

RELATIVISM AND OBJECTIVISM: A STUDY IN ETHICS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the following study is to conduct an inquiry into the nature of the ultimate basis of moral evaluation. The mystery surrounding the grounds upon which man's moral judgments are made has become, the author thinks, a matter of the utmost importance in the shaping of the post-war world, especially where that process affects the training and education of a new generation. Human personality, including temperament, character, and moral belief, is fundamentally the most dynamic medium of good and evil in the world of men. It is essential, therefore, that man seek to achieve the fullest and most penetrating understanding possible of the nature of the moral concepts; he must come face to face with the problem of human conduct, the problem of how man is to move about in his universe and what attitude he is to adopt towards himself and his fellow creatures.

This has become the human predicament today. The splitting of the atom and the mastery of atomic power have given to man a potentiality for destruction -- or for happiness -- never known before to the human race. The question of human behaviour, therefore, of how man should

act and use his power, can no longer be ignored or relegated to a subordinate position. And this question is essentially a philosophical problem. It is the task of the psychologist, the sociologist, and the statesman to educate and direct human affairs in the best conceivable fashion in matters individual, social, and political. But where the basis of human action and teaching is concerned, where the form into which life itself will place the content is in question, the task of the philosopher presents itself.¹

It is with this problem, then, that the present essay is concerned -- the inquiry "into the very nature of a moral standard". The seemingly small and trifling question, Why do we say this act is right, and that wrong?, has become one of tremendous significance. The question, of course, has always been a matter of concern for philosophers, and it is from a survey of historical and contemporary ethical theory that we shall take our approach in the following study.

We find that there have been, in general, ~~two~~ opposing views taken in regard to the basis of moral standards. One view holds that moral laws are relative to human beings, that they depend upon individual desire or taste, human will, or approval and disapproval of the majority. The

¹ Cf. W. M. Sibley, "Moral Relativism and Human Nature", Manitoba Arts Review (Vol. VII, No.1, Spring, 1949): "The philosophical problem involves...inquiry into the very nature of a moral standard, and the discussion of the reasons or evidence which may be adduced in the process of criticizing or evaluating such a norm. (p. 27).

theory adopted by adherents of this view implies that men can create right and wrong, good and evil, and that such terms are therefore essentially relative. Over against this approach stands the view that moral values are objective, that they are grounded in the general nature of man, or in the nature of the universe in which we live, and that all men must conform to them, regardless of race, class, creed, or colour. This view implies that moral laws are discovered, rather than created, by man. Its adherents claim that our knowledge of moral value is the result of a study of society and the human environment, or of human nature itself, or, again, that we intuit right and wrong, good and evil, by virtue of a faculty known as the moral sense, or simply through some natural "given" ability.

The method used in the essay which follows is to consider representative theoretical views, historical and contemporary, divided according to the two-fold distinction indicated above. Chapter I contains an examination of some of the main relativistic positions, and Chapter II a consideration of the leading objectivistic theories. These views are then subjected to a critical survey in Chapter III. The study is concluded by an epilogue, which contains a brief restatement of the author's position.

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF RELATIVISTIC POSITIONS

Our study will begin with a consideration of various relativistic theories of the meaning of good and evil. We shall find that these views hold the basis of moral evaluation to be relative to human desire, taste, or will, and the universe, as opposed to man, to be ethically neutral. Moral values are concepts which man himself originates, and which he projects upon the objects he desires, approves of, or wills for some ulterior purpose. Let us first consider the view that the good is that which man desires.

I. The Good = The Object of Personal Desire or Sovereign Command.

One of the most significant advocates of the theory that the good is simply what the individual happens to desire is Thomas Hobbes, whose writings date from the seventeenth century. It seemed to him self-evident that egoism was the fundamental law of human nature, and this, combined with a materialist philosophy of man, led him to assert that "whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth 'good'; and the object of his hate and aversion, 'evil'; and of his contempt, 'vile' and 'inconsiderable'"¹

For these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any

¹ The Leviathan (Harvard Classics edition, New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909), p. 351.

common rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man, where there is no commonwealth; or, in a commonwealth, from the person that representeth it.²

We thus see wherein Hobbes moral relativism lies. Good and evil are for him merely the names men give to the objects of their likes and dislikes. Let us, in order to place Hobbes' views in their full setting, briefly consider his picture of the human situation.

Hobbes' basic metaphysic reveals a thorough-going materialism. We find that motion is thought to be the most universal cause in nature and that everything is an effect of spatial movement. In his system, laws of material movement give rise to laws of individual minds and organisms which mutually influence each other, and the latter give rise to laws of political philosophy.

Man, as a being included in the universe, is simply another material organism, responding mechanically to stimuli impinging upon him from his environment. The conditions of sense-perception, such as colour and light, are not external realities but particles which rise from the motions of material objects and which enter the body through the senses. When these particles impinge upon the human being, they give rise to certain psychological responses or attitudes, characterized by a conative component,

as a result of which the individual either 'moves toward' or 'moves away from' given objects; in other cases he remains conatively neutral toward them. In so far as

² The Leviathan, p. 351. . . p. 351.

an individual's behaviour toward an object is 'adient', he is said to desire the object; and it is, for him, good. If his behaviour is 'abient', the object is, for him, evil. If his behaviour is neutral, the object is 'inconsiderable'.³

Pursuing this distinction still further, we find that adiciency, or sense of desire, is pleasurable, and that abiciency, or aversion, is painful. Hobbes thus associates the good with pleasure and the evil with pain.

It is important for our purpose to point out that Hobbes has defined values in terms of the psychological interests or attitudes of the individual. It is from this that his moral relativism directly derives, for such interests are not constant for all individuals. The latter vary in taste, desire, etc.;"one man calleth 'wisdom' what another calleth 'fear', and one 'cruelty' what another 'justice'; one 'prodigality' what another 'magnanimity'; and one 'gravity' what another 'stupidity'.⁴ And even a single individual does not remain the same in his recognition of values:

And, because the constitution of a man's body is in continual mutation, it is impossible that all the same things should always cause in him the same appetites and aversions: much less can all men consent in the desire of almost anyone and the same object.⁵

Now each individual, for Hobbes, as a voluntary agent is considered as a centre of desires and aversions, and his felicity as "a continual progress of the desire from one object to another". For those who use reason and who think

³ W.M.Sibley, "Moral Relativism", Manitoba Arts Review (Winnipeg, Man., Senior Arts Council, University, Spring, 1949)p. 27.

⁴ The Leviathan, op. cit., p. 343.

⁵ Ibid., p. 351^a

in terms of the future, the desire for power becomes prominent, springing from the more fundamental desires for self-preservation and self-gratification. But the desire for power brings the individual into conflict with others, for his desires often oppose those of his fellows. The inevitable result of this development is a secondary desire to control the actions of others. We thus see that for society, the love of power is the chief regulating principle of ethical judgments.

So that in the first place I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to, or that he cannot be content with a moderate power; but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.⁶

The egoism upon which the striving after personal power is based is obvious in the above, and this essential selfishness of man's nature makes it impossible for him to have a disinterested regard for the good of others. This, coupled with Hobbes' doctrine that all men, in the struggle for power, are equal,⁷ leads him to picture the natural state of man as a "war against all". As long as men live "without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in a condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man."⁸ The "right of Nature", "the liberty each man hath to use

⁶ The Leviathan, p. 385

⁷ cf. Ibid., p. 402.

⁸ Ibid., p. 406.

his own power as he will himself for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life," where "liberty" is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, as "the absence of external impediments,"⁹ is given free reign.

The end of man's "natural condition" and the origin of society are explained for us by the theory of the social contract, and it is here that we come upon the second side of Hobbes' moral theory, that concerning the meaning of "these words of good, evil, and contemptible...to be taken ...in a commonwealth." The primitive state of man, we are told, must be improved upon through resort to certain laws of Nature, for the war against all and the free exercise of the "right of Nature", where the individual is the judge and determiner of good and evil, make for a situation which would be fatal to social cohesion.¹⁰ Now a law of Nature "is a precept or general rule found out by reason by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life or taketh away the means of preserving the same."¹¹ The first of these laws, agreement with which marks the formation of the social contract, is "to seek peace and follow it", and the second, "by all means we can, to defend ourselves". Hobbes then proceeds to set forth nineteen laws of Nature, all of which relate to men living peacefully together, at the conclusion of which he gives us the following brief summary of their content:

"Do not that to another which thou wouldst not have done to

⁹ The Leviathan, p. 407.

¹⁰ cf. W.M.Sibley, op. cit., p. 28.

¹¹ The Leviathan, loc. cit.

thyself."¹² Thus is man brought into a state of peace. The society created by the social contract, and its relationship to the sphere of human conduct has been summarized by Michael Oakeshott:

Civil society is a complex of authority and power in which each element creates its own appropriate obligation. There is the moral obligation to obey the authorized will of the Sovereign; there is the external physical obligation arising from force or power; and there is the internal rational obligation of self-interest arising from fear of punishment and desire of peace. Each of these obligations provides a separate motive for observing the order of the commonwealth, and each is necessary for the preservation of that order. A moral obligation alone (right without force) can provide no objective order; and it belongs to the character of all voluntary action to be moved by rational obligations.¹³

In society then, as conceived by Hobbes, individual desires and physical power are superseded by the dictates of the Sovereign in their capacity as the basis upon which moral standards depend. Mr. Oakeshott has carefully drawn our attention to this fact.¹⁴ The moral covenant, the residuum of individual "artificial" interests, does not create a moral obligation, he points out. There is a rational obligation to make the covenant, but it must await the command of the Sovereign authority if it is to be morally obligatory. Nor is moral obligation based upon self-interest; "self-interest could not be a moral obligation unless and until it was commanded by the Sovereign, and if it was commanded, it would be morally obligatory, not because it

¹² The Leviathan, p. 428.

¹³ Michael Oakeshott, Introduction to The Leviathan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. lxi.

¹⁴ cf. Ibid, pp. lx-lxi.

was self-interest, but because it was commanded. Self-interest is a rational, not a moral obligation."¹⁵ Similarly, moral obligation does not spring from the superior powers of the Sovereign. Right is never identical with power, and a Sovereign that had no Right (that is, no authorization) could bind only physically, not morally. To conclude, then,

moral obligation is being bound by the law (the will) of the authorized Sovereign; there is no other law independent of this law, and no other moral obligation independent of this obligation. Natural law is morally binding, but it consists of those theorems of reasoning that have been commanded by the Sovereign; until the Sovereign has willed them, they are not laws and therefore create no moral obligation. 'When a commonwealth is once settled, then are they (the laws of nature) actually laws, and not before; as being then the commands of the commonwealth'. And again, the commands of God are morally binding, but these also are not known as commands until the Sovereign authority has settled and interpreted scripture, and the laws springing from that interpretation are morally obligatory, not because they are God's, but because they are the Sovereign's.¹⁶

II. The Good = The Object of Public Taste or Approval

From a theory which identifies the basis of moral value with the egoistic desire of the individual or the will of a sovereign authority, we now turn to a consideration of the view that the good is that which calls forth an emotion of approval in the contemplator or the spectator of an action. This is the theory set forth by David Hume in the eighteenth century, and it is through his system that we shall examine it.

¹⁵ Michael Oakeshott, op. cit., p. xl.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. lxi.

Briefly, Hume's theory is as follows. The good can be defined, he maintains, as that which, if contemplated, will create an emotion of approval in all or most men. In this initial definition we notice a difference from the egoistic philosophy of Hobbes, for Hume declares that this distinguishing emotion is not, as Professor Joad points out, "in the agent or in the person judging, or even in the members of a particular society, but in all or most of the men who are now alive, or who have ever been alive."¹⁷ It has, therefore, a universal and impartial value. A second and defining characteristic of Hume's theory is his affirmation that those things which are good, that is, those things which call forth an emotion of approval in all or in most men, are those which are pleasurable. He thinks there are two classes of actions, qualities of things, and characters of human beings, those that are pleasant to the agent, to the possessor, and those which give pleasure to others, respectively, and also those actions, qualities, and characters which are useful. And useful he proceeds to define as meaning indirectly conducive to pleasure in the agent, in the possessor, or in other men.

Hume's doctrine, then, is that moral good and evil are determined for us by the sentiments of approval or disapproval which Nature has caused to arise in us upon the contemplation of this or that action or situation. In the appeal to sentiment or emotion we see the implication that reason is power-

¹⁷ C.E.M.Joad, Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940), p. 362.

less to influence directly our distinction between good and evil. This is, indeed, the approach Hume takes, and he sets forth the following arguments to substantiate the fundamental position of passion or desire in determining moral values.

First he claims that morality must, by its very nature, influence action. Reason, however, cannot move to action,¹⁸ and therefore cannot yield moral distinctions. Secondly, he states that "reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason."¹⁹ But he holds that moral discernments are due to the emotions, and in this connection finds that

'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.²⁰

A third argument concerns one of Hume's most fundamental assumptions, namely, that passion dictates ends, and that reason points out suitable and practicable means. From this it follows that reason is the "slave of the passions".

¹⁸ Hume, Treatise of Human Nature, Book II, Part III, Sec. III, pp. 413-18.

¹⁹ Ibid. cit.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 458.

If we fail to find suitable means, the act which follows is said to be unreasonable. But guilt is not thereby implied, Hume rushes to point out, for the mistake is one of fact only. If it were a mistake of duty, the presumption would be that there existed an objective right and wrong, and Hume is not ready to grant this. Rather, he proceeds to consider arguments for such an objectivity in order to refute them.

Discussion of the question of an objective right and wrong forms another and trenchant argument against reason. Hume attacks the problem by stating that reason or the understanding is possessed of only two operations: "the comparing of ideas and the inferring of matters of fact, nor is there any third operation of the understanding."²¹ It follows, then, that if virtue and vice are objective, they must be capable of being recognized through one of these two operations. Let us briefly consider each of these.

For Hume, all demonstration is analytic inference, and the intuition of moral relations, if possible at all, must follow one of the four which he allows to be involved in demonstrable inference.

If you assert that vice and virtue consist in relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration, you confine yourself to these four relations, which alone admit of that degree of evidence: these are 'Resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportion in quantity and number'.²²

²¹ Treatise, p. 463.

²² Ibid., pp. 463-4.

A brief consideration, however, reveals that these relations are applicable to both irrational and rational beings, as well as to inanimate objects, and thus we "run into absurdity". There is one other possibility, that moral relations may be discovered by some relation other than these four. But here Hume states simply that there can be none. If such were possible, it could only exist between internal and external objects, not between two actions or two objects, he reasons, for "moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind, and are derived from our situation with regard to external objects."²³ And even if these existed, it would be impossible to distinguish a relation between an internal action and an external object, and one between the actions themselves or the objects themselves. Here Hume introduces his comparison between parricide and the death of a parent tree by its sapling, in which he maintains that if guilt depends upon relation, there is no difference between the two cases. Again, he triumphantly implies, reason has been shown powerless to distinguish moral values.

In dealing with the second of the operations of the understanding, inductive inference, Hume draws attention to what is in his view the one all-essential difference between the operations of reason and those of feeling. Reason, in the study of triangles or circles, considers the known relations of the parts of the figures, and from them proceeds to infer

²³ Treatise, p. 464.

some unknown relation which is dependent on them. In moral deliberations, on the other hand, all the facts have first to be before us; until they have been assembled and their relations known, no sentiment of blame or approval should be made. "But as every circumstance, every relation, is then known, the moral approval or blame arises in the mind, not as an act of knowledge but as a feeling to which we are immediately determined."²⁴

The part played by reasoning in influencing moral conduct is thus limited. Demonstrative reason can have an indirect influence, claims Hume, but that is the only influence it can possibly have. It can never alone be a motive to any action of the will, and can never oppose passion in the direction of the will, for only one passion can oppose another. Reason can reach conclusions which may direct our will along a certain line of action, or possibly prevent some action, but the argument must rest on at least one empirical premise. The real entities are passions, volitions, and desires, and as original facts which only exist they cannot be true or false.

Let us suppose, for example, that a man desires to pay a debt.²⁵ If he owes £100 plus £50, his reason instructs him that he owes £150. A priori reasoning thus directs his desire to a desire to pay £150, but the empirical facts, £100 and £50, are present as premises. Reason, however, did not cause the original desire, and investigation will reveal the fact

²⁴ N.K. Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1941), p. 197.

²⁵ cf. Rachael M. Kydd, Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 103.

that desire is always independent and prior to reason.

Empirical judgment which influences action is of two kinds, that concerning means to ends and that concerning the nature and existence of objects. But in the first case, Hume contends, both desire for the end and awareness of the means must be conscious together if reason is to direct our original desire to a desire for the means; and in the second case, although Hume admits that desires cause acts and ideas cause desires, he holds that ideas can have effect only if the individual's natural temperament and instincts are such that he is affected, and these conditions are independent of our reason and judgment.

Reason or judgment can, according to Hume, only affect action by regulating the ideas that are before the mind: that is by determining what passions are operative in an agent at any given time by presenting to him the ideas which are capable of giving rise to them. It is not possible for reason to cause acts directly, for all acts are directly caused by desire. Nor is it possible for reason to cause desires directly, for desires are caused by ideas. Nor can it cause ideas which are fully before the mind to give rise to desires, for the power of an idea to cause desire is dependent solely upon our instincts, and our instincts are fully beyond our control. But reason and judgment can, up to a point, determine what ideas are before our minds. By reflection and judgment we can become aware both of the relation of certain acts to others which are already desired and of the possibility of doing acts which are of a certain kind. This doctrine is central to the whole of Hume's practical philosophy; so central that it merits being called by a special name. We might, I think, call it the doctrine of reason as the 'mediate' or 'oblique' cause of action.²⁶

Hume has thus shown, to his own satisfaction, that moral values cannot be established as objective through a dependence

²⁶ Kydd, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

on reason and logic. His relativism consists, as we have seen, in a falling back upon a moral sense^{26a} as the faculty which makes moral distinctions. And this is said to depend, as we have further seen, upon the feeling of "a satisfaction of a particular kind", or upon "approval". But the approval of an act, the decision that it gives pleasure and is therefore good, is not based upon self-interest, nor is it entirely a personal judgment. Approval differs from liking in that it is that peculiar kind of pleasure which makes up praise or condemn, and in that it arises from an impartial consideration of its object.

It is usual to interpret Hume as saying that 'x is good' means no more than 'I approve of x' or 'the majority approves of x' or 'everybody approves of x'. But plainly there is no need to attribute to him this very unpalatable view. On his premises, an object may be good even though nobody has even thought it good, and even though the majority, or even everybody, has always thought it bad. For its goodness is defined by him not in terms of the feelings of approval which it actually arouses, but in terms of the feelings which it would arouse in a perfectly disinterested spectator who formed a perfect idea of it.²⁷

Hume maintains, however, that there is a universal or reciprocal connection between good and pleasure, and therefore the approval of the "disinterested spectator" would be an approval based upon the fact that the object approved of (that is, the good) turns out to be pleasant or conducive to pleasure. His theory can thus be classed as a type of utilitarianism, in that a good action is one which has

²⁷ Kydd, op. cit., p. 175.

^{26a} By "moral sense" is here meant a human faculty which enables the individual to recognize the quality of goodness whenever it is presented in experience.

consequences of which one approves, and as a "rather peculiar kind"²⁸ of hedonism, due to the relationship it assumes between good and pleasure.

Furthermore, his theory is subjective, but, as we have already observed, it avoids the egoism which marks the view of Hobbes. Men are so constituted that they feel an emotion of approval for happiness and for whatever conduces to happiness, but this emotion is not confined to the happiness, or what conduces to the happiness, of themselves. On the contrary, they feel it in contemplating happiness wherever it may be, and so are concerned for the welfare of others as well. This fact Hume calls the "principle of benevolence", and because of its existence, benevolence, and those aspects of actions or characters which tend to promote the public good, are known as virtues.

Hume thus holds that anything which tends to produce happiness for anyone is to be considered a good, and we are "safe in saying that at least part of the ground of our moral approval of a virtue such as benevolence is its tendency to promote the interests of our species."²⁹ This leads us to the further question, exactly why is social or public utility morally approved? The answer to this, an inquiry which penetrates to the core of Hume's moral doctrine, has already been given above, negatively in his attack upon reason as being capable of moral discernment, and by implication in his theory of

²⁸ cf. Joad, op. cit., p. 362.

²⁹ Smith, op. cit., p. 194.

benevolence. It may now be stated positively.

In our consideration of reason we discovered that the mind, in its rational capacity, is concerned only with truth or with fact, that it is incapable of determining right. Feeling, therefore, is the only possible arbiter in matters of morals, as of aesthetics. This explains why Euclid, in describing the properties of the circle, said nothing about its beauty; for beauty is not a quality of the circle, but an effect which arises in the mind:

Till such a spectator appear, there is nothing but a figure of such particular dimensions and proportions: from his sentiments alone arises its elegance and beauty.³⁰

Similarly, our attitude toward a social situation is explained. The activities of reason are required in order to bring the situation before us, in order to present its character and its consequences, and the justice or injustice involved. But reason cannot yield the verdict as to why we feel an emotion of approval or disapproval, an effect which arises in us. This "verdict is owing to the peculiar fabric and constitution of our species; and in particular to the operation of sympathy, whereby we enter into the sufferings of others as into suffering of our own."³¹

'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own

³⁰ Hume, Enquiry into the Principles of Morals, p. 292.

³¹ Smith, op. cit., p. 197.

acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter.³²

In terms of human conduct then, while reason discloses the useful, that is, what is efficient towards an end, it is feeling that gives it influence in our action. And, as N.K. Smith has pointed out, though it is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger, it is less humane to do so, that is, less in keeping with the sentiments which, as members of the human species, we naturally entertain.³³

Finally, we come to the consideration of moral obligation. Is there in moral matters an obligation to act in ways which can receive the approval of the moral sense? In stating Hume's reply to this we must differentiate between the natural and the artificial virtues. In the case of the latter, which arise with society and include such virtues as justice, fidelity, and veracity (which, incidentally, are the only ones Hobbes would admit the existence of), external sanctions are available owing to the control exercised over the individual by the species through public opinion and instruments of government. And such virtues are to be held supreme, Hume maintains, for society is good, and can only be upheld if there are no exceptions to the rules which promote general welfare. Thus we must sometimes do what may be unpleasant for ourselves, what may certainly be unpleasant for others,

³² Hume, Treatise, Book II, Part III, Sec. III, p. 416.

³³ cf. Smith, op. cit., p. 198.

and what seems to be detrimental to the general happiness, in the course of obeying rules. But, and this is a form of Kant's test of universalization,³⁴ there is no contradiction in having rules which everybody keeps; contradiction arises in making an exception whenever the rules bear hardly, for if the exceptions become sufficiently numerous -- and there is nothing to prevent them from doing so, once they are admitted -- the rules will no longer command respect, and will cease to be rules. In the case of the artificial virtues therefore, there exists what we may describe as an artificial obligation.

But it is with regard to the natural virtues that the issue of moral obligation becomes of central importance. And here Hume's final answer is that there can be none. To begin with, his doctrine of the ego is empiricistic and similar to that of Hobbes, proclaiming that it is a "bundle of impressions". This doctrine holds that there are no a priori ideas in the mind, that all knowledge is the result of impressions imposed on the ego from empirical sources, and that if no "impression" can be found for a certain idea, then that idea has no valid existence. By this process of argument, Hume rejected the idea of causation, and by a similar method he rejects the fact of moral obligation. No "impression" can be found for it. In dealing with individuals therefore, Hume could not point to what we "ought"

³⁴ cf. Joad, op. cit., p. 366.

to do, but only to our fundamental nature:

If a man have a lively sense of honour and virtue, with moderate passions, his conduct will always be conformable to the rules of morality; or if he depart from them, his return will be easy and expeditious. On the other hand, where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause; such a one must be allowed entirely incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophyFor my part, I know not how I should address myself to such a one, or by what arguments I should endeavour to reform him.³⁵

"In other words, there is, on Hume's theory of morals, no such thing as moral obligation, in the strict sense of the term. There is, that is to say, no intrinsically self-justifying good that with authority can claim approval".³⁶

For Hume then, the ultimate basis upon which moral evaluation is made rests with the de facto constitution of the individual. There is no objective right and wrong, as such, which man has knowledge of and to which we may appeal. Reason cannot determine our moral judgments, for empirical knowledge and rational operations prove insufficient, and there exist no a priori truths. And furthermore, we have seen that value is an effect which arises in the spectator, not a quality of the external object, and that it depends upon the emotion aroused in the individual. Hume's doctrine of benevolence, and his ascription of universality and impartiality to the emotion of individual approval make for agreement, to a certain extent, among mankind as to what is good; but all

³⁵ Hume, from Essays, quoted in N.K.Smith, op. cit., p. 201.

³⁶ N.K.Smith, op. cit., p. 201.

individuals have in ~~some~~ degree their own special preferences, and these (so long as they continue unchanged) are as final for the individual as the more widely prevailing preferences are for the species qua species. The distinction between virtue and vice is determined for us on sheerly de facto grounds peculiar to our human nature.

III. The Good = The Object of Moral Approval

The work of Edward Westermarck provides us with an interesting theory of "ethical relativity". He conceives of ethics as having an anthropological basis, and in the presentation of his thesis proceeds to reject all other views, including those classed as relativistic in our study. He finds inadequacies in naturalistic theories as well as in intuitionism, in utilitarianism as well as rationalism, and classifies them all as involving varying degrees of objectivity.³⁷

Moral concepts, claims Westermarck, are ultimately based on the emotions, and "no objectivity can come from an emotion".³⁸ It is not the object of a science of ethics to lay down rules for moral conduct, for there are no moral truths. It remains then, that if the word "ethics" is to be used as the name for a science, "the object of that science can only be to study the moral consciousness as a fact."

We find that, for Westermarck, the moral concepts "right" and "wrong", "good" and "evil", developed from custom in

³⁷ cf. Ethical Relativity (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), Chapters I, II.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

primitive society. In the beginning, an individual felt an emotion of approval toward a certain act.^{38a} If this emotion were felt by all members of the tribe (or at least by a majority) the emotion became a public feeling of approval, and the act was accepted into the moral code of the community. Similarly, certain other acts were censured, and gradually custom built up a body of rules of conduct. In this fashion morality originated, and with the passage of time the moral code was enlarged or modified as men grew in experience and intelligence.

In his analysis of the emotions Westermarck points out that they are essentially attitudes towards a living being. Resentment, for instance, even among primitive savages, is always directed towards the malefactor if he can be found, and only as a last resort against his kin. In modern practice, criminal punishment is meted out in an attempt to reform the nature of the offending person; determent is to prevent crime. Reformation emphasizes "the most humane element in resentment, the demand that the offender's will shall cease to be offensive." Similarly, revenge finds delight not so much in inflicting hurt as in making the party repent. Both theories thus spring from the same emotion. Moral resentment raises a protest against wrong, and its immediate aim has been always to give expression to the righteous indignation of the society which inflicts it.

^{38a} The reader will note the similarity between Westermarck's view and that of Hume. Westermarck's theory of approval, however, originates from a "majority approval", while Hume's relates directly to the feeling experienced by a disinterested spectator (i.e., to a moral sense). It should also be pointed out, though, that Hume's theory is not totally objective, for there always

It is said, writes Westermarck, that we should hate not the sinner but the sin; this proves to be impossible, however, for our resentment is directed against a sensitive agent.

But resentment is an illustration from only one side of man's emotional nature. On the opposite side we have kindly retributive emotion. The one who receives a kindness feels that he is a debtor and must return the deed; a feeling of humiliation is often present. Retributive kindly emotion has a tendency to retain a cause of pleasure, just as resentment has a tendency to remove a cause of pain; the one is useful to the species in securing benefits, the other in averting evils.

Westermarck's theory is thus based upon the two fundamental types of emotion, which he proceeds to call moral approval and moral disapproval. The question arises, however, how do these emotions differ from kindred non-moral emotions? What characterizes them specifically as moral emotions?

At this point we find Westermarck adopting a doctrine similar in some respects to that of Hume. He maintains that a ~~moral~~ judgment does not come first, but is always preceded by an emotion. A moral judgment always has the character of disinterestedness, and therefore, a moral emotion is one that is, or is assumed to be, impartial. This impartiality originates from a natural sympathy in human nature which causes an individual to feel for the exists among mankind the one "born of so perverse a frame of mind" that he remains "incurable".

welfare of others.

We have now discovered the origin of disinterested retributive emotions. But why are the qualities of impartiality and disinterestedness characteristics of the moral emotions? We note that the birth-place of the moral consciousness is society, and that the first moral judgments expressed emotions felt by the society at large, that tribal custom was the earliest rule of duty. Customs, says Westermarck, are not merely public habits; they are rules of conduct. Now if custom is a moral rule, any deviation from it will cause public disapproval, and this may be called a moral emotion. Custom is fixed for the whole society, and this leads to disinterestedness on the part of an individual and implies impartiality. Custom is a moral rule only on account of the disapproval called forth by its transgression. In its ethical aspect it is nothing but a generalization of emotional tendencies, applied to certain modes of conduct and transmitted from generation to generation. Similarly, public approval is the prototype of moral approval. Sometimes individuals have arisen who held different views, and, provided their views were disinterested and impartial, they have aided in raising the general level of public custom, and in spreading custom to a larger populace. But moral emotions, because they were originally public emotions, are essentially marked by an impartiality foreign to the

individual conscience.

Westermarck points out, in anticipation of a possible objection, that a moral judgment does not necessarily affirm the existence of a moral emotion in the mind of the person who utters it. Emotional judgments have often been transferred to objects in cases where the judgment met with social approval; particular modes of conduct have their traditional labels, and without any emotion being necessarily felt, an action is called right and wrong. Originally, however, the act did bring forth an emotion.

Our next consideration in tracing the development of Westermarck's theory is the relation of the moral concepts to the emotions. It is assumed that all people have moral emotions, and that these emotions lead to generalizations contained in the moral concepts. At first these were not clearly distinguished from other generalizations but the growth of language gradually made for clarification. There are two moral concepts, states Westermarck, ought or duty, and goodness, the first springing from moral disapproval and the second from the emotion of moral approval. The idea of duty, being derived from custom, is prior to that of moral goodness,³⁹ and is the central point of ethics.

Let us examine the concept of duty more closely. One can easily draw up a list of duties, but an explanation demands a deeper analysis. First of all, the concept expresses a

³⁹ It is to be noted that this view is directly opposed to that held by such thinkers as Green, Moore, and Kant, who hold that moral goodness exists in its own right, and that the idea of duty arises as a consequence of one's recognition of the quality of moral goodness.

conation, in that we experience an impulse to do the things we feel we ought to do. Also, it assumes an imperative character. Every "ought" judgment contains implicitly a prohibition of that which ought not to be done. This connection between ought and wrong has given to duty the most eminent place in ethical speculation when moral pessimism has been predominant. They have arisen, therefore, from the emotion of moral disapproval. Duty threatens with punishment, but promises no reward; right is merely conformity to duty. In the case of a right action, although an emotion of approval is present, the implication is that the opposite would have been wrong and from this we see that the concept of right ultimately derives its significance from moral disapproval.

The concept of justice is also found to be based upon moral disapproval. That which is strictly just is always the discharge of a duty corresponding to a right which would have been in a partial manner disregarded by a transgression of the duty. Justice and injustice thus involve a kind of rightness and wrongness, and derive from the same emotion.

From the opposite side of the emotional background of normative theory, from the emotion of moral approval, we find another series of concepts. Just as moral disapproval gave rise to duty and its affiliated concepts, we find that

moral approval gives rise to the concept of the good. The good implies a kindly feeling towards another individual as a cause of pleasure; it expresses moral praise, and in this positive aspect is distinguished from the right or the just.

Associated with the good are those qualities which we class as virtues. Westermarck draws our attention to the fact that virtues in themselves are no gauge as to a man's moral worth, for this depends upon the intensity of the struggle he has experienced in attaining them. The virtues are, however, to be associated with goodness rather than duty. That something is a duty implies that the opposite mode of conduct tends to evoke moral disapproval; that it is a virtue implies that the disposition to practice it tends to evoke moral approval.

From the moral concepts Westermarck turns to the subjects of moral judgments, and finds that they comprise conduct and character. "They are not really passed on intentions or deliberate wishes in the abstract, but on the persons who have them; they are held blameable or worthy of praise."⁴⁰ Again we see Westermarck's insistence upon the fact that moral emotions are responsive attitudes towards living beings. If an act is right, we usually do not inquire into the motive; if it is wrong, however, we do, with the result that the act is vindicated or the condemnation confirmed.

⁴⁰ Ethical Relativity, p. 152.

Moral blame is concerned with a defect of the will, and not the intellectual or other circumstances for which no man can be held responsible. The subject of a moral judgment is thus, strictly speaking, a person's will conceived as the cause of his conduct, and his will as a whole, his character, should be taken into account.

That moral indignation and moral approval are from the very beginning felt, not with reference to certain modes of conduct in the abstract, but with reference to persons on account of their conduct, is obvious from the intrinsic nature of those emotions.⁴¹

Finally, Westermarck finds that moral judgments are subject to variation. Their variability largely originates in different measures of knowledge, based on experience of the consequences of conduct, and in different beliefs. Also, the altruistic sentiment varies, and this gives rise to a corresponding variation in moral values.

III. The Good = The Creation of Human Will

A theory of moral evaluation which in recent times has played a prominent role in the political sphere and the conception of the state is one which makes good and evil relative to types of men and their creative will. It is a view which dates from the earliest times, first appearing in the form given to it by Callicles in his declaration that "justice is the interest of the stronger", being restated

⁴¹ Ethical Relativity, pp. 171-2.

in the fifteenth century by Machiavelli, and revived again in the eighteenth by Mandeville. Its most influential proponent in modern times has been Friedrich Nietzsche, and he has given full expression to its ethical doctrine.

There are two types of men, Nietzsche begins, masters and slaves, and from these stem two ethical codes, master-morality and slave-morality.

The distinctions of moral values have either originated in a ruling caste, pleasantly conscious of being different from the ruled -- or among the ruled class, the slaves and dependents of all sorts.⁴²

In the first case we find that "good" and "bad" mean "practically the same as 'noble' and 'despicable'"; in the second, that "good" and "evil" appertain to those qualities which are most useful as "a means of supporting the burden of existence" and to those which appear as powerful and dangerous, respectively.⁴³ From these two types of men, and their corresponding conceptions of morality, derive two sides to Nietzsche's teaching, a positive and a negative side. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The negative aspect of Nietzsche's doctrine, which lays the basis for the further development of his doctrine of morals, is characterized by an attack upon utilitarian morals. Utilitarian morality stems from the herd instinct in the individual, he maintains, and is the conception of the slaves. They bestow moral approval upon what is useful

⁴² Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 260, p. 227.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 231.

to them personally, or to the herd to which they belong, and refrain from actions of which the herd disapproves through fear of incurring its wrath and censure.

Everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbor, is henceforth called evil; the tolerant, unassuming, self-adapting, self-equalizing disposition, the mediocrity of desires, attains the moral distinction and honour.⁴⁴

In a similar fashion we find Nietzsche discarding the morality of motive. For him it is

false to suppose that the origin of actions is the freewill of the agent; for freewill is a delusion, and the conscious motive which apparently leads to the performance of an action is only a by-product of forces over which the agent has no control.⁴⁵

He thus rejects "intention-morality" and declares that it is "something which must be surmounted".

Our brief consideration of slave-morality has revealed Nietzsche's view that values are simply creations of the will; "good" to the slave was thus that which benefited him and the herd. We are to find this same basic thread running through his positive teachings, as we turn to an examination of master-morality.

"All the philosophers", Nietzsche writes, "...have wanted to give a basis to morality; ...morality itself, however, has been regarded as something 'given'".⁴⁶ And in this misconception has lain their mistake, for a system of morals

⁴⁴ Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 201, pp. 124-125.

⁴⁵ C.E.M. Joad, op. cit., p. 630. J.M. Kennedy writes of Nietzsche's doctrine: "In reality there is no soul separate from the body; nor is there such a thing as free-will, nor yet is there non-free-will. There are only strong wills which show themselves by their great deeds, and weak wills whose actions are considerably less." (Nietzsche: The Gospel of Superman, p. 126)

⁴⁶ Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 186, pp. 103-4.

is "only a sign-language of the emotions".⁴⁷ This explains the fact that morality is relative to types of men, for its dictates are only a reflection of their emotions. Thus, for the masters, in whom the will to power, present in all living things, is dominant, master-morality reflects power and strength. Further, Nietzsche maintained that the fittest do not only survive (as Darwin had announced) but ought to survive, for the goal of evolution was the development of a higher type of the human species, a Superman. Now the higher man is marked by higher qualities in all three of the spiritual, moral, and physical spheres, and these, in turn, are recognized by the will of the higher man to exercise power over his fellows. The master-morality, then, the system of values held by the honorable and noble, is characterized by the presence of the will to power.

It thus becomes the duty of the masters, for evolutionary purposes, to dominate the herd. Might is right, and all ethical principles derive from this. Pain means that some obstacle to power is being encountered; pleasure that it has been overcome. Man therefore seeks pain, for only through pain can pleasure arise and advance be made towards the goal of the Superman.

We thus have two moralities, but, standing behind them, is the doctrine that they derive from types of men. Nietzsche points out the "obvious" fact that designations of moral value

⁴⁷ Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 187, p. 106.

were first applied to men and only derivatively and at a later period to actions.

The noble type of man regards himself as a determiner of values; he does not require to be approved of; he passes the judgment: 'What is injurious to me is injurious in itself'; he knows that it is he himself only who confers honour on things; he is a creator of values.⁴⁸

Ideals are thus "manufactured" in this world,⁴⁹ and "it is the peculiar right of the masters"⁵⁰ to create them.

Further, Nietzsche seems to hold that the individual has within himself the power either to rise to the position of a master or sink to the level of a slave.

Either man, in virtue of his 'growing morality', which suppresses his instincts, will develop in himself 'merely the herd animal' and thus 'establish' the animal Man as the species in which the ~~animal~~ world goes into decline, as the decadent animal. Or man will overcome what is 'fundamentally amiss' with him, give new life to his instincts, bring to light his unexhausted possibilities, build up his life on the affirmation of the will to power, and breed the superman who will be the real man, the successful new being.⁵¹

To sum up, Nietzsche maintains that good and evil are values created by the will of men, and that, as mankind can be divided into two classes, masters and slaves, so there exist two scales of moral values. Men are not equal, he holds, and a higher culture, which it is the purpose of evolution to develop, "can only originate where there are two distinct castes of society". And it is the masters, placed nearer the higher culture through the dominance

⁴⁸ Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 260, p. 228.

⁴⁹ Genealogy of Morals, Aphorism 14, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 261, p. 233.

⁵¹ Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trs. R.G. Smith (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd, 1936), p. 154.

in them of the will to power, who determine the values which for Nietzsche are the more desirable. The two scales of moral values, themselves, can be seen in the meanings ascribed in each to the terms good and evil. "For the masters the antithesis between good and bad means practically the same as the antithesis between 'noble' and 'despicable'; for the slaves it is the same as the antithesis between 'useful' and 'dangerous'".⁵²

V. The Good = The Predicate of a Meaningless Statement.

From a relativism which seeks to find the source of moral value in human emotions and desires, we now turn to a theory which claims to remove the possibility of verification entirely from the sphere of value judgments. Such is the viewpoint of the logical positivist, the representative of a position which stands, in a sense, as the ultimate limits to which the tendency to rationalism and materialism has led. The result represents even more than ethical relativism; it is a type of ethical scepticism, for, if it is true, no alternative remains but to abandon study of the general basis of moral values.

Let us begin our discussion of positivism by drawing a distinction between an expression and an assertion or statement. An expression we may describe as any sign, verbal or otherwise, which expresses some emotion or experience, but which does not assert that the person involved has that

⁵² C.E.M. Joad, op. cit., p. 635.

emotion or experience. An assertion or statement, on the other hand, is an attempt by the person concerned to assert that he actually is undergoing some experience, and to communicate to others the nature of the experience he is undergoing. Now the positivist view admits that ethical expressions have a meaning, agrees, too, that it is not impossible for us to know what that meaning is, but claims that we can make no assertion or statement about the latter. No communication between individuals is possible concerning their moral experience. Briefly, the argument runs as follows. Ethical statements cannot be verified in any sort of sense-experience. Therefore they are meaningless. The fundamental ethical concepts are not really concepts at all, but are pseudo-concepts; they say nothing, and merely evince approval or disapproval. These, in turn, are simply feelings, facts in the speaker's mind, unrelated to any objective ethical facts or principles. An ethical statement does not even say anything about one's own feelings, since it expresses no real proposition. It is merely an emotional response, like a cry of delight.

For the logical positivist, the realm of experience, the a posteriori, has become, where synthetic judgments are concerned, the only valid world. All synthetic statements, therefore, to be capable of being true or false, must be capable of empirical verification.

One of the foremost representatives of the positivist school is A.J. Ayer. Ayer's general philosophical position stands as a rejection of metaphysics, and, in the sphere of rationality, a complete concern with the empirical realm. Through the nature of language he finds a basic affiliation between ethics and metaphysics, and in order to fully understand his rejection of ethical assertions as having meaning, we must first consider his view of metaphysical statements.

Metaphysics, claims Ayer, cannot yield knowledge of a transcendent reality; in arriving at such knowledge metaphysicians have been disobeying the rules which govern the significant use of language. In order to show this, Ayer insists that "we need only formulate the criterion which enables us to test whether a sentence expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact, and then point out that the sentences under consideration fail to satisfy it."⁵³ This criterion is the ~~verifiability~~ "criterion of verifiability".

We say that a sentence is ~~factually~~ significant to any given person if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express -- that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. If, on the other hand, the putative proposition is of such a character that the assumption of its truth, or falsehood, is consistent with any assumption whatsoever concerning the nature of his future experience, then, as far as he is concerned, it is, if not a tautology, a mere pseudo-proposition. The sentence expressing it may be emotionally significant to him; but it is not literally significant.⁵⁴

⁵³ Language, Truth and Logic (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1948), p. 35.

⁵⁴ Loc. cit.

To be capable of truth or falsehood, then, a statement must have factual content, and Ayer demonstrates that "all propositions which have factual content are empirical hypotheses".⁵⁵ Now the utterances of the metaphysician are nonsensical on two counts: they are devoid of factual content, and they are not a priori propositions.^{55a}

...a priori propositions, which have always been attractive to philosophers on account of their certainty, owe this certainty to the fact that they are tautologies. We may accordingly define a metaphysical sentence as a sentence which purports to express a genuine proposition, but does, in fact, express neither a tautology nor an empirical hypothesis. And as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical.⁵⁶

The metaphysician does not intend to write nonsense but does so because he is deceived by grammar, or because he commits errors of reasoning, "such as that which leads to the view that the sensible world is unreal".⁵⁷ Poets are often guilty of this mistake, too, but in their case it is justifiable for their statements often possess an aesthetic value. As far as philosophy is concerned, however, the difference is of no importance, for both types of expression hold no significance; "so that henceforth we may pursue our philosophical researches with as little regard for them as for the more inglorious kind of metaphysics which comes from a failure to understand the workings of our language."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Language, Truth and Logic, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Loc. cit.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁸ Loc. cit.

^{55a} For Ayer, a meaningful statement must be either an empirical hypothesis or an a priori proposition.

Ayer thus claims to establish that all synthetic propositions are empirical hypotheses. In considering ethical judgments he recognizes the objection that knowledge can relate to questions of value as well as to questions of empirical fact, and that the former are said to be genuine synthetic propositions and at the same time not hypotheses used to predict the course of physical sensations. But the objection can be met, he claims, by showing that "insofar as statements of value are significant, they are ordinary 'scientific statements'; and that insofar as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotions which can be neither true nor false."⁵⁹

Ayer proceeds to analyze the contents of "an ordinary system of ethics". He divides them into four classes: propositions which express definitions of ethical terms (these can be said to constitute ethical philosophy), propositions which describe the phenomena of moral experience (these belong to psychology or sociology); exhortations to moral virtue (these are just ejaculations or commands); and actual ethical judgments (these he does not know which sphere to assign to, but does not admit into ethical philosophy).

It is with the definition of ethical terms then, that the positivist is concerned. He is not concerned with the

⁵⁹ Language, Truth and Logic, pp. 102-103.

attempt to find a definition which would reduce all ethical terms to a fundamental term; whether, for example, "good" may be defined in terms in terms of "right", or "right" in terms of "good", or both in terms of "value". He is, rather, interested in "the possibility of reducing the whole sphere of ethical terms to non-ethical terms", of translating "statements of ethical fact into statements of empirical fact".

At this point we recognize, with Ayer, that there are two types of philosophers who hold that this can be done: the subjectivists and the utilitarians.

For the utilitarian defines the rightness of actions, and the goodness of ends, in terms of the pleasure, or happiness, or satisfaction, to which they give rise; the subjectivist, in terms of the feelings of approval which a certain person, or group of people, has towards them.⁶⁰

But in the process, Ayer adds, moral judgments have been transformed into a sub-class of psychological or sociological judgments. To make statements about ethical values is thus to move from the realm of ethics into that of psychology or sociology.

But apart from the fact that ethics as a branch of knowledge is left behind, Ayer cannot accept the basic positions of the reductionists. He disagrees with the subjectivist, for he finds that some things which are generally approved of can be asserted to be not right.

⁶⁰ Language, Truth and Logic, p. 104.

Similarly, with utilitarianism, he finds that it is not self-contradictory to say that it is sometimes wrong to perform the action which would actually or probably cause the greatest happiness, or the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or of satisfied over unsatisfied desire. We must emphasize that in this rejection Ayer's stress is upon the linguistic problem involved. He does not deny that it is possible or even that it is desirable to invent a language in which all ethical symbols are definable in non-ethical terms; he only denies that the suggested rejection is consistent with the conventions of our actual language.

That is, we reject utilitarianism and subjectivism, not as proposals to replace our existing ethical notions by new ones, but as analyses of our existing ethical notions. Our contention is simply that, in our language, sentences which contain normative ethical symbols are not equivalent to sentences which express psychological propositions, or indeed empirical propositions of any kind.⁶¹

Thus only normative ethical symbols, and not descriptive ethical symbols are held to be indefinable in factual terms. In holding that normative ethical concepts are irreducible to empirical concepts, however, Ayer seems to be paving the way for an objectivist view of moral values. But this he cannot accept, and, as he has already rejected the relativistic theories, he must meet the difficulty by originating a third theory.

⁶¹ Language, Truth and Logic, p. 105.

This third theory is the positivist view of ethical concepts, which proclaims that they are unanalyzable and are mere pseudo-concepts. They are unanalyzable inasmuch as there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the judgments in which they occur, and with no such criterion, the concepts have no meaning. "The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content".⁶² A sentence expressing a moral judgment can, therefore, be neither true nor false, for it merely evinces approval or disapproval.

In every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgment, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely 'emotive'. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them.⁶³

These "emotive" statements bear a relationship to feeling, and this point is considered by Ayer. It is true, he admits, that they express feelings; but this is not to say that they necessarily assert feelings. The assertion of a feeling always involves the expression of that feeling, but the expression of a feeling does not always involve the assertion that one has it.

And this is the important point to grasp in considering the distinction between our theory and the ordinary subjectivist theory. For whereas the subjectivist holds that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings, we hold that ethical statements are expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions.⁶⁴

⁶² Language, Truth and Logic, p. 107.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Even feelings are thus ruled out as possible references for determining the truth or falsehood of moral judgments.

We can now see why it is impossible to find a criterion for determining the validity of ethical judgments. It is not because they have an 'absolute' validity which is mysteriously independent of ordinary sense-experience, but because they have no objective validity whatever. If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. And we have seen that sentences which simply express moral judgments do not say anything.⁶⁵

It may be objected, at this point, that if ethical statements were really meaningless, we should not be able to dispute about questions of value. But it cannot be denied that we do dispute a great deal about such matters, and, with this admission, does not the positivist position become, at least partially, untenable?

Ayer meets this criticism by saying that we never really do dispute about questions of value. "In all such cases, we find, if we consider the matter closely, that the dispute is not really about a question of value, but about a question of fact."⁶⁶ We think that our opponent must be misinterpreting the facts of the case, or is not acquainted with all the circumstances involved. And, if after all facts have been presented, we cannot convince him that he is wrong, we abandon the attempt to do so by argument, assuming that he has a distorted moral sense.

Argument is thus possible only if a system of values is

⁶⁵ Language, Truth and Logic, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

presupposed, and this system depends solely upon our own feelings. Finally, the nature of the different feelings that ethical terms are used to express, and the different reactions they customarily provoke, are matters for the concern of the psychologist and not the philosopher. Where questions of fact are concerned, we have left philosophy and entered the regions of psychology and sociology.

The positivist position, then, is one which holds that no meaningful discussion of moral values can take place. The positivist might admit that ethical expressions have a meaning, if we insisted that something is felt by human beings in the moral realm; but he would hastily add that the nature of such experience cannot be communicated to others. This means that a person must undergo moral experience or forever remain unaware of the existence and nature of moral value. It means, too, that it is impossible for ethical philosophers to discover the origin, the justification, or the standards of reference of moral judgments. "The conclusion is that although morality really is morality, and although we know what it is, a science or philosophy of morality is something which should not be sought, for the reason that it can never be found."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ C.E.M. Joad, Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940), p. 171.



CHAPTER II

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVISTIC POSITIONS

Introduction. We now pass to an examination of views which claim that moral values are objective and valid for all men. Such views stand opposed to the relativistic theories we have been considering on several grounds. First, it is implied in the objectivist standpoint that values exist in a realm which does not depend upon the knowing mind, are not arbitrary, and are discovered by man; relativism, on the other hand, holds that values exist in the reacting subject, are relative to the individual, the social class, or to society, and are created by man. Objectivism is, for the most part, a priori; relativism, a posteriori. The former holds that man's moral code has always been, the latter that it is a process of growth, being based upon experience of those things which have proved to be "for the best" in terms of pleasure, self-preservation, general happiness, and so forth. Objectivism, finally, places man under a higher and greater authority through his recognition of the good; relativism, marked by a logical and scientific humanism, places man in a position from whence he can, seemingly, be himself the determiner of moral values.

It is through an inquiry into the nature of this higher authority, which by its very existence demands obedience, that we may define and distinguish between the various objectivistic positions. For some thinkers this authority is the result of the needs of an objective situation, in conformance with society without and the individual within; for others it derives from the very nature of the human being as a universal quality of the species; for still others it is an intuition of the good or the right, the impersonal call of an absolute ought (similar to Kant's categorical imperative). For all, however, the ground of duty, the reason for the good, does not originate from some arbitrary condition; there is no basis beyond the recognition of the principle itself; it is given to man as an objective necessity, and he responds in proportion as he is fully human.

I. The Good = The Affirmation of Human Life.

The traditional objectivistic view of value is one which is generally associated with the intuitionist theory. Now the latter, as we shall see, holds values to be eternal, immutable properties of objects and actions, which, basically, maintains value to inhere in the object and to be capable of human recognition as something apart from man. But the question arises, must values, and, more especially, moral

values, necessarily be conceived of as having existence apart from man in order to be objective? May it not be that they can be relative to man, to his needs and desires, to his environment and society, and yet remain objective, remain binding upon all, above arbitrary, individual determination? That they can so remain is the standpoint maintained in the tradition of humanistic ethics, to which we shall first turn our attention

A. John Dewey.

One of the foremost upholders of the humanist view in recent times is the American philosopher, John Dewey. Dewey's chief ground of contention with other ethical theorists concerns the nature of the ends, or goals, of moral action. Thinkers heretofore, claims Dewey, have thought of the "good" as something to be striven for as an end-in-itself, whether that something was simple and indefinable, or identified with some natural or metaphysical object or emotion. This was a misconception, he continues. "Many opposed theories agree in placing ends beyond action", and "the entire popular notion of 'ideals' is infected with this conception of some fixed end beyond activity at which we should aim."¹ "The acceptance of fixed ends in themselves" is only "an aspect of man's devotion to an ideal of certainty",² "a refuge of the timid and the

¹ Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Modern Library, 1930) p. 223.

² Ibid., p. 236.

means by which the bold prey upon the timid."³ We must therefore revolutionize our thinking, and realize that ends arise and function within action.

They are not, as current theories too often imply, things lying beyond activity at which the latter is directed. They are not strictly speaking ends or termini of action at all. They are terminals of deliberation, and so turning points in activity.... They are in no sense ends of action. In being ends of deliberation they are redirecting pivots in action.⁴

We thus see that Dewey's view represents a revolution in ethical theory. Rather than performing that action which would result in the greatest good (no matter how we conceive of good) or that action which our intuition informs us is "right", man, claims Dewey, is so constituted that he naturally engages in activity, and in the process goals are set up in order to give direction to that activity. These ends are to be chosen in accordance with our current biological and social needs and desires, and thus become more practical than the cold, abstract, and isolated ends of those theorists who maintain that something known as the "good" is to be pursued or promoted. "Men do not shoot because targets exist, but they set up targets in order that throwing and shooting may be more effective and significant."⁵

The effect of such a revolution, Dewey maintains, is to remove the block from human thinking which stiffens activity and directs it into rigid, formal paths. If an end is set up

³ Human Nature and Conduct, p. 237.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 223-225.

⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

as a goal of action, as "complete and exclusive, as demanding and justifying action as a means to itself, it leads to narrowness; in extreme cases fanaticism, inconsiderateness, arrogance, and hypocrisy."⁶ In becoming attached to "fixed, eternal ends", and not recognizing that "an end is a device of intelligence in guiding action"⁷, man's attention was diverted from "examination of consequences and the intelligent creation of purpose", and, since means and ends are two ways of regarding the same actuality, he was rendered careless in his inspection of existing conditions.⁸ This, claimed Dewey, resulted in failure, for an aim not based on present conditions forces one back upon past habits, forces one back on "the consoling thought that our moral ideals are too good for this world and that we must accustom ourselves to a gap between aim and execution."

The proper conception of ends, or aims, continues Dewey, is that they develop as a necessary condition of the application of reflection in conduct. With the block of fixed ends removed, man is free to live in accordance with the dictates of his being and environment. An aim begins with a wish, an "emotional reaction against the present state of things and a hope for something different."⁹ Action then falls back into imagination and summons up an ideal situation in which the wish is fulfilled. Present conditions are studied in conjunction with this, and then conduct proceeds to transform

⁶ Human Nature and Conduct, pp. 227-228.

⁷ Italics mine.

⁸ Cf. Human Nature and Conduct, p. 233.

⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

the situation so as to realize the aim. Once attained, the aim becomes a turning point, for its achievement makes possible the conception of new aims and, in turn, new discoveries. It is important for us to note that Dewey emphasizes desire and thought, that is, the dependence upon human control, in the nature of ends.

In one case, original impulse dictates the thought of the object; in the other case, this original impulse is transformed into a different desire because of objects which thought holds up to view. But no matter how elaborate and how rational is the object of thought, it is unimportant unless it arouses desire.¹⁰

Morality is thus not connected with supernatural commands, rewards, and punishments, but grows out of empirical facts. Moral considerations must not be introduced from above, for they arise naturally from human nature and the social environment. We must ground moral objectives, therefore, not upon lack of social aim, but upon the kind of social connections that figure. We must not preach unassuming simplicity and contentment of life when communal admiration goes to the man who "succeeds" (through command of money and other forms of power). It is meaningless to say that morals ought to be social, for they are social. "Morality", writes Dewey, "depends upon events, not upon commands and ideals alien to nature."¹¹

So we come to the heart of Dewey's view of moral values. In summing up his own position he writes: "Moral conceptions

¹⁰ John Dewey and J.H. Tufts, Ethics (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1932), p. 201.

¹¹ Human Nature and Conduct, p. 313.

and processes grow naturally out of the very conditions of human life."¹² These conditions centre around three points: desire, obligation, and approval. Desire belongs to the intrinsic nature of man; Dewey cannot conceive of a "human being who does not have wants, needs, nor one to whom fulfillment of desires does not afford satisfaction." With the development of thought, needs cease to be blind, and aims are formed. From these "universal and inevitable facts of human nature" moral conceptions of the Good emerge. Obligation exists because men "live together naturally and inevitably in society; in companionship and competition; in relations of cooperation and subordination." One person is convinced that fulfillment of his demands by others is his right; to these others it comes as an obligation to those who assert the claim. Finally, human beings, thinks Dewey, "approve and disapprove, sympathize and resent, as naturally and inevitably as they seek for the objects they want, and as they impose claims and respond to them." The moral Good is thus also approvable. It is "from out of the mass of phenomena of this sort", then, that moral values and standards emerge.

And with the humanistic view of values comes a method of giving an empirically verifiable meaning to the conception of ideal values in contrast with material values.¹³ This method involves thought, experience, and continuous repetition. The distinction, to begin with, "is one between goods which,

¹² Ethics, p. 343.

¹³ cf. Ibid., p. 229.

when they present themselves to imagination, are approved by reflection after wide examination of their relations, and the goods which are such only because their wider connections are not looked into." Secondly, we can say that certain goods are ideal in character because past experience has shown that they are the kind of values which are likely to be approved upon searching reflection. But neither thought nor experience can enable us to erect, once and for all, a table of values. This "needs to be done, and done over and over and over again, in terms of the conditions of concrete situations as they arise. In short, the need for reflection and insight is perpetually recurring."¹⁴

Thus far, however, Dewey has only given us a theory concerning how moral values originate, a theory explaining why they are present. A further question which arises is, why are they binding? Wherein lies their authority? "Still the question recurs: What authority have standards and ideas which have originated in this way? What claims have they upon us?"¹⁵ Dewey's answer is abrupt and concise: "The authority is that of life."¹⁶ A person must not ask whether he is going to use these affairs out of which reason and morality have grown, but how he is going to use them, if his question is to have sense. "He cannot escape the problem of how to engage in life, since in any case he must engage in it some way or other -- or else quit and get out."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ethics, p. 230.

¹⁵ Human Nature and Conduct, p. 80.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

We acknowledge the authority of Right for the same reason we do not put our hand in the fire.

For Right is only an abstract name for the multitude of concrete demands in actions which others impress upon us, and of which we are obliged, if we would live, to take some account. Its authority is the exigency of their demands, the efficacy of their insistencies.¹⁸

This reply derives its force from the fact that social pressure, according to Dewey, "is involved in our own lives, as much so as the air we breathe and the ground we walk uponwe live mentally as physically only in and because of our environment. Social pressure is but a name for the interactions which are always going on and in which we participate, living¹⁹so far as we participate and dying¹⁹so far as we do not."²⁰ Furthermore, the pressure involved is "not ideal but empirical", where empirical means "only actual". Considerations of right, therefore, are claims originating not outside of life, but within it. Moral values are not connected with ends and obligations independent of concrete actualities, but with actualities of **existence**.

For Dewey, therefore, we see that morality is not an arbitrary matter, is not something which can be created in accordance with human desire or taste or will. Moral laws arise because individuals are interdependent, and because the social situation is an integral a part of the individual as his own especial nature. Life imposes morality upon us,

¹⁸ Human Nature and Conduct, p. 326.

¹⁹ *Italics mine.*

²⁰ Human Nature and Conduct, p. 327.

and values are thus the same for all.

Right, law, duty, arise from the relations which human beings intimately sustain to one another, and their authoritative force springs from the very nature of the relation that binds people together.²¹

Values are thus fitted to the moment in human history from which they derive, and, although the content of moral law may vary, its form and the general principles upon which it is based remain unchanged.

Special phenomena of morals change from time to time with change of social conditions and the level of culture. The facts of desiring, purpose, social demand and law, sympathetic approval and hostile disapproval are constant. We cannot imagine them disappearing as long as human nature remains human nature, and lives in association with others. The fundamental conceptions of morals are, therefore, neither arbitrary nor artificial. They are not imposed upon human nature from without but develop out of its own operations and needs. Particular aspects of morals are transients; they are often, in their actual manifestation, defective and perverted. But the framework of moral conceptions is as permanent as human life itself.²²

B. Spinoza.

Our study of humanistic ethics continues as we turn to the theory set forth by Spinoza, the seventeenth-century Jewish philosopher. For Spinoza, strictly speaking, in reality there is no good and evil, right and wrong. All existence is as it is, and could be no different; all creatures, including man, derive the nature of their existence from their very being, and no alteration is possible, in

²¹ Ethics, p. 238.

²² Ibid., pp. 343-344.

reality or in conception. Value judgments, therefore, when such are made, are applicable to man and his interests only. There would be no intrinsic meaning, for instance, in applying the concept good or evil to a natural object, for it is impossible that the object might be otherwise than it is. So we find Spinoza writing, in the Preface to Part IV of the Ethics:

With regard to good and evil, these terms indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, nor are they anything else than modes of thought, or notions which we form from the comparison of one thing with another. For one and the same thing may at the same time be both good and evil or indifferent.²³

Good and evil must, then, be simply human terms to be applied in some accepted fashion. And this is what we find Spinoza asserting:

By good, therefore, I understand in the following pages everything which we are certain is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before us. By evil, on the contrary, I understand everything which we are certain hinders us from reaching that model.²⁴

At first glance it might seem that Spinoza is here presenting a relativism not entirely different from that held by Hobbes; but we are to discover that his view is, on the contrary, highly and necessarily objective. Value judgments made upon the conditions he maintains are not mere statements of the likes and dislikes of individuals, for man's properties are intrinsic to the species and thus common to all men.

²³ Ethics, trs. W. Hale White, rev. Amelia H. Stirling, Second Edition (London: F. Fisher Unwin, 1894), p. 179.

²⁴ Loc. cit.

The objective character of Spinoza's ethics is founded on the objective character of the model of human nature which, though allowing for many individual variations, is in its core the same for all men.²⁵

We have seen that, for Spinoza, there is, in truth, and in reality, no perfection and no imperfection, no good and bad, for the ultimate nature of things is completely real, and "its reality is an eternal necessity". A thing cannot be "perfect in any sense which would imply the successful realization of a 'best' over against a possible failure."²⁶ It therefore follows that

goodness and badness are simply modes of our thought, imaginative ideas, notions which spring from the comparison and generalization of an inadequate apprehension. In and for themselves, things are neither 'good' nor 'bad', but all alike necessarily what they are. For us -- in relation to our arbitrary types and patterns, as means to our purposes -- one and the same thing is good, bad, and indifferent, according to our present circumstances and requirements.²⁷

Let us, in order to set these fundamental ethical conceptions in their proper perspective, glance briefly at Spinoza's world view. Metaphysically, he may be classed as an **absolute** monist, for he maintained that the universe was a single unity which was God and that all existence was an aspect of this fundamental divine unity. The individual thus derives the whole of his being from God; by himself, he is nothing. But, even though only an "item in the whole which is God,"²⁸ the individual plays a necessary and essential

²⁵ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself (Toronto: Rinehart and Co., 1947), p. 27.

²⁶ Harold H. Joachim, A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 239.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 241.

²⁸ C.E.M. Joad, Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940), p. 357.

role in that unity. God's completion depends, in part, upon man's completion, or self-realization, and it thus becomes a fundamental law of the latter's nature that he realize himself. This law, from which there is no escape, is a law of effort and struggle, and "since there cannot be effort and struggle without desire, it is a law also of desire."²⁹ Man is thus a determined being, and it follows that the terms good and evil have no meaning apart from the individuals who use them. And as the law of man's being is to realize, "maintain", or "preserve" his being in accordance with the nature of his being as human, those things which aid in his preservation are desired and ~~are~~ known as "good".

We call a thing good which contributes to the preservation of our being, and we call a thing evil if it is an obstacle to the preservation of our being.³⁰

Further, man is so constructed that objects which aid or obstruct him affect him with joy or sorrow. Therefore

knowledge of good or evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sorrow in so far as we are conscious of it.³¹

The key to the heart of Spinoza's theory, however, wherein lies the objectivity of his view of moral value, is to be found in his doctrine of human nature. We have seen that he found the origin and explanation of all moral activity in a certain self-maintaining or self-realizing

²⁹ Joad, op. cit., p. 357.

³⁰ Ethics, p. 186.

³¹ Loc. cit. (Prop.viii, Part IV)

impulse, which is identical with the very essence of each finite individual. But this impulse, we must emphasize, is common to all men, in so far as they are human (and in so far as they fail to be human they are removed from our present consideration). Now when this self-maintaining impulse is satisfied, the individual is conscious of an increase of power; when unfulfilled, the individual is conscious of a loss of power. These two occurrences are attended by sensations of pleasure and pain respectively. If the individual is himself the adequate cause of such increased power, the emotion is termed an "activity". If, however, the diminution or increase of power is caused by some external force, and of which the individual is only a partial cause, the emotion is termed a "passion". In the latter case, man is said to be in bondage to his passions, and only a "part of nature".

The division we have sketched above gives rise to the conception of various levels of human life. At the lowest level, man is in complete bondage, in the fashion we have described, and the "true self is repressed by what is foreign to it".³² Human nature contains within itself, however, the secret of its own emancipation. If reason is exercised, the "confused" knowledge which is associated with objects at the stage of the passions becomes "clear and distinct" and yields to the individual control of his

³² J. Caird, Spinoza (London: Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1903), p. 225.

emotions. Passions thus become activities, "for, in one sense, the activity of thought kills passion; by thinking a passion, we make it cease to be a passion."³³ To live according to reason, therefore, is to live at a higher level. But, adds Spinoza, it is not only to live at a higher level; it is to live according to ourselves, to make our life the expression of our true nature. So long as the body exists, of course, we cannot cease to be creatures "of sense and imagination" and "to have a consciousness which consists of ideas of bodily sensations", but reason can succeed in elevating us, to a great extent, above the control of the passions, can even make us independent of passion. And in elevating ourselves more and more into the realm of reason, we gradually become aware of the entire universe, inasmuch as the exercise of our reason is God thinking in us, and the universe is simply a manifestation of his nature. It is in this sphere that we find Spinoza's conception of the true nature of man.

In this 'consciousness of the union which his mind has with the whole of nature', man realizes his essential being; and in this realization, therefore, Spinoza finds the ideal pattern of humanity.³⁴

Spinoza thus conceives man as a creature who naturally strives, through the exercise of his reason, to become one with God, to unite himself to the whole of which he is but a part. This is not to say that his nature, and God's nature,

³³ Caird, op. cit., p. 226.

³⁴ Joachim, op. cit., p. 244.

are not given bodily expression; they are, for such material expressions are no less real than the mental, and body is in no sense dependent upon spirit. But God's substance also expresses itself in terms of spirit, and so must man's, for, fundamentally, they are one. Now the distinguishing activity of spirit, as Spinoza conceives it, is intellectual, and the purpose of the intellectual activity of the spirit is the quest for truth.

To see things exactly as they are, and to accept unreservedly what one sees is to achieve truth. To achieve truth is to fulfill the spirit whose quest truth is, and to fulfill the spirit is to realize one's own nature.³⁵

And to obey the law of our natures, as we have seen, is to be free, whereas if we act with the object of gratifying the desires and passions that derive their origin from the events taking place in our bodies, we are in bondage to forces external to ourselves. Thus, to pursue knowledge becomes the highest goal of man; we are determined to this pursuit by the nature of our being, although we do not know in exactly what way God may determine us so to act.³⁶

Thus the difference between the good and the bad man is a difference of their nature. It is not a difference in the prudence of their calculations, nor a difference which depends upon their choice of the course to attain their happiness. The path which each follows is the inevitable result of the nature of each. Its 'goodness' or 'badness' depends upon the 'goodness' or 'badness' of the nature which it expresses: and the 'goodness' or 'badness' of that nature means its relative humanity -- the degree of human reality which it contains.³⁷

³⁵ Joad, op. cit., p. 360.

³⁶ cf. Joachim, op. cit., p. 247.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

There is thus an aspect of determinism even in Spinoza's conception of freedom. Every man acts of necessity according to his nature; and his actions are explicable either as the joint-efforts of his own nature together with an infinity of other cooperative causes, or as the effects of his own nature only. The actions of the good and bad are alike necessary, following inevitably from the nature of the agent in the medium in which he lives and works.³⁸ The actions, however, differ inestimably according to the richness of being, or humanity, which they reveal, and this difference is dependent upon our comparison. Everything which exists, in so far as it involves any affirmative being, is perfect, and therefore good, just as complete knowledge is completely true. Falsity and evil (which do not belong even to partial knowledge or partial or finite being) are mere negations and defects which attach to partial knowledge which poses as complete (or completer than it is), and "to imperfect forms of humanity which yet claim to be human: 'claim to be', that is, for us who group all men under the universal idea of humanity, and compare them with our conception of the pattern of manhood."³⁹

But though the estimation of ethical value is subjective, it is not arbitrary. The moral law is not a code which allows this and forbids that; it is the law which reason makes for itself to express its own innermost being.

³⁸ cf. Joachim, op. cit., p. 248.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

The good, which the free or rational man desires, is good for human nature as such, and hence, so far as men are guided by reason, they necessarily agree in their natures.⁴⁰

Thus, it seems, there is nothing arbitrary in the moral standard. If you apply a moral standard at all, you must apply the standard the standard Spinoza adopts; that is, the conception of the most fully real human nature. But if you apply the moral standard, you are not considering the nature of things as such, or as it is for complete knowledge: you are considering their nature from a special point of view. The moral categories (we may perhaps express it) are not ultimate, not valid as metaphysical categories. But they are valid and objective within the limits of human conduct and life.⁴¹

From a position almost identical to that of Hobbes in its subjectivism and its egoism, we thus see that Spinoza, through a different reading of human nature, reaches a conclusion which bases ethical value upon an objective standard rather than the thorough-going relativism of Hobbes. His theory is humanistic, for it demands nothing outside the nature of man, and the knowledge of God attained through that nature, to determine good and evil; but it is yet objective, for it posits that all men necessarily and inevitably seek to realize themselves in terms of a model of human nature which all recognize and acknowledge, in so far as they are rational, and therewith, human.

⁴⁰ cf. Joachim, op. cit., p. 271.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 249-250.

C. Erich Fromm.

The tradition of objective, humanistic ethics is continued in the recent work of Erich Fromm. Fromm's approach to the ethical problem is through an analysis of the personality of modern man, set in the context of a dualism which opposes authoritarianism to humanism, irrationality to rationality, original sin to natural goodness, and which sees man in terms of the neurotic or non-productive and the genital or productive character. His view is the view of the psychologist, and in his theory we find an affirmation of the general values presented by Dewey and Spinoza.

For Fromm, ethics is "the applied science of the 'art of living' based upon the theoretical 'science of man'".⁴² Just as the engineer requires an extensive body of theoretical knowledge to build a railroad track, the human being must know himself theoretically if he is to fulfill his function, the aim of his life, which "is to be understood as the unfolding of his powers according to the laws of his nature."⁴³ We find Fromm basing his science of man upon the premise that its object, man, exists and that there is a human nature characteristic of the human species. Herein rests his fundamental objectivism. But coupled with this is a universal obligation on the part of all to be alive, which is the same as the duty to be oneself, to

⁴² Man For Himself (Toronto: Rinehart and Co., 1947), p. 18.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 20.

develop into the individual one potentially is. Man, while "sharing the core of human qualities with all members of his species",⁴⁴ is yet a unique entity, differing from others by "his particular blending of character, temperament, talents, dispositions."⁴⁵ Here is a recognition of individual variation which preserves Fromm's theory from an otherwise inevitable affiliation with mechanism, and "humanizes" his objectivism. With the science of man as a basis, we reach the conclusion that a thing is called good if it is good for the person who uses it.⁴⁶

Good in humanistic ethics is the affirmation of life, the unfolding of man's powers. Virtue is responsibility toward his own existence. Evil constitutes the crippling of man's powers; vice is irresponsibility toward himself.⁴⁷

Such a criterion of good and evil does not lead to relativism, however. As with Spinoza, we find the true nature of man standing as objective, and as an ideal to which all are bound to approximate. Fromm states his purpose clearly and succinctly:

I have written this book...to show that our knowledge of human nature does not lead to ethical relativism, but, on the contrary, to the conviction that the sources of norms for ethical conduct are to be found in man's nature itself; that moral norms are based on man's inherent qualities, and that their violation results in mental and emotional disintegration. I shall attempt to show that the character structure of the mature and integrated personality, the productive character, constitutes the source and the basis

⁴⁴ Man For Himself, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Loc. cit.

⁴⁶ cf. Man For Himself, p; 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

of 'virtue' and that 'vice', in the last analysis, is indifference to one's own self and self-mutilation. Not self-renunciation nor selfishness but self-love, not the negation of the individual but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics. If man is to have confidence in values, he must know himself and the capacity of his nature for goodness and productiveness.⁴⁸

Fromm begins by drawing a distinction between authoritarian and humanistic ethics, between the view that an authority states what is good for man and the view that man is himself both the norm giver and the subject of the norms.⁴⁹ The former he identifies with irrational authority, the source of which is power over people, built positively upon power of the ruler and negatively upon fear within the subjects, and the latter with rational authority, the source of which is competence, its power being always temporary, its acceptance depending on its performance. Formally, the one denies man's capacity to know what is good or bad while the other is based on the principle that only man himself can determine the criterion for virtue and sin; materially, the one answers the question of values primarily in terms of the interests of the authority, the other on the principle that the "sole criterion of ethical value" is "man's welfare".⁵⁰

We next find Fromm proceeding to a discussion of the human personality, and here again a two-fold distinction is maintained. He differentiates between temperament and

⁴⁸ Man For Himself, p. 7.

⁴⁹ cf. Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

character, pointing out that the former refers to the mode of reaction and is constitutional and not changeable, and that the latter is essentially formed by a person's experiences and is changeable. Character, furthermore, is the "(relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization."⁵¹ The fashion in which assimilation takes place leads into a discussion of two types of orientation due to character types, and here we discover the heart of Fromm's thesis.

Fromm differentiates between the non-productive orientations and the productive orientation. The former he finds to be aspects of the neurotic personality. They include the receiving and ~~exploiting~~ orientations, which are marked by a belief on the part of the individual that the source of all good is outside him, and the hoarding and marketing orientations, in which the individual finds his security to rest within his fortification of possessions and in his "exchange value" respectively. The first two are characterized by a symbiotic relatedness in terms of social cohesion, and the final two by withdrawal tendencies. The receiving orientation finds the individual accepting everything possible, and in his complete turning to others he becomes helpless and wholly dependent, staunchly loyal, and marked by what is ~~called~~ known as masochism. The exploiting

⁵¹ Man For Himself, p. 59.

personality results in the desire to take things, for here it is felt that personal effort is required to obtain the good. The result is the authoritative person, marked, in society, by the impulse to swallow others, or sadism. A turning inward to a self which has been extended to include all one's material possessions is typical of the hoarding orientation; one's gains thus far in life must be preserved at all cost, and such assertiveness leads to the destructive-withdrawal type of inter-personal relatedness. Finally, the marketing orientation, a development of the modern era, makes man indifferent to his own nature through a concentration of interest upon his artificial acquirements; society demands that he be the person who can fill a position, not that he be himself, and so a core of knowledge, ability to use that knowledge, and an artificial personality become his sole goals, in order that his "exchange value" on the market may be enhanced.

Over against the various types of neurotic character stands the fully developed character which is the "aim of human development and simultaneously the ideal of humanistic ethics."⁵² This character is marked by the productive orientation, which causes us to seek to fulfill our potentialities as human beings. "Productiveness is an attitude which every human being is capable of, unless he is mentally and emotionally crippled."⁵³ Here man is concerned with

⁵² Man For Himself, p. 83.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 85.

himself, not with something apart from him.

In the concept of productiveness we are not concerned with activity necessarily leading to practical results but with an attitude, with a mode of reaction and orientation toward the world and oneself in the process of living. We are concerned with man's character, not with his success.⁵⁴

Fromm proceeds to build his conception of productiveness by drawing a series of distinctions. It is upon this concept that his ideal of true human nature rests, and in the latter that the source and basis of moral evaluation is to be found. The empirical evidence he presents in support of this fundamental concept therefore becomes of prime concern for us.

Fromm first considers man's relationship to the world. We can perceive it reproductively, he writes, in the same fashion as a film records objects photographed, or we can perceive it generatively by conceiving it, by "enlivening and recreating this new material through the spontaneous activity of one's own mental and emotional powers." If one method is used solely, he continues, one becomes a "realist" or grows insane, respectively. The normal human being, the productive person, on the other hand, "is capable of relating himself to the world simultaneously by perceiving it as it is and by conceiving it enlivened and enriched by his own powers,"⁵⁵ and productiveness itself is "something new which springs from this interaction," the most important

⁵⁴ Man For Himself, p. 87.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

object of which is man himself.

The two methods of apprehending the world now prove to be of further significance as we probe deeper into human nature. Man is a creature alone and separated from the rest of existence, and at the same time he is impelled to seek for oneness. This is the paradox of his nature: he must simultaneously seek for closeness and independence, for absorption into the species and for preservation of his individuality. Fromm holds that the resolution of this paradox is to be found in productiveness. Productiveness involves acting and comprehending, producing things in the exercise of his powers over matter and comprehending the world, mentally and emotionally, through love and through reason. Working, loving, and reasoning thus become the prime factors in productiveness.

Productive love involves care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Productive thinking involves the use of reason rather than mere intelligence,⁵⁶ is characterized by subjective interest and emotion as well as an objective approach to both the object and the thinker as an observer. Together they produce productiveness as an intrinsic human faculty which yields to man the desire and the energy to work, to be active, to care for himself and his world, to respond to and have respect for the objective universe, and to seek for an all-embracing knowledge of his species

⁵⁶ Fromm defines intelligence as "man's tool for attaining practical goals with the aim of discovering those aspects of things the knowledge of which is necessary for manipulating them", the goals themselves standing unquestioned. "Reason",

and its environment.

Productiveness is characterized by a concern for self-love as opposed to selfishness, for a self-interest conceived in terms of what the nature of man is, objectively, rather than in terms of the subjective feeling of what one's own interest is. It is marked by the assertion of humanistic conscience, the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning or disfunctioning, as against the claims of authoritarian conscience, the voice of an internalized external authority. The former is a reaction of ourselves to ourselves, and can justly be called the voice of our loving care for ourselves;⁵⁷ the latter is an expression of the interests of the authority, where "good conscience is consciousness of pleasing the (external and internalized) authority and guilty conscience is the consciousness of displeasing it."⁵⁸ In the sphere of pleasure and happiness, the productive individual finds pleasure natural to the nature of man superior to pleasure dependent on his own peculiar taste or desire. Furthermore, he distinguishes between pleasure resulting from scarcity and that resulting from abundance. The first is produced in the removal of physiological tensions, in the satisfaction of bodily needs, and is found at the animal level of

on the other hand, "involves a third dimension, that of depth, which reaches to the essence of things and processes." While not divorced from the practical aims of life, it is not a mere tool for immediate action. "Its function is to know, to understand, to grasp, to relate oneself to things by comprehending them. It penetrates through the surface of things in order to discover their essence, their hidden relationships and deeper meanings, their "reason'". (cf. pp. 102-103).

⁵⁷ cf. Man For Himself, p. 159.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 146.

existence; the second results from inner activity, from taste which is a product of cultural development and refinement, from anticipations which are produced by the loving and reasoning capacities of man and not physical urgency, and is essentially a human phenomenon. From the latter experience joy and happiness are found. Happiness is thus an achievement brought about by man's inner productiveness and not a gift of the gods; it is the criterion of excellence in the art of living, of virtue in the meaning it has in humanistic ethics.⁵⁹

In the realm of faith and moral capacity the productive individual is also at home in his universe. His faith is rational as opposed to the irrational faith held by one who adheres to the dictates of an external authority.

Irrational faith is a fantastic conviction in somebody or something, rooted in submission to a personal or impersonal irrational authority. Rational faith, in contrast, is a firm conviction based on productive intellectual and emotional activity.⁶⁰

The basis of the latter is thus productiveness;

to live by our faith means to live productively and to have the only certainty which exists: the certainty growing from productive activity and from the experience that each of us is the active subject of whom these activities are predicated.⁶¹

Humanistic ethics takes the position that man is able to know good and to act accordingly on the strength of his natural potentialities and his reason. It upholds the

⁵⁹ cf. Man For Himself, p. 189.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 208.

belief in man's dignity, power, and natural goodness, and denies that he is intrinsically evil and that his "strivings are evil from childhood on."⁶² The fact of evil is explained as the result of a failure of the individual to realize his potentialities. Fromm assumes that man must strive, must utilize his energy. If conditions are such that his natural powers can unfold as befits his nature as man, all is well; if, however, conditions block his productive development, his energy flows into destructive channels. Man is thus possessed of two kinds of potentialities: "one, a primary potentiality which is actualized if the proper conditions are present; the second, a secondary potentiality, which is actualized if conditions are in contrast to existential needs."⁶²

We have shown that man is not necessarily evil but becomes evil only if the proper conditions for his growth and development are lacking. The evil has no independent existence of its own, it is the absence of the good, the result of the failure to realize life.⁶³

Moreover, the tendency to grow, to develop and be productive is possessed by every individual. And this does not mean that man's inherent drive is an abstract drive "for perfection as a particular gift with which man is endowed."⁶⁴ It follows from his very nature that the power to act creates a need to use this power and that the failure to use it results in disfunction and unhappiness. And to be

⁶² Man For Himself, p. 218.

⁶³ Loc. cit.

⁶⁴ Man For Himself, p. 219.

fully productive means that we must not be destructive of ourselves or of others. Violation against another is violation against ourselves, for their interest is our interest, and ours, theirs. The respect for life, that of others as well as one's own, "is the concomitant of the process of life itself and a condition of psychic health."⁶⁵ Our own growth, happiness, and strength are based on respect for these forces, and thus one cannot violate them in others and remain untouched oneself. To produce the maximum good, therefore, is to produce conditions for the development of productiveness.

Virtue is proportional to the degree of productiveness a person has achieved. If society is concerned with making people virtuous, it must be concerned with making them productive and hence with creating the conditions for the development of productiveness. The first and foremost of these conditions is that the unfolding and growth of every person is the aim of all social and political activities, that man is the only purpose and end, and not a means for anybody or anything except himself.⁶⁶

Such is the evidence which Fromm presents in support of his thesis that man is naturally good, that the individual's interests are one with those of the human species and his nature one with the objective nature of man, that development of the productive character would mean full and complete human realization, that man's only goal is to preserve and maintain himself, and that the source and

⁶⁵ Man For Himself, p. 225.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 229.

standard of ethical norms are to be found within an objective human nature. Good and evil are relative concepts, but they are relative to the objective nature of man, and the strength of the latter, runs the claim of humanistic ethics, is sufficient to turn a seeming relativism into a natural and unquestionable objectivism.

II. The Good = An Indefinable Quality

We now come to an examination of the intuitionist theory, an objective view of moral value which holds, as has been indicated above,⁶⁷ that goodness is a quality or property of objects which exists apart from the knowing mind and which in no way depends upon that mind for its existence. Intuitionism is one of the commonest and simplest methods used to establish the objective nature of value judgments, and as such deserves our closest attention. In our study of it we first turn to the theory of G.E. Moore.

A. George E. Moore.

Moore's position may be summarized as follows. He defines the field of ethical inquiry to be an investigation of assertions about that property of things which is denoted by the term "good", and the converse property denoted by the term "bad". This field **excludes** such objects as particular things, dealing only with universal judgments which

⁶⁷ Supra, pp. 42-43.

predicate the quality "goodness" of any object. It does not concern "the good", or the whole of that which possesses good, but the predicate "good" itself. His investigation of this predicate then leads him to the conclusion that good is incapable of any definition, in "the most important sense of the word which is that in which a definition states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole."⁶⁸

It is one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition, because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined.⁶⁹

Good, therefore, is simple and indefinable, and this may be taken as a self-evident premise; it is a quality inherent in nature and experience which cannot be reduced to other terms.⁷⁰

In setting forth his view as to the nature of the good, Moore proceeds by rejecting all theories which claim that when we think "this is good" we are thinking that the thing in question bears a definite relation to some one other thing, which may be a natural object (that is, something the existence of which is an object of experience) or an object which "is only inferred to exist in a supersensible world". Such reductionist theories place value upon a relativistic basis, and thus Moore's criticisms will be effective in the establishment of his objectivistic position.

He first considers naturalism, the theory "which declares the sole good to consist in some one property of things,

⁶⁸ Principia Ethica (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁷⁰ cf. Ibid., p. 148.

which exists in time; and which does so because it supposes that 'good' itself can be defined by reference to such a property."⁷¹ The common arguments for this theory maintain that things are good because they are normal, or necessary, and Moore shows that these are false propositions due to the existence of contradictory instances. Was the excellence of Socrates or of Shakespeare normal?, he asks; on the contrary it was abnormal, extraordinary. And that which is necessary to life is not ipso facto better than what may appear unnecessary. It is not necessary to life, for example, to build temples, philosophize, and know the "sweets of friendship", yet we affirm that these things are good.

A more pretentious form of the theory is that of Spencer which connects ethics with evolution, but here the influence of the "naturalistic fallacy", the identification of good with some other simple object of thought, is at work. This fallacy "reduces what is used as a fundamental principle of ethics either to a tautology or to a statement about the meaning of a word."⁷² The evolutionary theory appears to identify the good with pleasure, and inasmuch as it does this it becomes subject to the same criticism which Moore levels against the hedonistic doctrine which defines "This is good" as meaning "This is pleasurable". Such a definition reduces to an absurdity, he maintains; when

⁷¹ Principia Ethica, p. 41.

⁷² Ibid., p. xiv.

an ethical teacher is asked "What is good", he cannot answer by describing "how people use a word" or "what kind of actions they approve", and if he says "Pleasure is good," we cannot believe that he merely means "Pleasure is pleasure" and nothing more than that.

There is no meaning in saying that pleasure is good, unless good is something different⁷³ from pleasure. It is absolutely useless, so far as Ethics is concerned, to prove, as Spencer tries to do, that increase of pleasure coincides with increase of life, unless good means something different from either life or pleasure. He might just as well try to prove that an orange is yellow by shewing that it is always wrapped up in paper.⁷⁴

Ethical judgments are, then, for Moore, synthetic and a priori. When we state that a thing is "good", we are stating something significant, and we are stating it because we have recognized (by intuition) the quality of goodness to be present. We can thus judge that things are good, but we cannot say that goodness means, or is equivalent to, some other object or quality, for goodness means nothing but goodness.

Moore's contention is further developed in his consideration of three other views which arise from the assumption that evolution and ethics are connected. He reveals the confusion involved in each. Evolution, for instance, may be a guide to conduct simply because it represents progress, which is good. But there are many elements involved in the

⁷³ Italics Mine.

⁷⁴ Principia Ethica, pp. 14-15.

course of evolution, and how are we to distinguish the good from the bad? Assuming progress to be good, we are still left seeking a criterion of goodness; thus

it is, at all events, certain that, if this had been the only relation held to exist between Evolution and Ethics, no such importance would have been attached to the bearing of Evolution on Ethics as we actually find claimed for it.⁷⁵

It may be, however, that the more evolved is a criterion because a concomitant of the better.

But this view also obviously involves an exhaustive preliminary discussion of the fundamental ethical question what, after all, is better.⁷⁶

Is it true, then, that though evolution gives us no help in discovering what results of our efforts will be best, it does give us some help in discovering what it is possible to attain and what are the means to this attainment? Moore admits that this third view is of some use to ethics, but, nevertheless, rejects the main contention of the evolutionary hypothesis, that "we ought to move in the direction of evolution simply because it is the direction of ~~evolution~~." We have no right to assume that the forces of nature are working on the right side, for evolution can well denote only a temporary historical process, and furthermore, the more evolved is not necessarily to be identified with the good.

So we come to the conclusion that the good cannot be identified with any one thing in the natural world.

⁷⁵ Principia Ethica, p. 55.

⁷⁶ Loc. cit.

There remains, however, the realm of the supernatural, which Moore deals with in considering "metaphysical ethics". He defines "metaphysical ethics" as "those systems which maintain or imply that the answer to the question, 'What is good?' logically depends upon the answer to the question, 'What is the nature of supersensible reality?'"⁷⁷ Such a possibility, however, has been refuted by the establishment that the naturalistic fallacy is a fallacy, he maintains, and its plausibility has arisen from "certain confusions".

The first of these confusions is that between the proposition "this existing thing is good", and the proposition, "the existence of this kind of thing would be good, wherever it might occur." Metaphysics, Moore points out, might be able to substantiate the former by showing that the thing existed, but is wholly irrelevant to the latter, which involves the true ethical problem. But the most important source of the supposition that metaphysics is relevant to ethics, thinks Moore, is the assumption that good must denote some real property of things. In this connection he disclaims the validity of the logical doctrine that all propositions assert a relation between existents. Ethical propositions must be distinguished from natural laws and from commands; it is not enough to say that a thing is good

⁷⁷ Principia Ethica, p. xviii.

because it is commanded -- we must still show why that thing is good. We must distinguish between that which is a reason for believing a truth and that which merely suggests a truth, or is a cause of our knowing it.

Similarly, to be good is not equivalent to being willed or felt in some particular way, and here we discover the refutation of a theory which represents Westermarck's position.

Moore's conclusion, then, is that "the subject matter of Ethics must be defined by reference to a simple, indefinable, unanalyzable object of thought."⁷⁸ This object is what we commonly refer to as the quality of goodness, and it is because good exists and differs from other objects that judgments which refer to it are ethical judgments. Moreover, the good is known solely through intuition.

But we find that Moore is only a strict intuitionist in his definition of good. When he comes to consider the question, "What ought I to do?", he rejects the intuitionist view, which claims that it is self-evident that certain actions ought always to be done. Where duty is concerned, Moore adopts a utilitarian position, and holds that "right does and can mean nothing but 'cause of a good result'; whence it follows that the end always justifies the means, and that no action which is not justified by its results can be right."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Principia Ethica, p. 21.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

Our 'duty', therefore, can only be defined as that action which will cause more good to exist in the universe than any possible alternative. And what is 'right' or 'morally permissible' only differs from this, as what will not cause less good than any possible alternative. When, therefore, Ethics presumes to assert that certain ways of acting are 'duties' it presumes to assert that to act in those ways will always produce the greatest possible sum of good.⁸⁰

We thus see that his intuitionism rests in the fact that after an act has been performed, we will know, intuitively, if the results it produces are good or bad; knowledge concerning what results will be produced by certain acts, however, is a matter for empirical inquiry, and because of this "ethics" is quite unable to give us a list of duties."⁸¹

Moore's is thus a modified objectivism where the sphere of action is concerned. All that ethics can do, he maintains is show that certain actions, possible by volition, generally produce better or worse total results than any possible alternative. From this it follows that virtue, by which is "mainly meant a permanent disposition to perform duties"⁸² is good only as a means, and "generally has no value in itself."⁸³

But his position does not reduce to relativism. We have classed it as a modified objectivism inasmuch as duty, where it concerns the choosing of actions, must wait upon ~~empirical~~ empirical inquiry. But where duty concerns the end to be achieved, objectivism is maintained, for the best end is good, and as such is self-evident.

⁸⁰ Principia Ethica, p. 148.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸² Ibid., p. 181.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 182.

B. W. D. Ross.

A similar view of ethical judgments, which maintains an objectivist standpoint through intuitionism, is that offered by Sir W.D.Ross. Ross begins by drawing a division between the right and the good, wherein he disagrees with Moore. These must be investigated separately, he holds, for the right act is not necessarily the one which produces the maximum good; the sense of obligation is associated with rightness, and therefore a knowledge of the good is not sufficient to determine action. "If we could persuade ourselves that right just means 'calculated to produce the greatest good', the matter would be simple,"⁸⁴ he writes, and then points out that there are only three possible ways by which this could be known: establishment by intuition, deduction, or induction. Of these, he finds that there is no known way of applying deduction, and that induction is unsatisfactory. Intuition is, therefore, left, and disagreement results.

It seems clear that Utilitarianism has not established inductively that being optimistic is always the ground of rightness, and as a rule utilitarians have not attempted to do so. The reason is simple: it is because it has seemed to them self-evident that this is the only possible ground of rightness. Professor Moore definitely says that for him the principle is self-evident. For my part, I can find no self-evidence about it.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Foundations of Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 67-8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

The theory we find Ross maintaining is one that centres in the moral situation itself. To do that which produces the greatest good may result, he declares, in reducing the happiness of people individually in order to create more happiness generally, or, in some instances, in setting great personal pleasure above the creation of a small pleasure in another. Apart from this, he recognizes "principles of duty which seem to emerge as distinct from the principle 'promote the maximum good'".⁸⁶ For Ross, there exists a plurality of such principles,⁸⁷ and they arise in the situation itself. We know them by intuition:

If we now turn to ask how we come to know these fundamental moral principles, the answer seems to be that it is in the same way that we come to know the axioms of mathematics. Both alike seem to be both synthetic and a priori; that is to say, we see the predicate, though not included in the definition of the subject, to belong necessarily to anything which satisfies that definition. And as in mathematics, it is by intuitive induction that we grasp the general truths.⁸⁸

Here we have the intuitionist reply to Hume, who recognized the fact of obligation to be a central problem in the theory of moral action. The reply, simply, is to say that obligation is given in intuition, is suddenly known in the contact of an individual with a moral situation. The objectivity of Ross' theory, however, does not rest in making duty rigid and formal; it rests in the fact that "good" and "right" (as Moore claims for the former) cannot

⁸⁶ Foundations of Ethics, p. 77.

⁸⁷ cf. Ibid., pp. 83, 88.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 320.

be defined in terms of some other, tangible object or property. Where duty is concerned, it is necessary to choose from among the various alternatives which arise in a moral situation.

Let us examine his idea of moral obligation more closely. "Moral intuitions," he claims, "are not principles by the immediate application of which our duty in particular circumstances can be deduced. They state what I have elsewhere called prima facie obligations." 89 Such obligations are determined by our general intuition that duty must be fulfilled,⁹⁰ and by the circumstances present in the situation. Many often arise, and Professor Ross points out that

we are not obliged to do that which is only prima facie obligatory. We are only bound to do that act whose prima facie obligatoriness in those respects in which it is prima facie obligatory most outweighs its prima facie disobligatoriness in those respects in which it is prima facie disobligatory.⁹¹

Ross' intuitionism leads him, with Moore, to hold that moral judgments are valid synthetic a priori judgments. This follows from his insistence that "good" is simple and indefinable and, further, where moral obligation is concerned, his theory of prima facie duties. In substantiating this view he rejects the theories advanced by the positivists and by those who base moral judgments on an emotion of approval.

89 Foundations of Ethics, pp. 83-84.

90 cf. Ibid., p. 290.

91 Ibid., p. 85.

We find Ross beginning his discussion of positivism by rejecting the view of Carnap that ethical judgments are commands. It may be that they sometimes have an imperative quality, but it is not true that they always have.

Where the judgment of obligation has reference either to a third person, not the person addressed, or to the past, or to an unfulfilled past condition, or to a future treated as merely possible, or to the speaker himself, there is no plausibility in describing the judgment as a command. But it is easy to see that 'ought' means the same in all these cases, and that if in some of them it does not express a command, it does not do so in any.⁹²

Ayer, Ross continues, avoids such a "crude view" of ethical judgments, but he does hold that they express simply a state of mind and assert nothing. Ross objects:

If I say, 'In saying that which you did not believe you acted wrongly,' I am (not) asserting no more than that you have said that which you did not believe. I am quite definitely meaning to characterize your action further in a certain way.⁹³

If we disapprove, we must consider that what we disapprove is worthy of disapproval.

Ayer is also criticized for his adoption of the principle that synthetic a priori judgments are impossible, a criticism which penetrates to the heart of the entire positivist position, and concerns a point which stands as the foundation of the intuitionist theory. Ross selects Ayer's example of one such judgment, namely, "a material thing cannot be in two places at once," and points out that the statement

⁹² Foundations of Ethics, pp. 33-34.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 34.

is synthetic for the words used have acquired certain usages, certain denotations, and are used in that sense by the speaker. It is not, therefore, just a statement about the use of language.

The fact that with different conventional meanings of words the statement 'a natural thing cannot be in two places at once' might have been untrue throws no light on the question whether with the existing meanings of words it is not both true and necessary and synthetic.⁹⁴

The positivist view of statements about the past is that they are really statements about the future, that is, that they are predictions as to the kind of experiences one will have if an historical investigation is undertaken. But, Ross objects, "a statement about the past is a statement about the past and not about the future." If Mr. Ayer's opponents assume that the past is objectively there to be corresponded to, his view equally involves the assumption that the future is objectively there to be corresponded to. And it is difficult, says Ross, to maintain that the present and the future are real, but not the past.

It is against the positivist view of verification, however, that Ross directs his main criticism. He shows that the meaning of a statement can be entirely different from the facts which verify it, as in the case where indirect verification must be used. And even the more refined view, that "no statement can have meaning unless it is verifiable,

⁹⁴ Foundations of Ethics, p. 36.

or at least partly verifiable" is refuted. Here he quotes Dr. Ewing:

He (Dr. Ewing) shows inter alia that the positivists could not 'establish the truth of their view even in a single case merely by sense-experience. For how can we ever know by sense-experience that there is not a part of the meaning of a statement that we cannot verify? The fact that we do not have any sense-experience of such a part proves nothing, since the point at issue is whether there is something in what we mean beyond sense-experience; and how can we know by sense-experience that there is not?'

If it cannot be verified by sense-experience that even the meaning of a single statement is entirely exhausted by what can be verified by sense-experience, still less, of course, can the general theory that all statements are meaningless unless they are thus verifiable be itself verified.⁹⁵

Finally, Ross considers Ayer's view that we never dispute about questions of value, but only about questions of fact. He admits that when we differ on a question of right and wrong, it is by consideration of questions of fact -- "of the precise nature of the consequences or of the probable consequences, or of the motives involved" -- but maintains that in doing so we betray the conviction that, if we could agree about the facts of the case, we should also agree on the moral question:

The more Mr. Ayer emphasizes this element in our discussion of moral questions, the more he pays tribute to the strength of this conviction; for unless we thought that if we could agree on the factual nature of the act we should probably agree on its rightness or wrongness, there would be no point in trying to reach agreement about its factual nature.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Foundations of Ethics, p. 38.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

The implication is, then, that we do agree in our fundamental judgments as to what kind of consequences ought to be aimed at and what kind of motives are good. It is ~~this~~ that Ayer fails to realize, and this that, if he did realize it, should be investigated as the central problem of ethics.

And even if we did reach agreement concerning the facts of the case, Ross continues, we do not find that all difference of opinion has vanished, and in order to escape from Moore's argument against him (that is, the argument that we do dispute about questions of value), Ayer should show that this ceases, not simply that argument ceases. The fundamental reason for argument arising on questions of moral value does not derive from a dispute about the facts; it derives, rather, from the attempt to convince one's opponent that "the liking, or the dislike, is justified, in other words that the act has a character that deserves to be liked or disliked, is good or bad".⁹⁷

Ross' viewpoint also stands opposed to the "approval" or "reaction" theory. Here we find him admitting that the thought that an action is right and the feeling of approval always go together, but denying that the latter may be the ground of the former. In the first place, it is too wide a term, for "we approve of many things to which we do not ascribe the character of being obligatory or morally right," and, even

⁹⁷ Foundations of Ethics, p. 41.

when approval of an action is present, the emotion "seems to presume some insight into the nature of the action, as, for instance, that it is an action likely to redound to the general good, or a fulfillment of a promise."⁹⁸

Secondly, he continues, when we say that an action is right, we mean that it stands in a certain relation to an agent considered as an agent, not to "a spectator considered as capable of emotion in contemplating it."⁹⁹

It is the relationship of an action to a person as an active being, not an emotional being, that is to be considered. Furthermore, Ross cannot assent to the view that an act first acquires wrongness when he begins to exercise disapproval of it.

For Ross, then, we find that the right and the good are separable qualities and that each is known through intuition. Experience provides the moral situation, and from this prima facie obligations arise. Knowledge of the consequences of actions, certainly as to whether the consequence is good or otherwise, must wait upon empirical evidence. As for Moore, knowledge of our "objective duty", of that act which really provides the greatest good for all concerned, remains within the realm of probability.

⁹⁸ Foundations of Ethics, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Loc. cit.

C. C. E. M. Joad.

As a final form of objectivism let us now consider a third interpretation of value which maintains that goodness is an indefinable quality, known to man through intuition, and grounded in the nature of the universe. This is the view of C.E.M.Joad, who bases his theory upon a position similar to that of Moore, and who, in its exposition, brings sharp criticism to bear upon relativistic and humanistic theories.

We have chosen to complete our survey of ethical theory with the view of Professor Joad, and to defend it in our subsequent criticism, because it seems to be more explanatory of the multifarious facts which surround the moral experience of man than ~~any~~ other. It is a view which we adopt only provisionally, however, for, as will be seen, there are difficulties in many of its tenets and it is also subject to some of the inconsistencies which mark the other standpoints. But despite such shortcomings, we find in Joad an open recognition of the objections to his theory, and an attempt to meet them. Considered in its entirety, we find his view to present the firmest guide to human conduct and the truest insight into the ultimate basis of moral evaluation that we have yet discovered.

Fundamentally, Joad holds that ultimate values exist and

are unique. Whenever a genuine ethical judgment is made, the existence of something which is considered to be valuable for its own sake and not as a means to something else is entailed.¹⁰⁰ When we say "x is good", for example, we do not mean that x happens to be approved of by me, but that it has a certain ethical quality. This, in turn, implies that the "universe should contain factors which possess ethical characteristics in their own right; it is necessary, in short, that some things should be really good, others really bad, some things really right and others really wrong." Furthermore, that which is ultimately valuable is unique, and, because it is unique, no account can be given of it.¹⁰¹ One argument for this, Joad points out, is that advanced by Moore and called by the latter the "naturalistic fallacy". And as whatever is unique is indescribable, it is concluded that we are not in a position to answer the question, "Why do we recognize goodness or moral virtue¹⁰² to be valuable and why do we seek to attain it?"

In substantiating his view that goodness is unique, Joad points out the failure of writers on ethics to describe its characteristics.

When writers on ethics make the attempt it is found that the accounts that they are giving of moral virtue, relate not to the characteristics of moral virtue, but to the circumstances and conditions in which it appears or to the effects which it produces.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ cf. Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 418.

¹⁰¹ cf. Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁰² Throughout the exposition of his theory of value, Joad uses the terms "goodness" and "moral virtue", apparently, interchangeably.

¹⁰³ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 422.

Subjectivistic (or relativistic) theories, he maintains, give an account of moral virtue in terms of its predisposing conditions. They assume that a certain class of conduct is expedient for a community in that it conduces to its welfare, or safety, or desire, that this is then inculcated as a duty in the members of the community, approved of for long periods of time, and, finally, that obligation to perform the conduct will then eventually, some day, be recognized as a duty.

Such a view, however, proclaims that the feeling of moral obligation and the sense of moral approval are merely functions of the conditions of human existence, and arise in us in a fashion similar to the appearance of freckles or red hair. This would mean that we are not responsible for our conception of duty, nor free in respect of our feelings of moral approval; we would have to do our duty whenever such arose, just as we have to submit to having red hair or a good eye. But ethics, Joad holds, entails freedom, and moral virtue "must be freely achieved, or else it is not moral virtue." The subjectivist's account, therefore, is not explanatory of what we mean by moral virtue or the moral notions.

Nor can moral virtue be described in terms of pleasurable effects, as the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill would have us do. This theory maintains that the good is valuable because it is instrumental in producing certain effects.^{103a} But to say this is to ascribe value to the consequences of moral

^{103a} The "good", that is, other than pleasure. Bentham and Mill maintain that pleasure is the sole good, and that all other things which are good are good only in so far as they lead to pleasure.

action, not to moral action or virtue in its own right, and "if something which purports to be moral virtue turns out not to have value in its own right, then it is not what we mean by moral virtue."¹⁰⁴

Joad thus concludes that moral virtue, if it exists at all, is valuable for its own sake, and is unique. "Popular usage supports this view." If we are good for the sake of the rewards of being good, then we are not really good. And, although we can recognize moral obligation when we meet it, "we cannot describe its characteristics any more than we can describe the characteristics of any other thing which is unique, such as, for example, colour....For it is inherent in the conception of moral virtue that it should not be a function of predisposing conditions, and that it should not be cultivated or valued for the sake of its results."¹⁰⁵

If we now turn more directly to the sphere of human action, we find that the morally virtuous man is he who performs actions which, on the whole, have good consequences, and who recognizes the good when he meets it. We cannot, of course, know with certainty what the results of our actions will be, but we can foresee them with a certain degree of accuracy; and in this regard, we would not say that the man who is continually performing actions which have bad consequences, whether because he mistakes the nature of his acts, or because he possesses a faulty conception of good, is a

¹⁰⁴ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 425.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 426.

morally virtuous person.

Furthermore, there is evidence to the effect that moral virtue is valued and pursued. It may be true that, although we often recognize "the good", we nevertheless perform "the evil".¹⁰⁶ But, this, maintains Joad, is not to say that "the good" exercises no influence over us. "On the contrary, there is a part of us which would always like to do ~~what~~ we conceive to be right, and would like to behave in the way in which we think that we ought to behave."¹⁰⁷ Again, other things being equal, Joad finds that we do what we think to be right and pursue what we think to be good without ulterior motive. Such motive is always present, however, when we do what we know to be wrong. Moreover, the argument that evil is parasitic upon good -- "that it is only because most people do, on the whole, act rightly and try to do their duty, that it pays some people to act wrongly"¹⁰⁸ substantiates the view that the good is valued and pursued.

The motive to act rightly is also, despite the fact that our perception of the good is not demonstrable by reason, not irrational. We cannot give reasons for our desire for moral virtue, but that is not to say that reason is not exercised in the passing of moral judgments, or that our desire itself is unreasonable. On the contrary, Joad finds that there is an emotive and a conative side to reason, and, too, that as judgments of value are expressions of our personality as

¹⁰⁶ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 428.

¹⁰⁷ Loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 429.

a whole, reason is integrated in the making of them.

We thus have Joad's affirmation that values are ultimate and unique, and that moral virtue, as one of the ultimate values, is pursued in a rational manner for its own sake. But this is not all. We find, as we come to the heart of Joad's positive statement of value theory, that he further affirms the recognition of value to be a universal human attribute.¹⁰⁹ This innate capacity of the human being to recognize universals, through the perception of particulars, is a theory which Joad has derived from Plato.

Let us examine it more closely. If, for example, writes Joad, a white object is shown to a baby and the infant is told that it is white, either a meaningful impression is left upon the baby's mind or the statement, "This is white", is meaningless to him. If the latter were the case, then, on the next occasion on which a white object is seen, and the baby told, "This, too, is white", there would be no residue of meaning in the baby's mind for the announcement to call up; there would be no link between the two occasions of knowing a white thing, and, consequently, the process which leads to the formation of abstract ideas would never be begun. But, objects Joad, "all people do have a general conception of whiteness", and therefore the statement, "This is white", must have left a meaningful impression upon the baby's mind in the first case.

¹⁰⁹ cf. Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 430.

There must have been something in the baby's mind to which the expression 'that is white' hitched on, and what can this something have been except a knowledge of what 'being white' means? To know what 'being white' means is to have a kind of knowledge of the universal whiteness, and to have it from the first.¹¹⁰

From this Plato concluded that whenever we come to know something on what appears to us to be the first occasion, the fact that we do come to know it presupposes some original acquaintance with what is known. That is, we cannot learn something new without already in some sense knowing what it is that we want to learn. For Plato, this set the stage for his theory of learning as a process of rediscovery, and his doctrine of the pre-history of the soul.

Joad finds that it is not necessary to accept Plato's metaphysical teaching in order to recognize the strength of his position. To Joad, "it is obvious that the feeling of duty, the recognition of right, are not acquirements that we pick up from our environment as we grow and develop."¹¹¹ We can only account for moral experience by granting that there is in the human soul from the first a capacity to recognize and pursue the good. We do, for instance, distinguish between the good and the expedient, and it is impossible to account for this without the doctrine of an innate human capacity. It may be, he admits, that a man living out his life on a desert island would fail to develop this capacity, and that men living in a bad environment would have a warped

¹¹⁰ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 433.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 436.

or undeveloped insight; but this would not invalidate the fact of its existence. Joad then summarizes his view:

value is a universal of which all men have an innate knowledge; all men, therefore, have an innate capacity for recognizing the forms which value assumes. Of these, moral virtue is one, beauty another. They also have the capacity for recognizing those particulars in which the forms of value such as moral virtue and beauty are exemplified.¹¹²

The forms which value assumes and which all men recognize and pursue are listed as moral virtue, truth, beauty, and happiness. Joad maintains that "all human beings...desire and value the same things", and this is "not surprising".

Human beings are the expressions of the same creative impulse; they evolve in the same environment; their natures are cast in the same mould. Running through all the differences between man and man is the element of their common humanity.¹¹³

The fact that we all "recognize truth, appreciate beauty, seek to attain virtue, and desire happiness" is the "distinctive mark of our common humanity".

Joad further maintains that the value, moral virtue, is always the same, and that in all the various manifestations of "virtue", it is always this same value which is recognized. Such manifestations include courage, kindness, wisdom, resolution, justice, and others, but in all, that to which we attribute the value moral virtue, or goodness, is the same, is one of the four fundamental forms in which universal value manifests itself.

¹¹² Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, pp. 437-438.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 440.

To summarize, Joad maintains that the universe contains a unique and independent factor which he calls first order value. First order value (which may be identical with what the theologians know as Deity), manifests itself in the form of second order values: moral virtue, truth, beauty, and happiness. The human mind possesses an innate knowledge of these second order values, and, accordingly, recognizes their manifestations as third order values in particular persons and things, and is moved to appreciate, to approve, and to pursue what it recognizes. This capacity for recognition, approval, and pursuit is "intermittent and precarious" at the "present stage in the evolution of our species". But Joad thinks there seems reason to assume that this capacity grows, however slowly, with the development of mankind, and even suggests that "the object of the evolutionary process is so to perfect and refine human consciousness that it becomes capable of unerringly, instead of imperfectly, recognizing these values, and of continuously instead of, as at present, intermittently pursuing them."

It remains for us to consider two questions which Joad poses for himself in concluding his statement of value theory. The first concerns the objection which is most commonly urged against the position of the intuitionist, namely, that our intuitions seem arbitrary and are often inconsistent; the second concerns the relationship between the right and

the good. Or, as Joad puts them, "Why do we not always see what is right and pursue what is good?" and, "What do we mean by right actions, and what is their relation to moral virtue?"

We find Joad presenting two answers to the first question. To begin with, he gives us an answer in terms of social ethics, and stresses the obvious influence of training and environment.

All human beings, I have suggested, possess a natural tendency to approve of certain characters as moral and of certain forms of conduct as right; but what characters they will approve of, what actions they will call right, depends very largely upon their environment and training.¹¹⁴

There are many conflicting opinions about right and good; they cannot, it is obvious, all be correct, and so mistakes will arise, mistakes owing to faulty training and to bad environment. One cannot, "as Aristotle pointed out, be a really good man in a really bad state".

A second answer concerns the fact that a man, even though he does see his duty clearly, may fail to fulfill it.¹¹⁵ This weakness of will, Joad holds, can be strengthened by right training and assisted by a good environment, but the crux of the matter goes much deeper. We must ask, why do even our educators and legislators not see the good? One of the strongest reasons for this, Joad maintains, is the presence in the universe of evil. Evil, he insists, is

¹¹⁴ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 448.

¹¹⁵ Or, as Paul put it, "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do". (Romans, 7:19)

real and objective, and is indefinable in the same sense and for the same reason that good is indefinable; it is not simply the deprivation or opposite of good. And it is the presence of evil which in some unexplained way accounts for our failure to pursue the good which we see, or to perform the duty which we recognize.

In considering right actions, we find Joad affirming the utilitarianism of Moore, and holding that right actions are those which produce best consequences. The consequences must include moral virtue, truth, beauty, and happiness, mingled in proportion relative to the person and situation concerned. The proportion in which they should, "in an ideal life, be mixed, may well be the subject of another intuition". The morally virtuous man, then, is he who acts in such a way as to produce those consequences which contain or promote the greatest quantity of those things which are valuable in themselves. The latter includes moral virtue, and so, as Joad recognizes, the argument has a circular appearance: the morally virtuous man seeks to promote an increase of moral virtue. Such is not a vicious circle, however, for "there is no paradox in conceiving of the good man as one who wishes to increase the amount of goodness in the world, and it is a commonplace that he does in fact increase it."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 60.

But a further complication arises. Suppose the duty which one sees differs from what is in fact right? In this case, however, the difficulty arises from a confusion between right action and what is thought to be right action, reasons for which have been given above; it does not arise, as, Joad points out, Ross seems to think, from the fact that there is no necessary connection between right action and moral virtue. On the contrary, the morally virtuous man will always try to do what he believes to be right, and, moreover, his duty includes the improvement of his practical judgment, or his powers of calculation, so that he will not choose to do acts which fail to produce the consequences he intends. This, of course, involves an intellectual factor, but we have already seen that Joad includes the rational in his conception of human desire for the good.

The full conception of moral virtue entails, then, a certain element of accurate reasoning as well as the more obvious elements of strength of will and virtuous motive; and it entails an element of accurate reasoning because we require to know what our duty is, as well as to will the duty that we know.¹¹⁷

It is evident, however, that the deliverances of the moral sense, and moral evaluations based thereon, are often, in fact usually, relative to social need, circumstance, and status. Sometimes such relativity does not distort human perception of the good, but more often it does.

In most societies that have existed there has been a marked divergence between the conduct

¹¹⁷ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, pp. 464-465.

that men called right, and which a morally virtuous man felt it, therefore, to be his duty to do, and that which was in fact right.¹¹⁸

And here arises the most fundamental question of ethics. How is this divergence between what is thought right and what is right to be adjusted? "How is a man to be induced to wish to do what is really right and to desire and to pursue what is really valuable?

To this question, Joad replies, no satisfactory answer can be given. Basically, as we have seen, he thinks that ultimate value exists and is capable of attracting man's consciousness and invoking the desire to pursue it, and that all men naturally desire the good; but he also maintains that evil exists, and works to cloud men's judgments and weaken their wills. The question of environment brings in the relationship of the individual to society, and here Joad points out, again, that it is extremely difficult to be a good man in a bad society, and that communities change with the moral insight of the individuals who compose them, a variation which, we hope, represents progress. Finally, we arrive at Joad's definition of the ideal society, a definition, grounded upon a theory of ultimate value, in which lies, perhaps, the basic answer to the central question of ethics which we raised a moment ago.

An ideal community may be defined as one in which everybody wishes to do what he thinks right, and everybody thinks right what is in fact right; it is, in other words, a community in which the actions which people think right and habitually try to do are those which produce the best consequences, namely, those which contain and embody the greatest amounts of the values beauty, truth, moral virtue, and happiness.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 465. ¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 467-8.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL ESTIMATION

A. Criticism of Relativistic Positions. Let us now turn to a brief critical survey of the various views we have studied and consider, first, the relativistic positions.

There are a few criticisms of the general position which we may make at the outset. In the first place, we find that the onus of proof rests on the relativists, or subjectivists.¹ When we say, for instance, that "x is good", we mean to assert something objective about x; we do not mean only that people will feel an emotion of approval or satisfaction when they experience x. The latter, of course, is usually true, for good is such that we normally approve of it. But when we say "x is good", we say it because we have recognized the quality of goodness in it; it is that which contains something which is valuable in itself, or, it is that which manifests, in some form, ultimate value. This quality is such, as we have seen, that it cannot be described; it can only be recognized as good by virtue of the capacity innate in all men to recognize and pursue the good. That we do discover this quality in many of the things we experience is, it seems to us as to Professor Joad, the belief of most people; and if the relativist is to deny this, he must take upon himself the task of substantiating it.

¹ cf. G.E.M.Joad, Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics, p. 384.

Furthermore, if the relativist is correct, "x is good" means the same as "x is pleasant", or "x is approved of by me" or "x is expedient", a view which raises the question, How did the distinction between expedient and good ever come to be made? It is a common experience that we do make this distinction, that, for instance, we often say "x is good" when x is neither pleasant nor expedient. Relativism, then, fails to account for the existence in us of the moral notions. Experience indicates that the words "good" and "right" stand for concepts which we specifically distinguish from those denoted by the words "pleasant", "expedient", and "useful".

One of the chief reasons advanced in favour of relativism, we found, was derived from the variation evidenced in the things people called right and wrong, good and evil. Now such variation we found to be inevitable, due to training and environment, and not to be denied by the objectivist. But such an argument, when used as a basis for relativism, fails to establish the conclusion it asserts. It shows that circumstances determine people's views about right and good and morality, but it does not show that circumstances determine what is right and good and moral.² And, because we assume that people's views on these matters are not views about nothing, it does not show that there are no such things as right and good for people to have views about. It seems

² cf. Joad, op. cit., p. 386.

natural to suppose that there are such things, and that when we make moral judgments we are making judgments about the right and the good, about things which exist apart from circumstances and environment. There is, as Joad maintains, a distinction between right and what is thought to be right.

Finally, the argument that the meaning of the word "good" is not the same as that of any other word stands against relativism. This, we found, was advanced by Moore, who termed its denial the "naturalistic fallacy", and is closely related to our above argument concerning the existence of the moral notions. When we say "x is good", for instance, we are not intending to say only that "x is pleasant". If the latter were so, we would simply be saying "pleasant is pleasant"; it is obvious, however, that in saying "x is good" we intend a significant statement, not a tautology.

The relativistic positions we have examined are, by and large, subject to these general criticisms. Let us, however, take a brief glance at them separately, and determine if any further objections arise.

Hobbes, we found, presents us with a theory based upon an egoistic doctrine of man and the primacy of his instinctive desires for self-preservation and the attainment of pleasure. His conception of good and evil, in which he maintains that they are dependent upon individual desire in man's "natural state" and the will of the sovereign, by virtue of the social

contract, in society, stands as a thorough-going relativism.

Now if Hobbes is right in thinking that we are all egoists, he is faced with the necessity of answering the question: How did the belief in the existence of altruism arise? We have given reasons above for concluding that the moral notions cannot be accounted for on a theory which equates good and evil with desire and aversion, or expediency and uselessness. It is difficult to make the supposition that our feelings in regard to duty and our respect for goodness derive from non-ethical factors, chiefly because such a view presupposes that there was a time when human beings acknowledged no ethical motives. And if there was a time when no distinction was ~~drawn~~ between "x is good" and "x is pleasant", why did it ever come to be made? The distinction is obviously not meaningless -- not at the present time, at any rate -- for we do make it, and intend something significant in making it.

Nevertheless, we find the formal element in Hobbes' system to be unassailable.³ That every man, so far as he acts rationally, seeks what he believes to be his own good, is a principle lying at the basis of all human action. Our difference with Hobbes lies in connection with the material element. He assumes that the content of the good at which every person aims is determined by that person's particular desire, or by the will of his sovereign, not that it exists in the universe as a manifestation of ultimate value. The

³ R.A.P. Rogers, A Short History of Ethics (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1913), p. 137.

narrowness of his particular view leads him to assert that men can never desire the good of others, a fact which, we think, proves contrary to human nature.

Furthermore, there is a general inadequacy in his theory, inasmuch as the **issue** of his philosophy may be taken as disproof of the doctrine of exclusive egoism, with which he had started, for he insists that the individual must yield his personal authority and identify his will with that of the community. He ends by affirming that, although the good of society has to do, fundamentally, with that of its members, good itself can only be attained through cooperation of all within a society.

With Hume the criterion of moral good shifts from that which one desires to that which one approves of, and is then widened so as to read: that of which all men (or at least most) approve of. Now we do not deny that men generally approve of that which is good; they do, insofar as they correctly perceive it, for we maintain that ultimate value is such that men naturally desire it. But Hume makes the feeling of approval the criterion or basis for our distinction between good and evil, and in doing so falls under the general criticism we have offered above.

More particularly, we find difficulty with Hume's method of meeting objections to the general arguments against subjectivism. He claims that a right action is that of which

most men approve, and thus seeks to remove the distinction between right and wrong from the sphere of individual taste and make it a matter of **fact**. On this view, if the majority of those who consider an action x feel an emotion of approval for it, then x is right; if not, not.

This is to reduce the difference between right and wrong to a question of statistics: we decide the issue by counting heads.⁴

But, we object, when we say a thing is good, or an action right, we do not mean that a bare majority of those who consider it would be found to approve of it. It seems evident that, whatever we may mean, it is not such as would be determined in this fashion by a majority.

We found the theory of Westermarck to be also concerned with the emotion of moral approval, but whereas Hume's centred upon the feeling arising in the majority of men in the consideration of an object or action, Westermarck's is chiefly concerned with the argument from origins and the growth of the moral code. And whereas Hume maintains that we approve because pleasure results, Westermarck maintains that men approved (and, of course, that we approve) primarily because of expediency or usefulness to society.

Fundamentally then, his view, too, argues that moral evaluation is relative to the emotion felt by the individuals who pronounce judgment.

⁴ Joad, op. cit., p. 389.

If I am right in my assertion that the moral concepts intrinsically express a tendency to feel a moral emotion of either approval or disapproval, it is obvious that a judgment which contains such a concept may be said to be true if the person who pronounces it actually has a tendency to feel the emotion in question with reference to the subject of the judgment.⁵

Let us first consider two objections raised by Professors Moore and Ross respectively. They are both opposed to Westermarck's view. The former writes:

If two persons think they differ on a moral question (and it certainly appears as if they sometimes think so), they are always, on this view, making a mistake, and a mistake so gross that it seems hardly possible that they should make it,⁶

in reply to which Westermarck points out that two people can experience different feelings about things, as, for instance, food. Professor Ross agrees with Moore, however, and adds the argument that

if something, without changing its nature, at some moment aroused for the first time the feeling in some mind, we should clearly judge not that the object had first become good, but that its goodness had then first been apprehended.⁷

Westermarck replies:

This is simply implied in the common sense belief in the objectivity of moral values, which I have examined before. But it is certainly in perfect agreement with my theory of moral values that we may judge an act to have been good before it evoked moral approval in us, since our tendency to feel this emotion, which constitutes its goodness, is something quite different from our actual feeling of it.⁸

⁵ Westermarck, Ethical Relativity (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), pp. 141-2.

⁶ Quoted in ibid., p. 143.

⁷ Quoted in ibid., p. 144.

⁸ Westermarck, op. cit., p. 144.

In considering Westermarck's defence of subjectivity, we find that in his reply to Ross the two feelings, "a tendency to feel an emotion" and the "actual feeling of it" are not, in this context, clearly distinguished, and that here, as in his reply to Moore, the argument depends, ultimately, upon the conception one holds of the objectivity of moral values. The central point in Westermarck's thesis, we find, is to be discovered in his explanation of the origination of the moral concepts. We have seen that he postulated an emotion of approval or disapproval as the first fact, and that the action giving rise to this emotion was either accepted into or rejected from the moral code in accordance with the emotion felt. If the group were unanimous in its feeling of approval, then the act was deemed to be good. But at this point Westermarck's logic, in basing a theory of relativity upon such an explanation, seems questionable. Does this view not necessitate the objectivity of moral values? Why, we ask, was it that a majority of the tribe felt an emotion of approval toward a certain act? If Westermarck's theory is carried back a step, we find that it demands an objective viewpoint, for something in the intrinsic nature of the act must have caused an emotion of approval to be felt. And this something, we further suggest, was a manifestation of the value goodness, inasmuch as it was perceived to be present in the action concerned.

Furthermore, as indicated in our general criticism, we find that the argument from origins and the association of ideas cannot account for the moral notions themselves. Westermarck's argument presupposes that ethical sentiments arise out of non-ethical considerations, presupposes that there was a time when no distinction was made between "x is good" and "x is pleasant" or "x is expedient". On this assumption, then, there must have come a time when such a distinction first came to be made. But again we ask, why did this happen? The argument that it grew solely out of an association of ideas and terms, we think, is not sufficient to account for it.

Our study revealed Nietzsche as maintaining that good and evil are simply products of the rational will. As such they are removed from the sphere of rational criticism, and we are, in a sense, reduced to a criticism of Nietzsche the man, rather than Nietzsche the philosopher. Despite our opposition to relativism in general and to values as a product of man's will in particular, however, we find something valuable in Nietzsche's writings. This is to be found, first, in his view that man must consider his own nature, must be for himself, rather than yield to the dicta of worn-out creeds in establishing a foundation for moral evaluation. His warning against the blind obedience, exercised by so many, to authoritarian commands, is pertinent to our

investigation of the basis of a moral code, for if man concentrates upon the rules of the moral order rather than the source of that order, evil arises and prevents true moral action. Man becomes a slave to the order, instead of making it his instrument for good. He labors in order to produce goods, for later enjoyment, rather than to serve the demands of the moral sense and ultimate value. Nietzsche's theory thus directs our study away from immediate goods and to a concentration upon ultimate values.

But only in this negative fashion can we favorably criticize the doctrine of the will to power. In postulating a class society, Nietzsche makes an arbitrary division among men, a division which functions to cloud his perception of moral virtue and right action. There is no adequate basis, we think, for such a division. Similarly, if Nietzsche is a humanist, his ideal of human nature is a warped ideal, and his theory fails to attain objectivity, which humanism from its own standpoint assumes, to this degree. His final goal, too, the creation of a super race, seems to stand with no purpose or meaning; it only succeeds in directing human energy toward man and away from a recognition of ultimate values. For Nietzsche, we ask, if meaning is denied to man as he exists today, within nature (and this is his implication), how can it be ascribed to man as he will exist in the future, also within nature? The difference is only one of degree.

The position of the positivist was found to be contained in the maxim that moral judgments were meaningless, owing to the fact that their empirical verification was impossible. The individual feels something, Ayer would admit, but he could say nothing intelligible concerning it. Ethical statements are thus purely emotive.

We find Ayer's view to be inadequate on several grounds. To begin with, he fails to establish the contention that the emotive power of an ethical statement depends solely upon the words, signs, or symbols in which it is formulated or expressed. Does it not depend, we ask, upon the descriptive content of the assertion rather than the words used? Are the emotions in a listener aroused by the vocable or by the thought which the vocable signifies? The word "good", for instance, sometimes carries an emotive effect, and, at other times, if used in a special and unusual sense, the effect is absent. Also, the emotive effect sometimes depends upon the way in which "good" is used in a sentence:

When the word 'good' occurs in a question, such as: 'Is x good?', certainly it is neither intended to nor does it in fact have the effect of producing an emotional reaction in the hearer. On the other hand, when I finally assert "x is good", such effect is desired, and frequently takes place. The emotive theorist should feel obliged to give some reason for the difference in effect between these two occurrences of the same word, since presumably 'good' is being used in the same sense in the question as in the answer.⁹

⁹ John Ladd, "Value Judgments, Emotive Meaning, and Attitudes", Journal of Philosophy, Vol. XLVI, No.5., Mar.3., 1949.

If we conclude then, that the emotive effect of an ethical statement depends upon its descriptive content, meaning is returned to moral judgments and the nature of human good can be communicated from one individual to another.

The positivist position also fails to take into account the whole of present experience, and we maintain that the latter is vitally necessary to a complete interpretation of the good (or at least as complete as the human mind can achieve). In this respect, Ayer holds that only statements describing what people value or have valued are scientific and empirical, that only descriptive psychological and sociological generalizations or reports are admissible by empirical method, while all other statements, including principles of evaluation, are merely expressions of private prejudice. There is a difficulty here, we think, which lies in a faulty conception of experience.¹⁰ According to Ayer, experience is sensory apprehension, the awareness of sensory presentations, sense data, or *sensa*. But present experience involves more than mere mechanical recording. We must consider the telic structure of experience; in its major modes it is an apprehension of the given in terms of needs, purposes, and goals. And these needs, purposes, and goals, which spring from the nature of the human being, in conjunction with society, the external environment, and the historical situation, form an integral part of our intuition of right and good, for they

¹⁰ This is the criticism which Prof. D.W. Gotshalk has recently urged against the positivist position in value theory. Cf. "Outlines of a Relational Theory of Value", Ethics, Vol. LIX, No. 3., April, 1949.

represent the manifestations of ultimate value in human experience. It is this completeness or fulness of the situation which the positivist appears to overlook.

In claiming that moral statements are meaningless because they cannot be verified in sense-experience, we find, again, that the positivist has arbitrarily chosen to give a limited meaning to human experience. There is, as Professor Olaf Stapledon has pointed out,¹¹ another kind of experience in which they can be verified, namely moral experience. This is a characteristic of that existence which we know as human, and insofar as man is incapable of moral experience, he in that degree fails of being fully human. Ultimate value, existing outside us, demands that we express ourselves in moral action; if we fail to do this, we sink to a lower level of existence. Such experience is therefore real, and is, we think, sufficient for the verification of moral statements.

Our belief that there exists in the universe a factor known as ultimate value, and that moral virtue is a manifestation of this value, also serves to invalidate the basic contention of the positivist, that a priori synthetic judgments are impossible. We can, we maintain, meaningfully say, "x is good", through our innate capacity to recognize the quality goodness when we meet it, and by virtue of the fact that goodness does exist as ultimate and unique.

¹¹ Cf. Olaf Stapledon, Philosophy and Living (Penguin Books, 1939), Vol. I., p. 202.

This concludes our critical survey of the relativistic positions which were set forth in the preceding pages. We have found them, on the whole, to be unsatisfactory explanations of the basis of moral evaluation. Let us, however, before concluding our study, briefly consider the objectivistic theories.

B. Criticism of Objectivistic Positions. The objectivistic positions which our study considered we divided into two classes, those associated with the humanistic tradition, and those which maintained an intuitionistic position with regard to the recognition of moral value.

The objectivism of the humanist theories derives from the fact that value is not ascribed to objects because they arouse an emotion of a certain kind in men, but because they bear a certain relationship to facts which are assumed to be beyond human dispute. Value is thus removed from the sphere of taste, or emotional reaction, and placed in a realm where rational argument and scientific search for truth is capable of revealing the right and the good. Such theories do not remove value entirely from the sphere of relativism, but nevertheless maintain a position which is objectivistic in the sense that all men, regardless of individual preference or training, insofar as they are fully human, come to view the same things as good. The humanistic tradition, therefore, advocates a theory which we may class as "objective relativism".

Our study began by considering a view of moral evaluation which may be described as contextual. This is the theory of John Dewey, who maintains that moral value concerns man, not the universe, and that good and evil, right and wrong, arise from the structure of the human situation, arise out of the nature of our relations with our fellow-men. We must so control the situation, he maintains, that good will ensue for man. The guiding principle to the greater good is human control.

We find Dewey to be correct in insisting that moral value pertains to man and human nature, for, as we have seen, moral virtue is manifested in men, and it is through them that we recognize that form of ultimate value which is distinctively moral. We agree, too, in his advocacy of a greater and greater degree of human control as being a necessary factor in the creation of an ideal society, for it is a duty of the morally virtuous to improve the practical judgment and perfect rational insight into the consequences which will arise from certain actions.

It is in Dewey's criterion for determining the good, however, that we differ. He finds that a result is good if it contributes to the general happiness and well-being of the individual and his society, to a life which he would describe as "human". It is our view, on the contrary, that goodness is a unique quality in an act, an object, or a person,

which we recognize through an innate capacity, and through our previous acquaintance with it. A good result is such that it naturally conduces to "human" life, for the latter is also good and is thereby connected with the former; but a good result is not good because it does this; it is good simply because it is a manifestation of goodness.

Dewey is right, nevertheless, in maintaining that moral value would not be recognized by one who had lived his entire life divorced from social relationships. But the reason for this is not, as he holds, that moral values are social and derive their being from the fact of society. On the contrary, it is to be explained by the fact that the capacity to recognize the good remains, like any other capacity, latent unless occasions are provided for its exercise.

It is doubtful, that is to say, to revert to a familiar example, whether in a man deposited at birth on an uninhabited island, it would ever develop at all, for the reason that it is doubtful whether a congenital Robinson Crusoe could be considered fully human.¹²

The theories of Spinoza and Fromm are based upon an ideal of human nature, and derive their moral concepts, as well as the objectivism of the latter, from it. The good, for them, is that which promotes the ideally human life for man, and the evil is that which causes man to fall to a sub-human level. At the outset we can say that their views represent a reading of human nature which we think is correct and that

¹² Joad, op. cit., p. 437.

their theories postulate action which we deem to be conducive to the existence of good in human life. It is in consideration of the basis upon which they choose to ground the concepts good and evil that we differ from them.

Let us, for a moment, pursue the implications of the humanist contention. If moral evaluation is based solely upon a certain ideal of human nature, or human living, ethics is reduced to a series of what we may call rationalizations.¹³ The universe possesses no ethical characteristics, and ethical terms are without meaning apart from human minds. "Good" is something projected outwards onto the canvas of an ethically neutral universe, deriving its meaning only from the presence in the human mind of the ideal which it promotes and maintains.

It is our belief, on the other hand, that the universe is not ethically neutral. We believe, with Professor Joad, that it contains a factor which may be called first order value, and which is manifested in the forms beauty, truth, moral virtue, and happiness. Moral values, therefore, though recognized in men and in human society, are ultimately grounded in the nature of the universe in which we live. This is not to say, however, that society and environment are unrelated to our capacity to recognize and pursue the good -- and it is in this respect that the humanistic position carries a necessary and valuable emphasis. For the realization

¹³ Cf. Joad, op. cit., p. 359.

of the good depends upon good moral instruction given in a right environment; if the inborn possession of the soul, the capacity to come to know moral virtue, is not assisted by training and education, it will never consciously realize its innate potentiality. But, ~~where~~ the basis of moral judgment is concerned, and where the actual "seed" of the moral virtue that results in the individual is in question, we must emphasize that they are "not the creation of the moral instruction and the right environment any more than the blossom on the plant in the conservatory is the creation of the conservatory. The blossom springs from the seed which was there from the first; the conservatory provides the environment in which alone the seed can blossom."¹⁴

The general view presented by Moore and Ross maintains that "good" is a quality in objects which man recognizes through intuition, a theory substantially the same as that held by Joad. Their separate theories differ, we discovered, on minor points, but both hold that goodness is something in the object, not something aroused in man by the presence of an object, and that man possesses a moral faculty which enables him to intuit this property of objects. Moral value is thus grounded in something other than the human mind.

The central contention of Moore we found to be that good is an indefinable quality, and that actions which produce consequences containing this quality are right actions.

¹⁴ Joad, op. cit., p. 436.

In this we agree with Professor Moore, for it is our belief that good is a unique and ultimate value which is manifested to us as a permanent and indefinable quality of certain objects or events.

The position which Ross takes is one which separates intuitions of the good from intuitions of the right. He maintains that an action may be "right" even though it does not promote good. We fail to see his justification for making such a distinction, however, for it seems to us that an action cannot be morally right unless it leads to consequences which promote or contain goodness. We do agree with him, though, in his view that moral duty exercises an obligation upon us to act in its service. Ultimate value is such that we are moved to pursue it; we may, of course, choose not to obey the command of duty, but, we maintain, insofar as we truly recognize it, we feel obliged to act in realization of it.

In considering the views of Moore and Ross we find a tendency, uppermost in all intuitionistic theories, to neglect the situation as a whole in passing a moral judgment. It is this stress upon the complete situation which Dewey called to our attention, and which we maintain is a necessary factor in moral evaluation. Moore considers the consequences of a moral action, and seeks for the presence of the "good". Ross considers the action as an entity in itself, and judges, by intuition, as to its rightness or wrongness. We object, however,

and insist that the entire, complex situation must be taken into account.

The consequences are significant, for an act by itself may be ethically neutral. If, for instance, I move a pen across a paper, I do not commit an evil act. If, however, the action results in the forging of a cheque, I have promoted material greed, selfishness, suspicion, distrust, hate, etc., as forces in the universe of human society, elements which stand opposed to those things in which goodness is manifested. And the evilness of my act arose from its consequences, not from the physical movement of pen upon paper.

Similarly, the motives are significant. If, in the above instance, forgery were committed by a man in his sleep, by a lunatic, or under duress (while, for example, a pistol were being pointed at his head), we should probably withhold moral condemnation, or, at least, admit extenuating circumstances.¹⁵ Even if the forgery were committed freely, we should judge it less harshly if the intention were to obtain funds to feed a starving family. In such cases, our moral evaluation is not thoroughly condemnatory for the evil forces, which were present in pure forgery, are not present to the same extent; in fact, they may not be present at all. Considerations of motive, then, affect our judgments of actions.

We therefore find that when we are judging about a moral action, we are judging the whole of a complex situation, of

¹⁵ Cf. Joad, op. cit., p. 289.

which motive, act, and consequences all form parts. We must include the circumstances in which the act was performed, the temptations to which the agent was exposed, the heredity, the physiological constitution, the psychological disposition, the training, and the environment of the agent, the consequences which he expected to follow from his act, the consequences which, in the light of the facts known to him at the time, he was reasonably justified in expecting to follow, and the consequences which did in fact follow".¹⁶

A further criticism to which a strict intuitionism is subject is that the deliverances of the moral sense are often changing, arbitrary, and inconsistent. Here, however, we think that Professor Joad has adequately explained such "inconsistency", in pointing out that it is the inevitable result of bad training and bad environment which, thus far, characterize this imperfect world.

As a final position, then, we provisionally adopt that presented by Professor Joad. Even here, however, difficulties present themselves. To begin with, Joad assumes that a priori knowledge is possible, and we are faced with the well-known epistemological problem again. The logical positivists deny the validity of the a priori; the intuitionists affirm it; neither, however, has offered a final solution. Therefore, if Joad is to maintain the validity of a priori synthetic

¹⁶ Joad, op. cit., p. 291.

judgments, he must offer some explanation of how such judgments are possible -- and this he fails to do.

We thus do not deny that his theory may be characterized by inadequacies, but, by and large, it appears to offer, of the views we have studied, the most satisfactory account of the basis of moral evaluation and the nature of the moral concepts.

EP ILOGUE

Our study began with an inquiry into the basis of moral evaluation, by raising the question, Why do we say this is good and that evil? The answer which we have attempted to defend in the preceding pages is, at the most, tentative and suggestive. We have interpreted the moral concepts in terms of an ultimate or "first order" value, and this may seem vague and inadequate as an interpretation of a criterion so basic and so vital to human living. It does, nevertheless, appear to give us the truest and deepest insight into the meaning we attach to the words good and evil, right and wrong. We do not deny that, under certain circumstances, for purposes of guiding conduct, good can be interpreted as the satisfaction of human desire, the subject of general approval, the creation of the human will, or that which preserves man's being as a member of the human species; for a good man living in a good environment, such criteria might, under normal conditions, suffice. We do not think, however, that such answers explain what we really mean when we use the terms good and evil.

What we really mean by the concept of goodness, we have suggested, is a unique and ultimate quality which we recognize in those objects we assert to be good. Similarly, evil is

a real and independent existent in the universe, and, like goodness, unanalyzable. Moral evaluation, then, is objective, for good and evil are not relative concepts, are not values dependent upon human desire or taste, are not values capable of human creation. They derive and take their meaning from a unique and independent factor, that of ultimate value, which exists in the universe. The mind of man, furthermore, possesses an innate capacity to know the various ways in which ultimate value manifests itself in human experience, ways which we describe as moral virtue, beauty, truth, and happiness, and which we may call second order values. These, in turn, are recognized as being present in particular persons, actions, and things, or third order values.

We further suggest that training and education are necessary if human recognition of moral value in actions and objects is to be produced. This is a truth which Plato, long ago, revealed to us in the Dialogue called the Meno, in which he showed, through Socrates' questioning of a slave boy, that man possessed an innate capacity to know universals. That is, the human mind is so constructed that it connects things in a series or system, that when it comes into contact with an object, a residue of some sort is always left in the mind when the object is removed. Man has, then, a capacity for recognizing the universal in the particular, and, in the case of moral value, goodness is the universal and

second and third order values are the particulars. The ability of an individual to make moral distinctions cannot, therefore, be taught; it can, however, be brought out, be developed, and therein lies the value of training and education.

The quality of goodness, therefore, as a manifestation of ultimate value, is, we maintain, a factor in the universe, independent of the nature of man, considered in itself. It is a quality which men recognize and pursue, and which, because it exists as ultimate, and because men possess an innate capacity to know it, makes for richness and completeness in that life which we recognize as fully human. It is this quality, we maintain, that men are speaking of when they use the word good.

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