistic Hedonism: as it is the latter of these, as taught by Bentham and his successors, that has become famous as Utilitarianism, I shall always restrict that term to this signification. For Egoistic Hedonism it is somewhat hard to find a single perfectly appro-

priate term. I shall often call this simply Egoism: but it may sometimes be convenient to call it Epicureanism: for though this name more properly denotes a particular historical system it has come to be commonly used in the wider sense in which I wish to employ it.

§ 5. The last sentence suggests one more explanation, which, for clearness' sake, it seems desirable to make: an explanation, however, rather of the plan and purpose of the present treatise, than of the nature and boundaries of the subject of Ethics, as generally understood.

There are several recognised ways of treating this subject, none of which I have thought it desirable to adopt. We may start with existing systems, and either study them historically, tracing the changes in thought through the centuries, or compare and classify them according to relations of resemblance, or criticize their internal coherence. Or we may seek to add to the number of these systems: and claim after so many unsuccessful efforts to have at last attained the one true theory of the subject, by which all others may be tested. The present book contains neither the exposition of a system nor a natural or critical history of systems. I have attempted to define and unfold not one Method of Ethics, but several: at the same time these are not here studied historically, as methods that have actually been used or proposed for the regulation of practice: but rather as alternatives between which the human mind seems to me necessarily forced to choose, when it attempts to frame a complete synthesis of practical maxims and to act in a perfectly rational manner. Thus though I have called them natural methods, they might more properly be called natural methods rationalized; because it is perhaps most natural to men to guide themselves by a mixture of different methods, more or less disguised under ambiguities of language. The impulses from which the different methods take their rise exist to some extent in all men; and the different claims of different ends to be rational each man finds urged and admitted by his own mind in different states and attitudes. And as along with these claims is felt the need of harmonizing them —since it is, as was said, a postulate of the Practical Reason, that two conflicting rules of action cannot both be reasonable—

the result is ordinarily either a confused blending, or a forced and premature reconciliation, of different principles and methods. Nor have the systems framed by professed moralists been free from similar defects. The writers have proceeded to synthesis without adequate analysis; the practical demand for the former being much more urgently felt than the theoretical need of the latter. For in this and other points the development of the theory of ethics has been much impeded by the preponderance of practical considerations. Although Aristotle has said that "the end of our study is not knowledge, but conduct," it is still true that the peculiar excellence of his own system is due to the pure air of scientific curiosity in which it has been developed. And it would seem that a more complete detachment of the scientific study of right conduct from its practical application is to be desired for the sake even of the latter itself. A treatment which is a compound between the scientific and the hortatory seems to miss both the results that it would combine: the mixture is bewildering to the brain and not stimulating to the heart. Again, in other sciences, the more distinctly we draw the line between the known and the unknown, the more rapidly the science progresses: for the clear indication of an unsolved problem is an important step to its solution. But in ethical treatises there has been a continual tendency to ignore and keep out of sight the difficulties of the subject; either unconsciously, from a latent conviction that the questions which the writer cannot answer satisfactorily must be questions which ought not to be asked; or consciously, that he may not shake the sway of morality over the minds of his readers. This last amiable precaution frequently defeats itself: the difficulties thus concealed in exposition are liable to reappear in controversy; and then they appear not carefully limited, but magnified for polemical purposes. Thus we get on the one hand vague and hazy reconciliation, on the other loose and random exaggeration of discrepancies: and neither process is effective to dispel the original vagueness and ambiguity which lurks in the fundamental notions of our common practical reasonings. The mists which the dawn of philosophical reflection in Socrates struggled to dispel still hang about the methods of the most highly reputed moralists. To eliminate this indefiniteness

CHAPTER II.

MORALITY AND LAW.

§ 1. In the last chapter I have spoken of Ethics, Jurisprudence and Politics as branches of Practical Philosophy, including in the scope of their investigation somewhat that lies outside the sphere of positive sciences: viz. the determination of ends to be sought, or absolute rules to be obeyed. Before proceeding further, it would naturally seem desirable to determine in outline the limits and mutual relations of these different studies. At the same time it is difficult to do this satisfactorily at the outset of our enquiry: because generally according as we adopt one method of ethics or another we shall adopt different views as to these limits and relations. For example, a Utilitarian is likely to think that the legal and political relations of the members of the community ought to be primarily determined, as the most important: and to treat Morality in the second place, as accessory and auxiliary to Law. While one who regards the common rules of morality as possessing an absolute and independent validity, is likely to extend their sway over Law and Politics. For if Justice is something that can be ascertained and sought apart from utility, it would naturally be thought that Law ought to realize such justice: and some again hold that Law aims at fostering other virtues in special departments, such as purity in the laws relating to marriage: and some would say that the State ought to aim at making its members good men, and therefore ought to establish and endow one or more religious bodies. There is a similar difficulty in determining the relation between Jurisprudence and Politics: or, more precisely, between the principles of Civil

and those of Constitutional and International Law. This is not indeed so difficult when we are dealing with details: we may say, for example, that the precepts of Constitutional Jurisprudence (whether abstract or historical) regulate the conduct of certain members of the society, to whom governmental functions are entrusted, and their mutual relations, and their relations to the rest of the community, (including the mode of their appointment): while Civil Jurisprudence includes all other rules enforced by Law Courts. But when we refer these rules to first principles, the relation of the two sciences becomes matter of much dispute: as a pure utilitarian holds that the two sets of rules are not so much systematically connected as coordinately established by a reference to universal utility in each case: while other political theorists consider that the rights of government are derived from a surrender of natural rights on the part of the individuals composing the community, and so that the principles of Civil Jurisprudence are logically prior to those of Politics. Formerly this surrender or "social compact" was regarded as historical, and much antiquarian labour expended in discussing the nature of a historical event fraught with so momentous consequences: but now it is understood to be a merely ideal conception, prescribing how the rights of government ought to be considered and judged, however they may have originated. And this latter view would seem to have been adopted implicitly to a greater extent than it has been explicitly: for upon some such conception depends the widely received principle of the intrinsic illegitimacy of despotism, and of all governments where taxes are imposed and laws made without the consent of a Representative body. For it is held that a man has a natural right to his property (some say to the produce of his labour, others to what he has acquired by First occupation and voluntary transfer) and to freedom of action: and that he cannot be rightly deprived of either except by his consent given through his representatives. This theory, however, is not free from difficulties: for besides that the definition of Natural Rights is much disputed, it is not clear that the consent of the majority of persons whom a man has helped to choose is the same thing as his own consent.

These questions, however, we cannot now adequately consider. But regarding Morality, as we may on any method regard it, as a system of rules for the guidance of conduct, we may at any rate distinguish it from Law by saying that Law consists of such rules as it is right to enforce by a definitely organized infliction of punishments, and Morality of all other rules that ought to be observed. And in so far as moral rules are accepted by universal consent, and parts of what I shall call the Morality of common sense, we may pursue the analogy with Law further: for such rules also have a penalty[1], attached to their violation, though not a definite one, viz. the disapprobation of mankind and its consequences in indisposition to render services, &c.

However we cannot thus exclude Jurisprudence and Politics from the sphere of Morality. For it is a moral duty to observe laws, always or ordinarily, even when the penalty might be evaded: and the disposition to do this is recognised by some moralists as a principal virtue, and called the virtue of Order. And every one in a free state has duties as a citizen besides mere obedience, which are determined entirely or to some extent by the constitution of the state: and perhaps (if we may assume that no one ought to acquiesce in a perfectly despotic government) every one in any state has such political duties, either those allotted to him by the constitution, or at any rate the general duty of making the constitution and the laws as good as possible. But further, all are agreed that the moral duties of a member of any community must depend to some extent upon the actual state of its laws, and again, that in laying down Law we must have regard to current morality: but it is disputed how far this mutual implication extends. We have already seen that the relation of Ideal Law (as determined on theoretical principles) to Morality, will be decided differently

[1] It is this penalty that Bentham called the "moral" sanction: as being the only *external* influence tending to secure the observance of Morality proper as distinct from Law. But the term is not a happy one, as it seems to imply that the whole of Morality is supported by such a sanction: whereas scarcely any one holds that the rules imposed by universal consent exactly coincide with the whole law of Duty at any time: and least of all does a utilitarian hold this, as he thinks that they ought to be revised in accordance with calculations of utility.

by different ethical schools: but besides this we have to consider how Morality is related to positive Law where that diverges from the ideal, and is not judged to be the best or right law. It is universally recognised as a duty to conform to even bad laws, generally speaking, so long as they exist. But nearly all except Hobbes are agreed that some such laws ought to be disobeyed: as (e g.) that which bids us worship false gods. Again, though no one would maintain that all that is allowed by law is morally allowable: yet to some extent moral duty is thought to vary with positive law, even outside the sphere of strict law-observance. Thus positive Law seems to give to some extent the skeleton or frame-work, which Morality clothes or fills in. How far this is the case is however disputed: and the dispute cannot be settled without much discussion: so that at present we can only indicate vaguely and roughly the boundary of Morality on the side of Law.

§ 2. There is, however, another view which regards Ethics as dependent on Politics in quite a different manner: viz. as being an investigation not of what ought to be done here and now, but of what ought to be the rules of behaviour in an ideal society. So that the subject-matter of our science would be doubly ideal: as it would not only prescribe what ought to be done as distinct from what is, but what ought to be done in a society that itself *is* not, but only *ought* to be.

As this view involves a complete change in the statement of the fundamental problem of our science, and not merely a different method of solution, it must be carefully examined before we proceed further.

This is the view which Plato's metaphysic led him to take: and it has been more or less expressly held by Platonists in all ages. In our own times the theory has been stated most distinctly by Mr Herbert Spencer[1]. "Morality," says that thinker, "is a code of rules proper for the guidance of humanity in its highest conceivable perfection...right principles of action become practicable only as men become perfect." And the analogy of Geometry is adduced to shew that Ethics ought to deal with ideally perfect human relations, just as Geometry treats of ideally perfect lines and circles. But the

[1] *Social Statics*, Introduction, p. 4.

most irregular line has definite spatial relations with which Geometry does not refuse to deal: though of course they are more complex than those of a straight line. So in Astronomy, it would be more convenient for purposes of study if the stars moved in circles, as was once believed. But the fact that they move not in circles but in ellipses, and even in imperfect and perturbed ellipses, does not take them out of the sphere of scientific investigation: by patience and industry we have learnt how to reduce to principles and calculate even these more complicated motions. It is, no doubt, a convenient artifice for purposes of instruction to assume that the planets move in perfect ellipses (or even—at an earlier stage of study—in circles): we thus allow the individual's knowledge to pass through the same gradations in accuracy as that of the race has done. But what we want, as astronomers, to know is the actual motion of the stars and its causes: and similarly as moralists we naturally inquire what ought to be done in the actual world in which we live. It may be that neither in the former case nor in the latter can we hope to represent in our calculations the full complexity of the actual considerations: but we endeavour to approximate to it as closely as possible. It is only so that we really grapple with the question to which mankind have so long been demanding an answer: 'What is a man's duty in his present condition?' For it is too absurd to say that the whole duty of man is summed up in the attainment of a right state of social relations (though some travellers in Utopia seem to think so), and that we owe no duties to our contemporaries, but only to those who are to attain fruition of these ideal conditions. We must therefore determine our duties to the present world of men somehow: and Ethics seeks to do this in a systematic manner.

This inquiry into the morality of an ideal society can therefore be at best but a preliminary investigation, after which the step from the ideal to the actual, in accordance with reason, remains to be taken. We have to ask, then, how far such a preliminary construction seems desirable. And in answering this we must distinguish the different methods of Ethics. For it is generally held by Intuitionists that true morality prescribes absolutely what is in itself right, under all social conditions; at

that we can not only fix certain limits within which the future social condition of mankind must lie, but even determine in detail the mutual relations of the different elements of the future community, so as to view in clear outline the rules of behaviour, by observing which they will attain the maximum of happiness. It still remains quite doubtful how far it would be desirable for us to imitate these rules under the circumstances in which we now live. For this foreknown social order is *ex hypothesi* only presented as a more advanced stage in our social progress, and not as a type or pattern which we ought to make a struggle to realize approximately at any earlier stage. How far it should be taken as such a pattern, is a question which would still have to be determined by considering the effects of our actions on the present life of mankind; and hence it does not appear that the construction of an ideal society can fitly be taken as the foundation of any system of Ethics[1].

[1] Some further consideration of this question will be found in a subsequent Chapter. Cf. Book IV. c. iv.

CHAPTER III.

MORAL REASON.

§ 1. In the first chapter I spoke of what ought to be done as being right and reasonable, that which Reason prescribes and urges us to do, either absolutely or as a means to an end apprehended as ultimately rational. This manner of speaking is employed by writers of different schools, and seems in accordance with the common view and language on this subject. For we commonly think that wrong conduct is essentially irrational, and can be shewn to be so by argument; and though we do not conceive that it is by reason alone that men are influenced to act rightly, we still hold that appeals to the reason are an essential part of all moral persuasion, and that part which concerns the moralist or moral philosopher as distinct from the preacher or moral rhetorician. On the other hand elaborate and serious objections have been made to this phraseology, which we must carefully examine. There seem to be two grounds of objection, which though closely connected may yet be distinguished: one relating to the cognitive function, and the other to the motive or volitional influence, of the Practical Reason. It is maintained, first, that it is not by the reason that we apprehend moral distinctions, but rather by virtue of some emotional susceptibility commonly called a Moral Sense; and, secondly, that the Reason cannot be a spring of action, as it must always be Feeling that stimulates the Will. Let us consider the two questions separately.

In discussing whether moral distinctions are perceived by the Reason, it is especially important to make clear the point at issue. As we know nothing of any faculty of the mind

except from its effects, and only assume different faculties to explain or express differences among the mental phenomena which we refer to them, we must always be prepared to state what characteristics in the feeling or cognition investigated such reference imports: thus only can we avoid the sterile logomachy of which there has been unhappily too much in the present controversy.

For in saying that the Reason apprehends moral distinctions, it would seem that no more is usually meant than that there is such a thing as moral truth and error; that two conflicting judgments as to what ought to be done cannot both be true and sound. Now if I were attempting to establish dogmatically a system of Ethics, it might be desirable to prove this at the outset. But as my object is rather to expound the different methods of moral reasoning, in the most consistent (and so far rational) form which it seems possible to give to each, with the view of ascertaining exactly their points of agreement and disagreement; it can hardly be necessary to prove a proposition that must necessarily be assumed by all who pass ethical judgments. Such an assumption is really as much made by Hobbes, who identifies Reason with Rational self-love, and by Bentham when he announces that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is "the only right and proper end of human action," and by Adam Smith when he declares that general rules (resulting from the complex action of sympathy) are "plainly intended to be the governing principles of human nature," as it is by an Intuitional moralist.

We have to ask, then, whether anything that conflicts with this is intended by those who prefer to say that moral distinctions are perceived by a Sense. Now no doubt by sense is sometimes meant a faculty not conversant with objective truth but only with the sensations—purely subjective phenomena—of the sentient being, which may vary from A to B without either being in error. But then such a faculty does not furnish us with what are here called moral, but rather with psychological distinctions: its exercise does not lead to the affirmations "that this and that action ought to be done," but rather that "this and that action excite in me such and such

specific emotions." In so far, however, as supremacy is attributed to these emotional impulses over others (as it is by Hutcheson, and the Moral Sense school generally), and it is affirmed that we *ought* to obey them, it is obvious that this affirmation cannot also be referred to a Sense, as above defined: and hence even this system seems to rest ultimately on an objective truth—apprehended, we may say, by the Reason. But in fact those who have spoken of a Moral Sense have not always meant to deny the objectivity of its apprehensions: any more than in speaking of the sense of beauty we commonly intend to imply that there is no objective standard of beauty: and even in the case of colours, sounds, and all the so-called secondary qualities of matter, apprehended by special senses, it can scarcely be said to be the common view that they may be apprehended differently by different persons without error. In this case the opposition between Sense and Reason would seem to vanish, as the perception, to whichever faculty attributed, is the same "that such and such actions are right and ought to be done:" except in so far as the term Sense implies that a specific emotion always attends this perception. But here again there hardly seems to be any ground for controversy. For no one would maintain that the moral apprehension is ever a purely intellectual state of consciousness, containing no emotional element. While, on the other hand, it could not be denied that the amount of emotion attending the recognition of duty varies very much from individual to individual, and with the different moods of the same individual: the essential fact of the moral judgment remaining the same.

It must be allowed, however, that the use of the term "reason" for the faculty that perceives and prescribes moral rules is liable to lead to some confusion, which it may be well to notice and dispel.

In the first place, just as we have had to distinguish the relative from the absolute use of "right," "ought," "duty," &c.; so correspondingly we must distinguish from the authoritative, "categorically imperative" function of the Practical Reason, another in which its operation is more subordinate, prescribing not the end of action but only the means to a given end. In this latter case the end is determined by desire or impulse of

some kind, which may or may not be itself rational. The intellect merely apprehends that this or that thing or action is causally connected with the end or object of desire. Desiring the end, we cannot but be impelled to employ the indispensable means for attaining it: and thus the intellectual apprehension furnishes, so to speak, the machinery by which the impulsive force of desire is directed upon certain objects or actions which would not otherwise have come within its range. Or, again, the desire may be a general one for a class of objects: and the intellect may direct it upon a particular object by demonstrating that this possesses the attributes of the class. Such demonstration may be very complicated and elaborate, requiring the highest exercises of the intellect: but still the desire itself is independent of the reason, so that we cannot say that the actions to which it prompts are rationally prescribed.

In these cases the reason seems to introduce consistency into our conduct: and we may say generally that one meaning of "irrational" as applied to conduct is "inconsistent." Looking closer we see that there are two grades of inconsistency, of which we may call the one negative and the other positive. Our impulses to action may be such as not to conflict, and yet not harmonized or systematized: or they may be actually opposed and conflicting. In the latter case our conduct is more obviously and violently irrational: as when (e.g.) desiring an end we decline to take the necessary means to its attainment, or if aiming generally at a kind of objects or results, we shew ourselves arbitrarily indifferent to a particular individual or instance. This kind of conflict, however, is only possible when impulses have reached a certain degree of comprehensiveness and generality: there would be no place for it if they were (as we commonly conceive the impulses of brutes to be) quite momentary and particular. Still conduct prompted by a series of such unconnected impulses we call irrational, as being absolutely unsystematized, and in that sense inconsistent. Every one who claims to act reasonably, acts by general rules or notions; and considers an impulse unreasonable, not only when it conflicts with these, but when it cannot be brought under some one of them, when no general grounds can be stated for it. But, again, general rules and maxims may in their turn be

what he thought right as such, whether or not he had any other motive for doing it: it is surely paradoxical to assert that the impulse which in this ideal case is conceived to be permanently paramount is one which is nowhere to be found among men. If this were so, the inquiry into what is absolutely right and reasonable would be one of purely speculative interest. But probably few would maintain that it is of no practical importance whatever whether a man adopts one ethical principle or another: at any rate all who have spent any labour in the demonstration of any such principles seem to have held the opposite opinion.

We may assume then as generally admitted that the recognition of any action as reasonable is attended with a certain desire or impulse to do it: and that in this sense the Reason may be affirmed to be a spring of action.

It may perhaps be thought that the "Moral sentiments," on which one school of moralists lay stress as supplying the real impulsive force, are after all very different from this impulse to do what is reasonable. And no doubt by a Moral sentiment we commonly mean an impulse towards a special kind of right action to which we feel a strong attraction (or a strong aversion to its opposite), such as the sentiment of veracity, courage, purity, &c. But each such specialized sentiment in its normal state includes or is combined with the more general impulse to do right. We may see this clearly from considering the exceptional cases in which the two impulses are separated. Suppose that any one habitually influenced (e. g.) by the sentiment of veracity is convinced that under certain peculiar circumstances in which he finds himself, speaking truth is not right but wrong. The sentiment, no doubt, still remains: the person still feels a repugnance against violating the rule of veracity: but it remains as a feeling quite different in kind and degree from that which prompted him to truth-speaking as a department of virtuous action.

Again, some may think that the impulse to do what is right and that to do what is reasonable ought not to be identified as completely as I have identified them, although they may always coincide. I think, however, that this objection will probably arise from a confusion between the two functions of the

Practical Reason distinguished in the previous section. In its subordinate operation, in which it only prescribes actions hypothetically, the really impulsive force and that which fixes the end of action after deliberation is very commonly self-love: and hence by reasonable action is sometimes meant "action prescribed by rational self-love." But, as was said, this exercise of reason is different from that by which we affirm that self-love—or anything else—is the *right* principle of conduct: and it is in this function that we are now considering reason as practical and prompting to action. (In fact I have defined "reason" so that "reasonable" conduct must mean "right" or "what ought to be done.")

It must be allowed, however, that by "reasonable" impulse would naturally be understood what Butler and Hutcheson would call a "calm" or "cool" motive: whereas the impulse which urges us to duty has often a passionate and enthusiastic tinge. But in an inquiry that is strictly ethical and not psychological we are not primarily concerned with the quality of the emotion which attends the apprehension of duty: but rather with the direction of its volitional impulse. It may be observed however that the character of the feeling frequently depends on some other notion being inseparably connected with the notion of duty. For example, a religious person will not contemplate duty merely as duty, but also as being God's ordinance: and hence his impulse to do it will be tinged with religious feeling: and it is possible that this latter conception may altogether obscure the former. Still most reflective Theists would say that they do not conform to God's law as the dictate merely of Supreme Power, but also of Supreme Goodness: that is, because God's will is itself reasonable and right: and in this manner the purely moral impulse again emerges, distinct from, though in harmony with, the religious feeling. And similarly the utilitarian's impulse towards what is right and good, which for him is identified with the happiness of mankind or of sentient beings, will naturally be blended and identified with sympathetic and philanthropic feeling: although the desire to do one's duty is still in itself distinguishable from the desire to benefit one's fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER IV.

PLEASURE AND DESIRE.

§ 1. In the preceding chapter I have tried to shew that the psychological proposition, 'that all voluntary action is prompted by Feeling or Sentiment of some kind,' does not really conflict with the ethical assumption that Reason prompts us to a certain kind of action: we have only to suppose (what psychological observation seems to confirm) that all moral agents, as such, feel a certain desire to do what Reason dictates. It is thus of some practical importance to ascertain what Reason does dictate: which is the aim of all ethical discussion.

There is however an account of voluntary action, very commonly accepted at the present day, which appears to exclude the above-mentioned assumption altogether, and (at least when stated in its most extreme form) to settle summarily the fundamental question of Ethics. I mean the theory that the motives to voluntary action are always pleasures or pains in prospect. For on this view there seems no room for the impulse to do what is right and reasonable as such: and the ultimate end of action is fixed for us by nature and not dictated by Reason.

In examining this theory, we may conveniently take the statement of it which is given by its most distinguished recent expositor, J. S. Mill. He tells us (*Utilitarianism*, c. 4) not only that "desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable, or rather two parts of the same phenomenon," but also, still more precisely, that "we desire a thing *in proportion* as the idea of it is pleasant." It is important to notice the italic-

ized words: as, if the statement thus exactly defined were true, the scope of ethical discussion would be much more limited than it is ordinarily thought to be. If in the case of any conflict of impulses all the conflicting desires and aversions are strictly proportioned to pleasures and pains in prospect, then the resultant impulse must always be directed towards what appears to be the individual's greatest happiness. On this view the notions "right" and "wrong" would seem to have no meaning except as applied to the intellectual state accompanying volition: since if future pleasures and pains be truly represented, the desire must be directed towards its proper object. And thus the only possible method of Ethics would seem to be some form of Egoistic Hedonism. It will be said, perhaps, that I might still regard the Right or Reasonable course of conduct as different from that which tends to my own greatest happiness: and such a view may be conceivable as a psychological phenomenon: but no one would maintain it to be a reasonable view. I cannot rationally think that one end of action has been definitely determined for me by unvarying psychological laws, and another conflicting end prescribed for me by Reason. If my own greatest happiness—or what I think such—is what I cannot help aiming at, it cannot be true that I ought to aim at something else.

But it is surely manifest, without referring to the disputed cases of Virtuous or Self-sacrificing conduct, that there can be no such definite proportion maintained between strength of desire (or aversion) and intensity of foreseen pleasure (or pain): at least in any sense in which it would much concern the student of Ethics. For it is a matter of common experience that the resultant or prevailing desire in men is often directed towards what (even in the moment of yielding to the desire) they think likely to cause them more pain than pleasure on the whole. "Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor" is as applicable to the Epicurean as it is to any one else. If any evidence is needed of this, I cannot do better than quote Mill himself. He tells us[1] that men often, not from merely intellectual deficiencies but from "infirmity of character, make their election for the nearer good, though they know it to be less valuable: and this

[1] *Utilitarianism*, c. 2, p. 14.

no less when the choice is between two bodily pleasures..... they pursue sensual indulgences to the injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good."

It may be said, however, that in this and other cases the prevailing desire is always directed towards some pleasure or other, though it may not be the greatest pleasure within our reach or even what we think such: and that thus, though the strict proportionality between pleasure and desire must be abandoned, it still remains true that the object of desire is always pleasure and nothing else.

Now it should be observed that this more indefinite psychological generalization is *primâ facie* compatible with any of the different methods of Ethics. For it admits the notion of Duty or Reasonable or Virtuous action, as determined on other grounds than by reference to its pleasurable or painful consequences to the individual agent: since the performance of duty, however determined, will equally be attended by the special pleasure of the "moral sense," and this pleasure may be preferred to all others, and chosen in spite of all concomitant pains. Indeed, as Aristotle says, our idea of a virtuous man includes the characteristic that he takes pleasure in doing virtuous actions: and it does not at first sight seem very important whether we say that he does his duty because he recognises it as duty, or because he finds a moral pleasure in doing it.

On reflection, however, I think it will appear that we have a natural tendency to pass from the psychological generalization that Pleasure is the Desired, to the ethical principle that Maximum Pleasure is for each the Most Desirable, or Summum Bonum. If we once admit that our actual motives are always pleasures and pains of some kind, it seems rational to compare these with each other in respect of their pleasantness or painfulness, and to choose the greatest pleasure or least pain on the whole: though perhaps the transition from the one view to the other cannot be thrown into the form of a cogent inference. And further, it must, I think, be admitted that if I do an act from the sole desire of obtaining the glow of moral self-complacency which I believe will attend its performance, my act does not really correspond to the common notion of virtuous

from the former. I do not mean that the analysis which distinguishes the two kinds of impulse can in all cases be performed. Of much of our appetitive consciousness it seems truer to say that neither the strictly extra-regarding impulse nor the strictly self-regarding are yet "differentiated" (if I may borrow a term of Mr Herbert Spencer's). Still on other occasions this differentiation seems to be made quite clear by the different actions to which the two elements respectively prompt. For as the pleasure depends to a great extent on the strength of the appetite, the desire of the pleasure of eating prompts men not only to gratify but to stimulate hunger. The gourmand who takes a walk in order to enjoy his dinner, is impelled by one sensual impulse to aim at producing another: here at least the two cannot be identified.

Indeed it is so obvious that hunger is something different from the desire for pleasure, that some writers have regarded its volitional stimulus (and that of appetite generally) as a case of aversion from pain. This, however, seems to me a distinct mistake in psychological classification, though one very natural and easily explained. Hunger, and we may say desire generally, is a state of consciousness so far similar to pain, that in both we feel a stimulus prompting us to pass from the present state into a different one. But in pain the impulse is to get out of the present state and pass into some other state which is only negatively represented as different from the present: whereas in desire proper we are indifferent to the present consciousness, and the impulse is towards the realization of some future end positively conceived. The desire itself seems to be a state of excitement which becomes pleasurable or painful according to the nature of its concomitant circumstances, and is often not definitely either the one or the other. When it is, for any reason, baulked of its effect in causing action, it is generally painful in some degree: and so a secondary aversion to the state of desire is generated, which blends itself with the desire and may easily be confounded with it. But here again we may distinguish the two impulses by observing the different kinds of conduct to which they respectively prompt: for the aversion to the pain of ungratified desire, though it may act as an additional stimulus towards the gratification of the desire,

may also (and often does) prompt us to get rid of the pain by suppressing the desire. We may observe also that desire, even when it has become a pain or uneasiness, is often but very slightly painful: so that the mere aversion to it as pain is but a small part of the total volitional stimulus of which we are conscious.

When, however, the desire is having its natural effect in causing the actions which tend to its gratification, it seems to be commonly a more or less pleasurable consciousness: even when the satisfaction at which it aims is still remote. Thus it may even generate a secondary desire for itself as a pleasure, or at least for the total consciousness of which it forms an essential part. In fact the pleasures that accompany actions under the influence of a keen desire, which we may call generally the pleasures of Pursuit, constitute a considerable item in the total enjoyment of life. And, for our present purpose, it will be important to examine them carefully; as they are peculiarly well adapted to exhibit the difference between extra-regarding and self-regarding impulses. For here certainly we often find exemplified what Butler regards as the normal relation between desire and pleasure: the pleasure that we experience depends entirely on the pre-existence of a desire which cannot therefore be directed towards this pleasure as its object. Take, for example, a favourite amusement of rich Englishmen. What is the motive that impels a man to fox-hunting? It is not the pleasure of catching the fox. Nobody, before entering on the chase, represents to himself the killing of the fox as a source of gratification, apart from the eagerness produced by pursuit. What the fox-hunter deliberately and before the chase desires is, not the capture of the fox, but the pleasure of pursuing it: only of this pleasure a temporary vehement desire to catch the fox is an essential condition. This desire, which does not exist at first, is stimulated to considerable intensity by the pursuit itself: and when it has thus been stimulated the consciousness attending the pursuit becomes pleasurable, and the capture, which was originally indifferent, comes to afford a keen enjoyment[1].

[1] To avoid misapprehension, it may be well to observe that I am not trying to give a complete analysis of the whole enjoyment of hunting, but only to define accurately a single (but the most essential) element of it.

The same phenomenon is exhibited in the case of more intellectual kinds of pursuit, where the objects sought are more abstract. It often happens that a man, feeling his life languid and devoid of interests, begins to occupy himself in the pursuit of some end, for the sake not of the end but of the occupation. At first, very likely, the occupation is irksome: but soon, as he foresaw, the mere reaction of his active upon his appetitive nature makes him (as we say) "take an interest" in the end at which he is aiming: so that his pursuit becoming eager becomes also a source of agreeable sensations. Here it is no doubt true that in proportion as his desire for the end becomes strong, the attainment of it becomes pleasant in prospect: but it would be inverting cause and effect to say that it is this prospective pleasure that he desires.

When we compare these pleasures with those previously discussed, another important observation suggests itself. In the former case, though we could distinguish appetite, as it appears in consciousness, from the desire of the pleasure attending the satisfaction of appetite, there appeared to be no incompatibility between the two. The fact that the gourmand is dominated by the desire of the pleasures of eating in no way impedes the development in him of the appetite which is a necessary condition of these pleasures. But when we turn to the pleasures of the chase, we seem to perceive this incompatibility to a certain extent. In all forms of pursuit a certain enthusiasm is necessary to obtain full enjoyment. A man who maintains throughout an epicurean mood, fixing his aim on his own pleasure, does not catch the full spirit of the chase; his eagerness never gets just the sharpness of edge which imparts to the pleasure its highest zest and flavour. Here comes into view what we might call the fundamental paradox of Hedonism, that the self-regarding impulse, if too predominant, defeats its own aim. This effect is not visible, or at any rate is scarcely visible, in the case of passive sensual pleasures. But of our active enjoyments generally, whether the activities on which they attend are classed as "bodily" or as "intellectual" (as well as of many emotional pleasures), it may certainly be said that we cannot attain them, at least in their best form, so long as we directly aim at them. Nor is it only that the exercise of our

faculties is insufficiently stimulated by the mere desire of the pleasure attending it, and requires the presence of other more objective, extra-regarding impulses, in order to be fully developed: we may go further and say that these other impulses must be temporarily predominant and absorbing, if the exercise and its attendant gratification are to attain their full height. This is true (e. g.) of most other bodily exercises pursued as sports, no less than of the chase. It is true again of the pleasures of thought and study: these can only be really enjoyed by those who have an ardour of curiosity which carries the mind temporarily away from self and its sensations. In all kinds of Art, again, the exercise of the creative faculty is attended by intense and exquisite pleasures: but in order to get them, one must forget them: the desire of the artist is always said to be concentrated and fixed upon the realization of his ideal of beauty.

The important case of the benevolent affections is at first sight somewhat more doubtful. On the one hand it is of course true, that when those whom we love are pleased or pained, we ourselves feel sympathetic pleasure and pain: and further, that the flow of love or kindly feeling is itself highly pleasurable. So that it is at least plausible to interpret the benevolent impulse as aiming ultimately at the attainment of one or both of these two kinds of pleasures, or at the averting of sympathetic pain. But we may observe, first, that the impulse to beneficent action produced in us by sympathy is often so much out of proportion to any actual consciousness of sympathetic pleasure and pain in ourselves, that it would be paradoxical to regard this latter as its object. Often indeed we cannot but feel that a tale of actual suffering arouses in us an excitement on the whole more pleasurable than painful, like the excitement of witnessing a tragedy: and yet at the same time stirs in us an impulse to relieve it, even when the process of relieving is painful and laborious and involves various sacrifices of our own pleasures. Again, we may often free ourselves from sympathetic pain most easily by merely turning our thoughts from the external suffering that causes it: and we sometimes feel an egoistic impulse to do this, which we can then distinguish clearly from the properly sympathetic impulse prompting us

to relieve the original suffering. And finally the much-commended pleasures of benevolence seem to require, in order to be felt in any considerable degree, the pre-existence of a desire to do good to others for their sakes and not for our own. As Hutcheson explains, we may *cultivate* benevolent affection for the sake of the pleasures attending it (just as the gourmand cultivates appetite), but we cannot produce it at will, however strong may be our desire of these pleasures: and when it exists, even though it may owe its origin to a purely egoistic impulse, it is still essentially a desire to do good to others for their sake and not for our own.

It cannot perhaps be said that the self-abandonment and self-forgetfulness, which seemed an essential condition of the full development of the other elevated impulses before noticed, characterize benevolent affection normally and permanently; as love seems naturally to involve a desire for reciprocated love, strong in proportion to the intensity of the emotion: and thus the consciousness of self and of one's own pleasures and pains seems often heightened by the very intensity of the affection that binds one to others. Still we may at least say that this self-suppression and absorption of consciousness in the thought of other human beings and their happiness is observable as a frequent incident of all strong affections: and it is said that persons who love strongly often feel a sense of antagonism between the egoistic and altruistic elements of their desire, and an impulse to suppress the former, which sometimes exhibits itself in acts of fantastic and extravagant self-sacrifice.

If then our moral consciousness declares—as it certainly seems to do—that "the pleasure of virtue is one which can only "be obtained on the express condition of its not being the object sought[1]," we are not to treat this as an abnormal phenomenon, requiring a special explanation. It is merely another illustration of a psychological law which, as we have seen, is exemplified throughout the whole range of our desires. It is not (as Kant seems to hold) that the *natural* determination of the Will is by motives of pleasure and pain, but that when our action is truly *rational*, a higher law of causation comes into

[1] Lecky, *Hist. of European Morals*, Introduction.

proved, it would have little bearing on the present question. What I am concerned to maintain is that all men do not *now* desire pleasure, but rather other things: some in particular having impulses towards virtue, which may and do conflict with their desire for their own pleasure. It is no reply to this to say that all men *once* desired pleasure, except on the assumption that the earlier condition of our impulses is somehow better and more trustworthy than the later. But this assumption would require us to prefer the coarsest and lowest of our pleasures to those that are more elevated and refined: which no one would maintain to be reasonable.

CHAPTER V.

FREE WILL.

§ 1. In the preceding chapters I have treated first of rational, and secondly of disinterested action, without introducing the vexed question of the Freedom of the Will. The metaphysical difficulties connected with this question have been proved by long dialectical experience to be so great, and appear to me so insoluble in the present state of our faculties, knowledge, and fundamental notions, that I am anxious to confine them within as strict limits as I can, and keep as much of my subject as possible free from their perturbing influence. And I am convinced that the identification which Kant and others after him have sought to establish between Free Action and (1) Rational, (2) Disinterested action, is in neither case required as an assumption nor adequately supported by psychological experience, while in the latter case it is distinctly erroneous. Conduct strictly disinterested, that is, disregardful of foreseen balance of pleasure to ourselves, is found, as I have tried to shew, in the most instinctive and unconscious as well as in the most deliberate and self-conscious region of our active life: nay, it appears to exist (as far as any phenomenon known to us only by introspective observation may be thought to exist) in the lower animals. We have at any rate just as much reason to say that a faithful dog acts disinterestedly, as we have to say that he acts interestedly. Again, the conception of acting rationally, that is from an impulse in harmony with an intellectual apprehension of an objective rule, or intrinsically desirable end, is certainly not bound up with the notion of Free

Will: it remains unaltered, if Free Will be a chimera. At the same time it must be allowed that in behalf of this latter connexion, a plausible appeal may be made to our inner experience. It may fairly be said that[1] "we consider our Reason as being ourselves rather than our desires and affections. We speak of Desire, Love, Anger, as mastering *us*, or of *ourselves* as controlling them. If we decide to prefer some remote and abstract good to immediate pleasures, or to conform to a rule which brings us present pain, (which decision implies exercise of Reason,) we more particularly consider such acts as our *own* acts." Still even if this language represented a uniform experience (which it does not) it would not adequately justify the Kantian proposition. For, granted that when Reason yields to passion we lapse from freedom to slavery, still this is a voluntary slavery, a free abnegation of freedom, even in the view of Libertarians: or indeed especially in their view, as they especially insist that we are responsible for such concessions. But it should be observed that the conflict in question does not always appear in consciousness as a conflict between Reason and blind passion, between "ourselves" on the one hand and a force of nature on the other. We are sometimes conscious of deliberately preferring what we clearly see to be an irrational course of action: not merely self-interest to duty (for here is rather a conflict of claims to rationality than clear irrationality): but (e.g.) port wine to health, revenge to reputation, &c. And if it be said that in such cases we perceive on reflection that we have been "the slaves of our desires and appetites:" it may be answered that sometimes when we have acted morally, a reaction comes, another state succeeds, in which we seem to ourselves to have been in bondage to idle scruples, and vain or exaggerated opinions of duty. Nay, even in the conflict itself we sometimes change sides: the moral law, though we still recognise its authority, suddenly seems to become external to us, and instead of identifying ourselves with the Reason that prescribes obedience to it, we seem to feel that the real ego is impulsively struggling to violate it. Indeed there are many persons, to whom, from a preponderance of the emotional and active elements in their nature, the state of re-

[1] Whewell, *Elements of Morality*, Bk. I. c. ii.

flection in which action is most deliberate is essentially irksome and depressing: they do not seem to themselves truly to exist unless when they are borne along upon some tide of impulse: so that when they act most deliberately, they feel least really alive, least their real selves: the more they yield, at any rate to some impulse, the "freer," in a sense, they seem to be. Such persons certainly do not give much heed to philosophy: but philosophy must give heed to them and to the deliverances of their consciousness.

I cannot therefore accept that identification of Free Will with Practical Reason, which lays the transcendental fact of Freedom at the foundation of Ethics. Indeed I hold with many English moralists that it would be quite possible to compose a treatise on Ethics which should completely ignore the Free-will controversy. At the same time I think that such a treatment would not only be felt to be shallow, but would omit the consideration of really important practical questions. Although it seems to me that the question of the Freedom of the Will, in its fundamental and general aspect, has no bearing upon the determination of what is intrinsically good for man, or ideally right and reasonable in human conduct: I think that it has a special and limited connexion with Ethics, which it is highly important to consider. If, however, it had been indispensable, for the satisfactory treatment of my subject, to offer a solution of the general question, the present treatise would not have been written. The "Freedom of the Will" presents itself to me as an unsolved problem: a subject on which I am obliged to confess that I have no knowledge, because I have no really consistent thought: on which therefore I have reason to believe that my absence of knowledge springs from the imperfect state of my conceptions. This imperfection, however, I am unable to remove, and therefore I am forced to suspend my judgment on the question. The reasons for this suspense I will proceed to give, partly from the strong interest which all persons who concern themselves with moral theories have always taken in this time-honoured topic; and partly because they are almost necessary to introduce and explain my treatment of the question as standing in a merely special and very restricted relation to systematic morality.

§ 2. We must begin by defining the problem as precisely as possible. The assertion is often made that there is really no difficulty at all to be solved, and that the illusory belief that there is a difficulty springs from inaccuracy or shallowness of thought. And I am quite willing to believe that if we could apply the right conceptions to the facts we should either ask no question at all, or one that could be answered as soon as asked. But in so far as any actual attempts to shew the illusoriness of the difficulty have ever seemed plausible, it has been, I think, in consequence of careless statement of the question, which most men at present are irresistibly impelled to ask. For clearness' sake I will put this question in the following different forms.

Is my voluntary action at any moment completely determined by (1) my character as it has been partly inherited, partly formed by my past actions and feelings, and (2) my circumstances, or the external influences acting on me at the moment? or not? Could the volition that I am just about to originate be certainly calculated by any one who knew thoroughly my nature at this moment and the forces acting upon me? or is there a strictly incalculable element in it? Is the self to which I refer it as cause a self of determinate moral qualities (which have more or less become known to me and to others from my past actions), or "myself" in some other sense, some "unconditioned" ego lying within or behind the "conditioned[1]?"

I have avoided using terms which imply materialistic assumptions, because, though a materialist will naturally be a determinist, a determinist need not be a materialist. In the above questions a materialist would substitute "brain and nervous system" for "character," and thereby obtain certainly a

[1] It is not uncommon to conceive of each volition as connected by uniform laws with our past states of consciousness. But any uniformities we might trace among a man's past consciousnesses, even if we knew them all, would yet give us very imperfect guidance as to his future action: as there would be left out of account

(1) all inborn tendencies and susceptibilities, as yet latent or incompletely exhibited;

(2) all past physical influences, of which the effects had not been perfectly represented in consciousness.

circumstances and unfettered by the result of what we have previously been and felt our volitional choice may appear: still when it is once well past, and we survey it in the series of our actions, its relations of causation and resemblance to other parts of our life appear, and we naturally explain it as an effect of our nature, education and circumstances. Nay, we even apply the same conceptions to our future action, and the more, in proportion as our moral sentiments are developed: for with our sense of duty generally increases our sense of the duty of moral culture, and our desire of self-improvement: and the possibility of moral self-culture depends on the assumption that by a present volition we can determine to some extent our actions in the more or less remote future. No doubt we habitually take at the same time the opposite, Libertarian, view as to our future: we believe, for example, that we can resist to-morrow and henceforward temptations to which we have continually yielded in the past. But it should be observed that this belief is (as moralists of all schools admit and even urge) *at any rate to a great extent* illusory and misleading. Though Libertarians contend that it is *possible* for us at any moment to act contrary to our formed character and previous custom: still, they and Determinists alike teach that it is much less easy than men commonly imagine to break the subtle unfelt trammels of habit.

It is said, however, that the conception of the Freedom of the Will, alien as it may be to speculative science, both generally and in the special department of human action, is yet indispensable to Ethics and Jurisprudence: we may exclude it from our systematic apprehension of what is, but it is forced upon us irresistibly in our systematic elaboration of what ought to be. Our recognition of the moral law, says Kant, is *ratio cognoscendi* of the Freedom of the Will: "ought" implies "can:" the real voluntariness of an action is the criterion by which we distinguish it as a proper subject of moral approbation and disapprobation. The notion of Justice, say jurists of the same school, and with it the reasonableness of the criminal law, depend on the assumption of Free Will: unless a man could have acted otherwise than he did, he cannot really have either merit or demerit: and if he has not merit or demerit, it is repugnant to the moral reason and sentiments of mankind to reward and punish him.

Now it seems to me clear that this is the natural and primary view of the matter: that, on the Determinist theory, "ought," "responsibility," "desert," and similar terms, have to be used, if at all, in new significations: and that the conception of Freedom is, so to say, the pivot upon which our moral sentiments naturally play. On the other hand I cannot deny that the Determinist can give to the fundamental terms of Ethics perfectly clear and definite meanings: that the distinctions thus obtained give us a practically sufficient basis for criminal law: while the moral sentiments actually existing are seen to be appropriate and useful, as a part of the natural adaptation of social man to his conditions of life. The Determinist allows that, in a sense, "ought" implies "can," that a man is only morally bound to do what is "in his power," and that only acts from which a man "could have abstained" are proper subjects of punishment or moral condemnation. But he explains "can" and "in his power" to imply only the absence of all insuperable obstacles *except* want of sufficient motive. It is precisely in such cases, he maintains, that punishment and the expression of moral displeasure are required to supply the desiderated motive force. True, the meaning of punishment is altered: it is no longer properly retributory, but reformatory and preventive: but it may be fairly said that this is the more practical view, and the one towards which civilization—quite apart from the Free-will controversy—seems to tend. And so of the moral feelings and judgments. If the Libertarian urges that it is unreasonable to resent involuntary harm any more than voluntary, as both are equally resultant effects of similar complex natural forces: the Determinist answers that the reasonableness depends on the effect of the resentment, which obviously tends to prevent the one kind of action and not the other: nay, he retorts, indignation is only reasonable on the assumption that men's actions are determined by motives, among which the fear of others' indignation may be reckoned. It may be replied, that however useful moral sentiments may be on this theory, its general adoption would practically prevent their development and effective operation. But thus the ground is shifted and the belief in Free Will asserted to be necessary not logically, as an assumption involved in

ethical and jural reasoning; but practically, as the only means to a desirable end. Such an assertion stands in need of much more empirical proof than has ever yet been offered: and even if it were proved, to conclude from the practical efficacy of the belief to its speculative truth is to use a doubtful and now generally discredited method of inference.

§ 3. This almost overwhelming cumulative proof seems, however, more than balanced by a single argument on the other side: the immediate affirmation of consciousness in the moment of deliberate volition. It is impossible for me to think, at such a moment, that my volition is completely determined by my formed character and the motives acting upon it. The opposite conviction is so strong as to be absolutely unshaken by the evidence brought against it. I cannot believe it to be illusory. So far it is unlike the erroneous intuitions which occur in the exercise of the senses: as (e. g.) the misperceptions of sight or hearing. For experience soon teaches me to regard these as appearances whose suggestions are misleading: but no amount of experience of the sway of motives even tends to make me distrust my intuitive consciousness that in resolving after deliberation I exercise free choice as to which of the motives acting upon me shall prevail. Nothing short of absolute proof that this consciousness is erroneous could overcome the force with which it announces itself as certain.

Now I cannot perceive that such proof has been given: and hence I am conscious that I habitually think upon this subject in two conflicting modes, between which I cannot pretend to offer any reconciliation. But it seems possible to reduce this conflict within narrower limits than it sometimes occupies, by scrutinizing carefully this consciousness of Freedom, and ascertaining exactly the extent of its affirmation.

In the first place, as was said, it seems to be only in moments of Deliberation that I become conscious of Freedom (in the sense in which the word is here used): conscious, that is, that "I" am to some extent distinct from and independent of my formed character, and that I can choose to be swayed by motives, of which the impulsive force (so far as I can estimate it) is less than that of conflicting motives.

This consciousness of Freedom seems only to emerge when

self-consciousness reaches a certain degree of intensity and prominence: but self-consciousness, though a permanent element of our conscious life, is during a great part of it not a prominent element, and is often almost evanescent. Frequently, even for long periods, consciousness is almost entirely absorbed in objective contemplation and action: and we seem to act from impulse and habit, without reflection, and therefore without the possibility of any separation or distinction between the Free Self and the Formed Character. At such times we cannot, from the nature of the case, analyse introspectively the phenomenon of volition when actually present: for introspection involves precisely that higher degree of self-consciousness, the absence of which characterizes the state in question. But in so far as we can observe it in memory, the analysis given by the Determinist school (which was found inadequate in the case of deliberate action) is here completely satisfactory. We find nothing more in the phenomenon than an antecedent passive consciousness—pleasure or pain or desire or aversion—and a consequent active consciousness, exertion or effort. Even if the Libertarian will not admit that Freedom is ever entirely absent, any more than self-consciousness, he must at any rate allow that it is at such times latent and evanescent: and that what we then actually do is entirely accounted for by our formed tendencies to action and susceptibilities of feeling, together with the external influences operating on us.

Secondly, it is important to observe exactly what it is that the Will is free to effect: or rather (for we need not pursue the inquiry upon exclusively Libertarian assumptions) what the range of effects is, which it would be possible to cause by human volition, provided that adequate motive were not wanting. These effects seem to be of three kinds: first, changes in the external world consequent upon muscular contractions: secondly, changes in the train of ideas and feelings that constitutes our conscious life: and thirdly, changes in the permanent tendencies to action that compose what is called our character.

I. The sphere of volitional causation is by some confined entirely to such events as can be produced by muscular contractions: and certainly these constitute the most obvious and

prominent part of it. As regards these, it is sometimes said that it is properly the muscular contraction that we will, and not the more remote effects: for these require the concurrence of other causes, and therefore we can never be absolutely certain that they will follow. But no more is it certain, strictly speaking, that the muscular contraction will follow, since our limb may be paralyzed, &c. And hence some say that the immediate object of the will is some molecular change in the motor nerves. And this is no doubt an inseparable concomitant of such volitions: but we are never thinking of our motor nerves and their changes, nor indeed commonly of the muscular contractions that follow them: and therefore it seems a misuse of terms to describe either as the "object" of the mind in willing: since it is always some more remote effect, which we consciously will and intend. Still of all effects of our will on the external world, some contraction of our muscles is always an indispensable antecedent: and when that is over our part in the causation is completed.

II. We can control to some extent our thoughts and feelings. We cannot indeed directly summon or dismiss any thought or state of consciousness: and in the case of emotion an important part of what we commonly call "control of feeling" comes under the head just discussed. Our control over our muscles enables us to keep down the expression of the feeling and to resist its promptings to action: and as the giving free vent to a feeling tends, generally speaking, to sustain and prolong it, this muscular control amounts to a certain power over the emotion. But there is not the same connexion between our muscular system and our thoughts: and yet experience shews that most men (though some, no doubt, much more than others) can voluntarily determine the direction of their thoughts, and pursue at will a given line of meditation. How then is this control exercised, and what is it precisely that the effort of will effects? It seems to be the concentration of our consciousness on a part of that which is present to it, so that this part grows more vivid and clear, while the rest tends to become obscure and ultimately to vanish. Frequently this voluntary exertion is only needed to initiate a train of ideas, which is afterwards continued without effort: as in recalling a

Libertarian only thinks that it too probably will not prevail, although it is always possible that it may.

Nor again does it appear that there will be any general difference between the two schools in determining the details of duty.

We saw that it is easy to throw into a form suitable to Determinism the general characteristic of duty "that it is in our power to do it:" we have only to say "that there is no obstacle to our doing it except absence of motive:" a formula which is, of course, practically convertible with the other. And so far as the absolute duties are concerned, which are prominent in intuitional systems, the moralist does not consider in prescribing them whether any one is likely to do them or not. In precisely determining relative and indefinite duties, we have, no doubt, to consider circumstances present and future, and among these the probable future conduct not only of other men, but also of ourselves. For it is often foolish and wrong to perform a single act of (say) benevolence, unless others are to follow it. But even here no practical difference will emerge between Determinists and Libertarians, if the latter admit the limitations of Free Will, as above expounded. For if by any effort of resolution at the present moment we can only produce a certain limited effect upon our character and so indirectly upon our action at some future time, and immediate consciousness cannot tell us that this effect will be adequate to the occasion, nor indeed how great it will really prove to be: we ought obviously before pledging ourselves to any future course of action to estimate carefully, from our experience of ourselves and general knowledge of human nature, what the probability is of our keeping present resolutions in the circumstances in which we are likely to be placed. It is no doubt morally most important that we should not tranquilly acquiesce in any weakness or want of self-control: but the fact remains that such weakness is not curable by a single volition: and whatever we can do towards curing it by any effort of will at any moment, is as clearly enjoined by reason on the Determinist theory as it is on the Libertarian. On neither theory is it reasonable that we should deceive ourselves as to the extent of our weakness, or ignore it in the forecast of our conduct, or suppose it more easily remediable than it really is.

There seems therefore to be no general connexion between systematic ethics and the disputed question of Free Will. But it seems to be in a special manner involved in the determination of one particular branch of morality; namely, Justice. For Justice as commonly understood implies the due requital of good and ill Desert, and the notion of Desert when closely scrutinized seems to involve free choice of good or evil: if there is really no such free choice, there does not seem to be, strictly speaking, any Desert: so that Justice has to be determined on a different principle. Thus as we saw, on the Determinist theory, punishment is regarded as preventive instead of retributive. And though roughly and generally the two views will coincide in practice, it is easy to see that they may diverge to a considerable extent, especially as regards the *quantity* of punishment that ought to be inflicted in any case: for example, the fact that men are urged by strong natural impulses to commit a crime may be a reason for making its punishment more severe, if this be considered purely as preventive: but it certainly seems to render the ill-desert of the act less rather than greater. But the further consideration of this point had better be deferred till we have examined more closely the notion of Justice[1].

[1] Cf. Book III. c. 5.

CHAPTER VI.

THE METHODS OF ETHICS.

§ 1. THE results of the discussions in the last three chapters may be thus briefly stated.

The prevailing motive in conscious action is not always an impulse towards the attainment of pleasure or the avoidance of pain: as we experience powerful impulses towards the realization of something other than a state of our own consciousness: such as the welfare of those who are to live after us, or the triumph of a cause which we shall never see triumphant. Among these latter impulses we may place the desire to do what is right and reasonable as such, of which the characteristic is that, as Butler says, it claims supremacy: i.e. that in so far as we are moral beings we think that it *ought* to prevail, whether it does or not. This desire we may consider as existing in more or less strength in different persons according to the nature, education and circumstances of each: so that though it seems impossible not to believe ourselves free in the moment of deliberate volition, still the question of the "Freedom of the Will" need not arise in deciding generally between ethical systems. A Determinist need not believe himself to act universally from self-interest alone: on the other hand a Libertarian must admit that he may deliberately prefer the pleasures of sense to the dictates of duty.

Still, when a man deliberates, he generally desires to act in accordance with reason. Now though there is a partial rationality in any kind of conduct that is consistent, and such that, when it is viewed as a whole, there appears some principle and method of preference to which it all conforms: yet

this is no more than a partial, or, we may almost say, merely apparent rationality. Many men whose conduct has become systematic by the predominance of some one impulse do not yet maintain that the ends thus systematically sought are ends in themselves rational. They admit that for such ends reasons have to be given; and sometimes they offer such reasons, and sometimes are conscious that they cannot give them, and that their conduct, however consistent, is profoundly irrational.

The Methods of systematizing conduct, that claim to be reasonable, are thus found to be limited in number: and they seem to be those enumerated in the first chapter.

For, in the first place, Happiness appears to be a reasonable end (although we reject the doctrine that we all necessarily seek it): if I can say of any action that it makes me happier, it seems that no further account need be given of my doing it. Though when we ask *whose* Happiness, a controversy emerges: for to some it seems that the agent ought to seek his own happiness, and that this is what each individual's reason must necessarily prescribe to him: while others think that the view of reason is essentially universal, and that it cannot be reasonable to aim ultimately at the happiness of any one individual rather than that of any other equally deserving and susceptible of it. There are therefore two views and methods in which Happiness is regarded as the ultimate and rational end of actions: in the one it is the agent's happiness which is so regarded, in the other the happiness of all men, or all sentient beings. It is of course possible to adopt an end intermediate between the two, and to aim at the happiness of some limited portion of mankind, such as one's family or nation or race: but any such limitation seems arbitrary, and probably no one would maintain it to be reasonable *per se*, but only as the most practical way of seeking the general happiness, or as a means of attaining one's own.

Again, Perfection or Excellence is thought a rational end, and if by anything that we can do we can make our own nature or any part of the world around us better, more perfect and excellent in its kind, we seem to need no further reason for doing it. And here, too, the Perfection aimed at may be either individual or universal. But in this case it would seem

that more divergent views of the universal end are possible: for we are not necessarily limited as in the case of happiness to the consideration of mankind or of sentient beings: as inanimate things also seem to have a perfection and excellence of their own and to be capable of being made better or worse in their kind. And this excellence or one species of it we call beauty: and we find that men have actually devoted their lives to the embodiment and realization of some ideal of beauty in some kind of matter. But whether beauty or any other quality of inanimate objects can on reflection be regarded as good or desirable in itself and out of relation to consciousness, we must presently consider[1]: meanwhile it is more clearly and admittedly rational to take the perfection or excellence of oneself or of other human beings as an ultimate end.

But again, it is a common opinion that of truly right action a great part is not done for any end outside of and apart from the action itself, but merely because it is right or good; and that such right or good action can be classified under certain general heads, as Justice, Truth, &c.: so that to each such division corresponds a proposition, "that we ought to do what is just, truthful, &c.:" and that these propositions are to be taken as ethical axioms, requiring no proof and constituting in themselves so many final reasons for the performance of the actions denoted by the general terms. This is commonly called the Intuitional theory of morals, and I have thought it best to term the method founded upon it Intuitionism; because its rules are thought to be ascertained by direct intuition of the actions themselves, instead of being inferred from consideration of their consequences. There are serious objections to this term, and even the distinction just given does not turn out to be as clear and sharp as could be desired: but no other word would so readily bring to the reader's mind the general object which I wish it to denote.

§ 2. It may seem, however, that I have by no means exhausted the list of reasons which are widely accepted as ultimate grounds of action. Many religious persons think that the highest reason for doing anything is that it is God's Will: and

[1] Cf. *post*, c. 9.

become a guide to it? In a sense, as Butler observes, any impulse is natural: but it is manifestly idle to bid us follow Nature in this sense: for the question of duty is never raised except when we are conscious of a conflict of impulses, and wish to know which to follow. And it will scarcely be said that we are always to follow the impulse that is felt as the strongest: for this would be rather a rejection than an interpretation of the dictates of reason, and would sometimes lead to conduct flagrantly irrational. Nor does it seem, on reflection, that any of the three meanings before suggested (which are all, I think, involved in the current notion of "natural") will serve our purpose. For we can hardly maintain that the frequency of an impulse or the priority of its appearance in time is clearly indicative that God designs us to follow it: especially since, when we take a retrospective view of the history of the human race, we find that some impulses which all admire, such as the love of knowledge and enthusiastic philanthropy, are both rarer and later in their appearance than others which all despise. Nor, again, can we eschew as unnatural and opposed to the Divine design all such impulses as have been produced in us by the institutions of society, or our use of human arrangements and contrivances, or that result in any way from the deliberate action of our fellow-men: for this were arbitrarily to exclude society and human action from the scope of the Divine purposes. And besides it is clear that many impulses so generated are auxiliary to morality and in other ways beneficial: and though others no doubt are pernicious and misleading, it seems that we can only distinguish these latter from the former by taking note of their effects, and not by any precision that reflection can give to the notion of "natural." And if we take a more physical view of our nature and endeavour to ascertain for what end our corporeal frame was constructed, we find that such contemplation determines very little. We can tell from our nutritive system that we are intended to take food, and we can say that we are intended to exercise our various muscles in some way or other, and move our various limbs, and perhaps that we are to exercise our brain and organs of sense. But this carries us a very trifling way, for the practical question almost always is, not whether we are to use our organs or leave them unused, but to what extent

or in what manner we are to use them: and when men attempt to enunciate the teachings of Nature on these points, their divergence seems to shew that they are merely formulating the habits and instincts that result from varying custom, or confused intuitions of expediency.

On the whole, it appears to me that no definition that has ever been offered of this notion exhibits it as capable of being laid at the basis of an ethical system. And no one maintains that "natural" like "beautiful" is a notion that though indefinable is yet clear, being derived from a simple unanalysable impression. No doubt, when we have otherwise determined the right and wrong in conduct, we may assert that what is right is necessarily conformable to Nature (or to the Divine Will), and that this latter notion supplies the ultimate ground and reasonable motive for doing what is right. But at any rate it is not in itself sufficiently precise to give a practical criterion of the rightness of actions.

§ 3. It thus appears that not all the different views that are taken of the ultimate reason for obeying rules of conduct lead to different methods of determining what these rules shall be. Indeed we seem to find on closer examination that there is no necessary connexion between the Method and the Ultimate Reason in an ethical system: almost any method may be connected with almost any ultimate reason by means of some possible—or even plausible—assumption. Hence arises considerable perplexity and confusion in the classification and comparison of ethical systems: for these appear to have different affinities according as we consider Method or Ultimate Reason, and hence are not easy to classify even when both elements are made clear: which is often not the case, as some writers lay stress on Method, and are hesitating and uncertain in their enunciation of Ultimate Reason, while others chiefly confine themselves to the discussion of the latter and leave the former obscure.

These and other difficulties in our classification will be seen more clearly as our investigation proceeds. In the meantime the list of first principles already given seems to include all that have a *primâ facie* claim to be included: and to afford the most convenient classification for the current modes of determining right conduct. At the same time I do not wish to lay

stress on the completeness or adequacy of the classification. I do not profess to prove *à priori* that there are these practical first principles and no more. They have been taken merely empirically from observation of the moral reasoning of myself and other men, whether professed moralists or not: and though it seems to me improbable that I have overlooked any important phase or point of view, it is always possible that I may have done so.

On the other hand some readers may be expected to blame the list for excess rather than defect. They may have been taught to believe that "the common sense of mankind has in every age led to *two* seemingly opposite schemes of morality, that which makes *Virtue* and that which makes *Pleasure* the guide of human action:" and they may consider it a fault in my enumeration that it somewhat obliterates this fundamental distinction. Now perhaps no material error would be committed by stating the generally received methods of ethics as *three* in number and classifying all varieties under these three heads. For, as far as I am aware, there has been no systematic attempt to determine the rightness of conduct by considering its tendency to promote *universal* Perfection. And when Perfection or Excellence of the individual is spoken of as the ultimate end, what is most commonly meant is Moral Perfection, or at any rate this latter is taken to be its chief element: and when "Moral Perfection" has come to be defined, it has been found to mean "dispositions and habits tending to good action," the goodness being determined intuitively or by reference to common sense, and not by any special criterion derived from the notion of Perfection. And so far the method based upon this notion would coincide with a species of Intuitionism: and whatever divergence is introduced by including in the End other than moral excellences may seem not sufficiently important to constitute this a fundamentally distinct method. This point it is not particularly needful to determine. But against any identification or blending of Egoistic and Universalistic Hedonism, and even against any representation of their differences as secondary and subordinate, it seems very important to protest: as such a *rapprochement* encourages a serious misapprehension of both the historical and the philosophical relations of

these methods to the Intuitional or Common-Sense Morality. And the contrast between Egoism and Altruism is at any rate *primâ facie* one of the most fundamental that morality exhibits. No doubt it is a postulate of the practical Reason, that it must be consistent with itself: and hence we have a strong predisposition to reduce any two methods to unity. But it is just because this postulate has been the source of a large amount of bad reasoning in ethics, that it is a special object of the present work to avoid all hasty and premature reconciliations, and to exhibit fairly the divergence of the different methods without extenuation or exaggeration: and no divergence appears more obvious and glaring than that between the two systems not unfrequently confounded under the name of Utilitarianism.

At the same time it is not difficult to find reasons for this close union between principles and methods from one point of view so antagonistic. In the first place, the systems of Epicurus and Bentham are essentially similar in being both *dependent* systems; that is, in prescribing actions as means to an end distinct from, and lying outside the actions; and thus both consist of rules which are not absolute but relative, and only valid if they conduce to the end. Again, the ultimate end, or entity regarded as intrinsically good and desirable, is in both systems the same in quality, *i.e.* pleasure; or, more strictly, the maximum of pleasure attainable, pains being subtracted. Besides, it is of course to a great extent true that the conduct recommended by the one principle coincides with that inculcated by the other. Though it would seem to be only in an ideal polity that "self-interest well understood" leads to the perfect discharge of all social duties, still, in a tolerably well-ordered community it prompts to the fulfilment of most of them, unless under very exceptional circumstances. And, on the other hand, a sincere Benthamite may fairly hold that his own happiness is that portion of the universal good which it is most in his power to promote, and which therefore is most especially entrusted to his charge. And the practical blending of the two systems is sure to go beyond their theoretical coincidence. It is much easier for a man to move in a sort of diagonal between egoistic and universalistic hedonism, than to

be practically a consistent adherent of either. Few men are so completely selfish, whatever their theory of morals may be, as not occasionally to seek the general good of some smaller or larger community from natural sympathetic impulse unsupported by Epicurean calculation. And probably still fewer are so resolutely unselfish as never to find "all men's good" in their own with rather too ready conviction.

In spite of all this, the distinction between one's own happiness and that of people in general is so natural and obvious, and so continually forced upon our attention by the circumstances of life; that some other reason is required to explain the persistent confusion between the systems that respectively adopt either end as furnishing the right and reasonable standard for each individual's conduct. And such a reason is found in the theory of human action held by Bentham (and generally speaking by his disciples), which has been discussed in a previous chapter. Though ethically Epicureanism and Benthamism may be viewed as standing in polar opposition, psychologically Bentham is in fundamental agreement with Epicureans. He holds that a man ought to aim at the maximum felicity of men in general; but he holds, also, that he always does aim at what appears to him his own maximum felicity—that he cannot help doing this—that this is the way his volition inevitably acts. Bentham takes every opportunity of putting these two propositions with characteristic sharpness and clearness. "The greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question is the only right and proper and universally desirable end of human action in every situation." But "in the general tenor of life, in every human breast, self-regard is predominant;" or, more explicitly, "on the occasion of every act he exercises, every human being is led to pursue that line of conduct which, according to his view of the case, taken by him at the moment, will be in the highest degree contributory to his own greatest happiness, whatsoever be the effect of it in relation to the happiness of other similar beings, any or all of them taken together." He goes on to refer those who doubt to the "existence of the human species as being itself a proof, and a conclusive one."

Here, if self-interest be not the "right and proper end of

him quoted with approval by Clarke, who is commonly taken to represent Intuitionism in an extreme form. Nor does Shaftesbury, in introducing the theory of a "moral sense," seem to have dreamt that it could ever impel us to actions not clearly conducive to the Good of the Whole: and his disciple Hutcheson expressly identified its promptings with those of Benevolence. Butler seems to have been the first who distinctly pointed out the occasional discrepancy between the apparent well-being of society and Virtue as commonly understood[1]. When Hume presented Utilitarianism as a mode of explaining current morality, it was seen or suspected to have a destructive tendency. But it was not till Bentham's time that it was offered as a method for determining conduct, absolutely complete in itself: the conclusions of which were to overrule all traditional precepts and supersede all existing sentiments. And even this complete and final antagonism relates rather to theory and method than to practical results: indeed the discrepancy in results between Utilitarianism and Common Sense has been rather extenuated than exaggerated by most utilitarians. The practical conflict is so essentially between Egoism and Altruism, that the sense of this continually tends to draw together Utilitarianism and Intuitionism into their old alliance. Indeed from a practical point of view Egoism and Utilitarianism may fairly be regarded as extremes between which the Common-Sense morality is a kind of *media via*. For this latter is commonly thought to leave a man free to pursue his own happiness under certain definite limits and conditions: whereas the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" seems to self-love a principle more oppressive from the comprehensive, indefinite, and unceasing character of its exactions. And thus, as Mill remarks, Utilitarianism is sometimes attacked from two precisely opposite sides: from a confusion with Egoistic Hedonism it is called base and grovelling: while at the same time it is more plausibly charged with setting up too high a standard of

[1] I think we can trace a change in Butler's view on this point, if we compare the first of his Sermons on Human Nature with the Dissertation on Virtue which forms an appendix to the *Analogy*. Certainly in the former treatise he does not notice, any more than Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, any actual or possible want of harmony between Conscience and Rational Benevolence.

unselfishness and making exaggerated demands on human nature.

A good deal remains to be said, in order to make the principle and method of Utilitarianism perfectly clear and explicit: but it seems best to defer this till we come to the investigation of its details. It will be convenient to take this as the final stage of our examination of methods. For on the one hand it is simpler that the discussion of Egoistic Hedonism should precede that of Universalistic: and on the other, it seems desirable that we should obtain in as exact a form as possible the enunciations of Intuitive Morality, before we compare these with the results of the more doubtful and difficult calculations of utilitarian consequences.

In the remaining chapters of this book I shall endeavour to define more clearly the nature and relations of the other two methods, before proceeding to the fuller examination of them, with which we shall be occupied in Books II. and III.

CHAPTER VII.

EGOISM AND SELF-LOVE.

§ 1. In the preceding chapter I have used the term "Egoism," as others have done, to denote a system which prescribes actions as means to the end of the individual's happiness. The ruling motive in such a system is commonly said to be "self-love." But both terms admit of other interpretations, which it will be well to distinguish and set aside before proceeding further, as the ambiguous meaning of "egoism" and "self-love" has been a frequent source of confusion in ethical discussion.

I may illustrate this by a reference to the doctrines of Hobbes. His method is naturally and quite properly called egoistic, but it is not throughout, strictly speaking, hedonistic. In fact his deviations from pure Hedonism are considerable: and it is of some interest to notice them, as they are essential characteristics of his system, which in its original plan and purpose, (though not perhaps in its effect upon mankind,) was the reverse of destructive. His aim was to promulgate philosophical principles of conduct upon which the social order might firmly rest, and escape the storms and convulsions with which it seemed to be menaced from the vagaries of the unenlightened conscience. Now pure egoistic hedonism, as I shall presently shew, cannot furnish a solid basis for such social construction: and even such imperfect constructiveness as Hobbism attained is only managed by means of qualifications and assumptions alien to pure hedonism. For example, it is not "self-love" in Butler's sense—the impulse which aims at the

individual's pleasure—but "self-preservation," which determines the first of those precepts of rational egoism which he calls "Laws of Nature." It is true that his psychological theory that "pleasure helpeth vital actions" made him to some extent blend the two notions: for so by aiming at pleasure a man would seek to increase if not strictly to preserve his vitality. Still in the development of his system we often find that it is Preservation rather than Pleasure that he has in view. I do not mean merely that he considers social rules to be enjoined by prudence on the individual as "articles of peace:" for peace is a means to the end of Pleasure as well as of Preservation. But in determining the very important question, when the same prudence or egoistic reason will prompt the individual *not* to conform to his articles of peace, he decides that such non-conformity is justifiable at the point at which submission would tend to interfere not with his pleasure, but with his life and freedom of action; "when death or imprisonment are threatened" by society.

Again in Spinoza's view the principle of rational action is necessarily egoistic, and is (as with Hobbes) the impulse of self preservation. The individual mind, says Spinoza, like everything else, strives so far as it is able to continue in its state of being: indeed this effort is its very essence. It is true that this impulse cannot be distinguished from the desire of pleasure: because pleasure or joy is "a passion in which the soul passes to higher perfection." Still it is not at Pleasure that the impulse primarily aims, but at Perfection or Reality: as we should now say, at Self-development. Of this, according to Spinoza, the highest form consists in a clear comprehension of all things in their necessary order as modifications of the one Divine Being, and that willing acceptance of all which springs from this comprehension, and which Spinoza calls the "intellectual love of God." In this state the mind is purely active, without any admixture of passion or passivity: and thus its essential nature is realized or actualized to the greatest possible degree.

We perceive that this is the notion of self-realization as defined not only *by* but *for* a philosopher: and that it would mean something quite different in the case of a man of action