

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE ETHICS OF
BISHOP BUTLER

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Philosophy
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Maurice Alvin Edward Hardman
March 1952



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BUTLER'S LIFE AND TIMES	1
Butler's life	1
Butler's times	2
The Renaissance	2
Rationalism	6
The Enlightenment	7
Deism	9
The development of English ethics	12
Summary	26
II. BUTLER'S PLACE IN ENGLISH ETHICS	28
III. THE BASIC IMPULSES	37
The two kinds of basic impulses	37
Basic impulses disinterested	38
The basic impulses, self-love, and benevolence	41
Conclusions	43
IV. SELF-LOVE AND BENEVOLENCE	46
Self-love	46
Benevolence	49
Self-love and benevolence compared	54
Observations	56
Conclusion	57
V. CONSCIENCE	58
Conscience analysed	58

	iii
CHAPTER	PAGE
The authority of conscience	59
Conscience violated	65
Conscience and self-love	67
Conscience and benevolence	70
VI. VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS	72
Virtue	72
Virtue constitutional	72
Virtue and self-love	74
Virtue not benevolence	76
Virtue and duty	80
Happiness	82
The life of indulgence versus the life of virtue	82
Happiness analysed	84
Happiness and virtue	87
VII. BUTLER'S ETHICS IN RELATION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ETHICS	89
The ethics of orthodox Christian theology . .	91
The orthodox conception of the nature of God	91
Man's response to God	96
Butler's ethics and theology	99
His conception of the nature of God	101
Man's response to God	104
Conclusion	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	112

CHAPTER I

BUTLER'S LIFE AND TIMES¹

I. BUTLER'S LIFE

Joseph Butler was a man of the eighteenth century. He was born in 1692 at Wantage, England. The son of a prosperous English businessman, he was in a financial position to receive a good education. As a boy, he attended the Wantage grammar-school; later his father sent him to a Presbyterian academy where he began to study to enter the Presbyterian ministry. There Joseph distinguished himself academically. As the years passed, however, he found himself ever more out of sympathy with Presbyterian teachings; and eventually he persuaded his father to send him to Oriel College, Oxford, where he studied to enter the Anglican ministry. He was ordained deacon and priest at the age of twenty-six.

During his lifetime Butler held many important offices in the Anglican Church. That was due partly to his influential friends but also to his outstanding ability as a theologian and as a preacher. The year after he was ordained he was

¹ This account is based on the items in the Bibliography, the listings of which are followed by this symbol (#).

appointed preacher at the Rolls Chapel in London. It was while there that he delivered his Fifteen Sermons², in which he made his greatest contribution to the study of ethics. That work was published in 1726. In 1736 his other outstanding work, The Analogy of Religion³, was published. The latter treatise contained an argument against the attacks of Deism on orthodox Christianity, with a short treatise in the field of ethics -- Dissertation II -- appended to it. Among other positions which Butler held were: Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Bishop of Bristol, Bishop of Durham. On one occasion he was invited to become Archbishop of Canterbury, but he declined. He died in 1752.

II. BUTLER'S TIMES

The eighteenth century saw the first great development of ethical theory in modern times. The roots of that development extended backward to the Renaissance.

The Renaissance. The Renaissance was a transitional movement from the Middle Ages to the modern world, marked by

² Joseph Butler, Fifteen Sermons (London: 1726). See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202.

³ Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature (London: 1736). See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCLIX), Vol. I, pp. 312-323. It will be known throughout this thesis as the Analogy of Religion.

a revived appreciation throughout Western Europe of classic culture, a passionate enthusiasm for freedom and spontaneity, and a broadened range of human interests. That great movement of mankind, as it made itself felt in the realm of religion, is called the Reformation; and as it made itself felt in the academic or intellectual realm, the Revival of Learning.

The Renaissance had its beginnings in certain influences which were at work even as early as the Crusades. The Crusades carried countless men, from almost every walk of life, to the East; and what they found there impressed and inspired them greatly. While Europe had been involved in the tedious task of systematising Church dogmas during those centuries after the fall of Rome, when Eastern learning had all but been forgotten in the West, the Mohammedans had kept alive the philosophic search for truth. The works of Greek philosophy, especially those of Aristotle, had been preserved and studied, and a notable period of scientific activity had occurred. The crusaders found in that enlightened culture the means whereby they could express their humanity fully, in a spirit of advance and adventure, such as had been denied them by European Scholasticism. They soon developed a new interest in human affairs and in science, and they were caught up and filled with enthusiasm by the glory of their revealing discoveries. Naturally, they carried their enthusiasm home to Europe with them.

From then on, the society of the West was gradually transformed. The concept of authority was replaced by the concept of the free-thinking individual; the ecclesiastical ideal was replaced by the secular ideal; and the idea of international or supra-national jurisdiction, as afforded by the Pope, was replaced by nationalism. The outcome of the Crusades was not what the Church had anticipated. Contact with the highly-cultured Mohammedans had aroused in the crusaders a sympathy for their way of life and their theories of life. The hands of the kings had been strengthened, against the feudal lords on the one hand and against the Pope on the other, by the need for security and protection felt by both the travellers and the merchants. National rivalries had developed as a result of the mingling together of men from various countries. Above all, there had grown up the concept of the individual man as a self-contained unit, opposed to the Church's emphasis on the corporate nature of society.

The Renaissance first became an accomplished fact in Italy. In 1453 Constantinople, the capital of the eastern Roman Empire, was captured by the Turks. Many Greek scholars took refuge in Italy; and their residence there accelerated the new spirit which had been so recently implanted there by the crusaders. The result was dramatic and revolutionary. The old principles of learning and of morals were overthrown. A pagan culture grew up, which paid homage to beauty, to art

and literature, to sensualism -- indeed to all expressions of human nature. Along with the rest of Italy, the papal court was paganized. Almost all the Greek philosophies were revived.

In northern Europe, the Renaissance was not so extreme in character. Religion was not discredited with such vengeance as in Italy, and the result was the Reformation. Its leaders did not intend to abandon all religious principles, but rather to rescue the basic dogmas from the encumbrances of speculative and academic modifications with which they had been surrounded. Their justification for their actions lay in the freedom from papal control as taught by the spirit of the Renaissance, spurred on by the paganizing of the papal court, and supported by the growing nationalisms.

During the course of the years, the newly-awakened spirit of adventure and discovery led to many significant accomplishments. The map of the geographical world was changed by the discovery of America. The map of the astronomical world was changed by Copernicus, who showed the sun to be the centre of our system. This revised conception of the heavens disturbed the traditional ecclesiastical view of heaven, as being above the earth, and threw the thinking of countless Christians into confusion. The invention of gunpowder forced a new concept of authority upon men, and gave the common soldier the means of becoming as powerful as the noble. The invention of printing made possible the

spread of knowledge and culture to all classes.

Thus, after the long era of the Middle Ages, man had again become conscious of himself as an individual. The newly-discovered powers within his own nature had taught him that he was an individual, not just a member of society or of the Church. He had learned that he did not have to take orders from any outside authority, human or divine; and he had begun to sit in judgement on his environment, and to rearrange it to meet his own cravings. Political controls and religious dogmas became the objects of his investigation, and sometimes of his rebellion, instead of of his unquestioning respect and submission. All this meant, in philosophy, a revival of the legitimate philosophic quest for truth; and, in science, the beginning of a free investigation of, and experimentation with, nature, unhindered by ecclesiastical limitation.

Rationalism. With the establishment of the individual human reason as the final court of appeal in all matters, the first type of modern thought took the form of a scientific rationalism. Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz were the main leaders in an ambitious rationalistic movement, in which metaphysical systems, based on physics and mathematics, were invented and highly systematised. These men had unlimited faith in the ability of reason to discover the ultimate secrets of the universe. Dissatisfied with the old scholastic method of

reasoning, by which various theories were supported by citing authorities, the rationalists saw in mathematics a sure foundation for science. Whereas the scholastic arguments could continue endlessly as new authorities were found, the mathematical method, based on clear cut ideas and suppositions, could advance only in a definite direction, reaching deductive conclusions which were irrefutable.

Rationalism, however, proved to be just as unsatisfying to the human spirit as scholasticism had been. The problems of Descartes' dualism, Spinoza's God of thought and extension, and Leibnitz's monads, had little appeal to the popular mind. In its reaction against the authority of the past, rationalism had wandered away from human affairs, and become abstract and remote. The rationalists had mistaken their own individual reason for universal reason. They had condemned everything which they could not adjust to agree with the mathematical postulates which they had set up as the absolute criterion. They had lost contact with history, in which human feelings, hopes, and indeed the newly-discovered Renaissance spirit itself, had their province.

The Enlightenment. The Renaissance had been the effect of a great wave of enthusiasm, following on the re-discovery of eastern learning, which had swept everything before it. To the newly-awakened forces in man, nothing had seemed impossible: caution had been abandoned; any criticism of the human mind and

its workings had been superseded by faith in its unlimited capacity. As the impetus of the Renaissance slackened, however, a different outlook developed. Man's faith in his own powers waned. Metaphysical interests began to lose their appeal; and a sceptical attitude resulted. Perhaps man could never know the ultimate truths of the universe!

There were, however, things ready to hand which man would do well to investigate! Let him turn his attention from transcendental inquiries to everyday human affairs! Thus there became popular a new method of applying man's natural powers to the betterment of his own situation. Attention was turned to the human being himself, and an empirical approach was begun. The resulting period is called the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment is marked by an inherent distrust of vague concepts and ideals, by a hatred of abstract thought forms and mathematical formulae, and by a determination to apply the test of severe critical reason to everything and reject what was uncertain. Metaphysics was replaced by epistemology, and ideals were replaced by ideas, as the legitimate objects of human investigation. In the period of the Enlightenment, an advance was thus made over the original Renaissance quest for truth, for reason began to call itself in question.

The prime mover in the enlightened approach to the quest for truth was John Locke. He aimed to show the futility

of verbal arguments based on traditional assumptions which had never been tested by reason. In opposition to the rationalists, he contended that men should use their minds, not upon empty words and vague concepts, but upon real facts. The mind of man is competent, he said, to deal only with empirical certainties. Abstract concepts, both mathematical and religious, are beyond reason; and it is absurd for both the rationalists and the Church to demand compliance with their respective dogmas. Locke undertook an epistemological study of the mind and its workings.

Thus, after reason had been used as a justification for discarding the traditional beliefs of men, it was brought to trial before its own judgement-seat. This approach, begun by Locke, was further developed by Berkeley and Hume, and finally reached its logical conclusion -- scepticism.

Deism. A by-product of the Renaissance, and the movements which were inspired by it, was, in the field of religion, the Deistic movement. Deism aimed to free Christianity of its irrational elements. Its method was to call men back from the complications of dogmatic theology to the original simplicity and sweet reasonableness of the New Testament. The one essential article of faith found in its pages, it was claimed, is that of the Messiahship of Christ. Deism contended that there is no contradiction between reason and revelation: contradiction exists only between reason and the mysteries of Church

dogma, which the Church has added to the original revelation for purposes of exposition. Revelation was not intended to make religion mysterious, but only to corroborate, through its miracles, the simple reasonable truths of the Gospel.⁴

Deism thus, implicitly, taught that revelation is needless, for, after all, reason alone is competent to understand the nature of God. As opposed to the traditional religion of revelation, Deism established itself as a natural religion, free from any supernatural characteristics. In keeping with such claims, the influence of God in human affairs became ever more unnecessary to the Deists. Their theology became little more than a concept of God as a first cause, who created the universe, set it in motion, established laws by which it is to be controlled, and then retired to a region beyond the human situation. One of the laws God established before his retirement was the moral law, which was simple in nature. The simplicity of religion, claimed the Deists, had been perverted into a complicated maze of credal and devotional requirements by the orthodox Church, whose priests aimed to control the lives of believers.

By and large, Deism was unsuccessful in its attempt to

⁴ Arthur Kenyon Rogers, A Student's History of Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), p. 354. For a discussion of the various movements in Deism, see John Henry Blunt, Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology (London: Rivingtons, 1872), pp. 190-6.

disprove the need of revelation. The basis of the deistic arguments was justly attacked by its opponents. Deism opposed the Biblical account of God's dealings with the world, on the ground that they were inconsistent with his goodness and justice: the proper way for God to deal with man, who is a rational being, is through regular laws, not through the miraculous circumvention of laws. It contended that those regular laws are to be found in nature. Its opponents showed, however, that such arguments could be equally as well applied to the deistic God of nature, for there is no way of determining which laws, the natural or the miraculous, are the more regular. It was Joseph Butler, who, in his book entitled Analogy of Religion, put forward such an argument with lasting success and effect.⁵

The practical result of the Deistic movement was that religion, generally speaking, was reduced to a life of moral conduct, with little emphasis on dogma. Even the opponents of Deism placed their emphasis on morality, and were out of sympathy with the abstractions of theology.⁶

From this emphasis a very important consequence followed.

⁵ Butler thus showed that the claims of revealed religion are no less improbable than those of Deism. He did not successfully refute Deism. Cf. post p.110.

⁶ Cf. post p. 90.

The attempt to base morality on a foundation independent of theology, had aroused great interest in the study of ethics, and there followed the first large-scale development of ethical theory in modern times.

The Development of English Ethics. The theories of Hobbes (1588-1679), a contemporary of Descartes, provided the starting point for English ethics. His conception of selfish human nature, and the replies which it provoked, gave the original impetus to the study of ethics.

Hobbes' ethical speculation had its foundation in the conception of the "Law of Nature". This conception, which was at least as old as Stoicism, had played a prominent part in Scholastic thought. The needs which arose from the troubled conditions in Europe during the century before Hobbes had given a new prominence to it. With the springing up of various religious groups, and the sudden rise of national powers, questions as to the rights of sovereigns and the duties of subjects had to be decided. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant writers sought to supply the need for law and order by developing the conception of the Law of Nature.⁷

The Law of Nature was defined to mean those rules of

⁷ Cf. Henry Sidgwick, History of Ethics (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1925), p. 160 ff.

mutual behaviour which men should observe, derived, exclusive of revelation, from the very nature of man, insofar as man is not just an animal, but also the possessor of a unique desire to live with his fellows under settled conditions, and to act on general principles. The Law of Nature was said to be a part of divine law, unalterable even by God himself. On it were based such principles as: respect for another's goods, parental authority, fidelity of spouses, and the honouring of contractual agreements.

Alongside the conception of the Law of Nature, was a correlative conception of what was called a "State of Nature". The latter referred to a hypothetical state of man, supposed to have been in existence before man had developed political institutions. In the State of Nature, the Law of Nature had afforded a criterion of the principles of conduct mentioned above.

Grotius (1583-1645) and others had applied these conceptions to the political conditions of Europe, to determine the international rights and duties of the new nations. There had become prominent recently, however, a doubt as to the validity of Grotius' theories, for he had not given any ultimate reason for obeying the Law of Nature, nor had he adequately dealt with its basis in the nature of man.

It was in the answers which Hobbes gave to such questions that English ethics, independent of theological

ethics, had its beginning. Hobbes' psychology was bluntly materialistic. The reason for this lay in the great respect which he, like Descartes, had for mathematics and deduction. Unlike Descartes, however, Hobbes was opposed to any belief in the supernatural; so that whereas Descartes had confined a materialistic explanation to the realm of inanimate nature, Hobbes applied it universally, to the mental as well as to the material. The result was a completely materialistic psychology, and hence a completely materialistic philosophy. Hobbes taught that mind is material in nature, and that the process of thought, like every psychological process, is a movement of material. Mental feeling is a mere appearance of an inner material process. Pleasure he defined as essentially motion "helping vital action", and pain as motion "hindering" it. From that he concluded, without logical justification, that appetite or desire has always pleasure, or the absence of pain, for its goal. In moral psychology, Hobbes' basic teaching was that all of man's desires are naturally aimed at either the maintenance of life, or the intensification of it, which is pleasure. Indeed, Hobbes defined pleasure as the feeling or appearance of appetite, and pain as the feeling or appearance of aversion; and he defined the objects of appetite as "good", and the objects of aversion as "evil". He derived all of man's complex emotions from the simple passions, which were selfish and pleasure-seeking. Thus, for

example, he defined pity as grief for the calamity of others, resulting from a fear of the same calamity happening to oneself. He resolved man's social inclinations into either desire for reputation or desire for selfish betterment through the agency of others.

Hobbes implicitly denied the validity of the Law of Nature. If man were naturally selfish, he could and would have no respect for any law in his natural state, which was a state of war. His life would then be, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."⁸ It was the intolerableness of such conditions, said Hobbes, which brought about the establishment of society and government; for it was found that man's interests could better be advanced by this covenanted peace than by war. Society did not, however, he continued, arouse in man any non-egoistic motives. For the maintenance of the state therefore, not only must men enter into agreement to respect one another's rights, but the carrying out of that agreement must be guaranteed by the creation of a single governmental power with means at its disposal sufficiently strong to enforce its rulings.

Hobbes thought of such an organised state as the lesser of two evils: man would really rather have dominion than peace;

⁸ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (first edition, London: 1651), Part I, Chapter XIII.

but he would rather have peace without dominion than war with dominion. One consequence of Hobbes' theory was that concepts such as 'right' and 'morality' are artificial values, created by the state, apart from any revelation or other exterior influence. They relate only to man in society and not to man in his original solitude. By natural endowment, man has nothing but instincts of self-seeking and pleasure. It is consequently only indirectly reasonable that man should obey moral rules of behaviour. This latter point taught by Hobbes, though similar to the Epicurean outlook, is unique, in that even the indirect reasonableness of the basic moral rules is dependent on their general recognition, and this, in turn, is dependent on the influence of government. Hobbes insisted on the necessity of obeying the moral laws: man can best serve his selfish nature by making use of his reason, and his reason informs him it is the lesser of two evils to obey them.

Hobbes made use of two separate bases for his ethical doctrines. One was the theoretical basis of the principle of psychological egoism which, to him, justified ethical egoism -- that it is reasonable and right for each person to aim solely at his own pleasure. The other was the practical basis of the respect due to rulers, which implied that it is reasonable and right to do whatever is dictated by the established state. In both cases, the concepts of good and evil are relative.

The theories of Hobbes became the starting point for English ethics because of the many contradictory replies which they provoked. These replies were of two main types: the first was that of the first generation of orthodox ethicists after Hobbes, who attacked his theory of the dependence of social morality on the establishment of a social order; the second was that of Shaftesbury, who attacked his theory of psychological egoism. There is a further distinction to be made among those who adopted the first type of reply: some writers, including Cudworth, More, Clarke, and Wollaston followed what can be called the rationalistic approach to ethics; some others, including Cumberland and Locke, followed what can be called the jurial approach to ethics.

The rationalistic approach stressed the self-evidence of ethical principles, even abstracted from particular situations. Apart entirely from any consideration of their being defined as binding by any ruler, human or divine, the principles of ethics have an intrinsic relationship to man's rational will.

Cudworth (1617-1688), a Cambridge Platonist, developed this thesis by means of his conception of innate ideas of reason. He upheld the "eternal and essential distinctions of good and evil", apart from any arbitrary will, including, of course, that of Hobbes' ruler of society. Man becomes aware of these distinctions by "participating" in God's reason,

rather than in God's will. Cudworth did not go on to list the ethical principles intuited in such a manner by man's reason.

An exposition of those principles was given by Henry More (1614-1687), who was also a Cambridge Platonist. Some of the principles are admittedly based on a recognition of an egoistic element in human nature. There are others that require the sacrifice of egoistic inclinations, such as the positive statement of the Golden Rule. What motive the individual has for obeying these latter principles, More did not make clear, just as Cudworth did not. He might consistently have placed it in the rational will; but instead he explained that the rational will was supported by another faculty which he called the "boniform faculty". It was this latter faculty which apprehends the pleasure resultant upon the rational will's intuitive recognition; and the pleasure affords the motive. Thus More's theory was as hedonistic as Hobbes' in relation to the ultimate spring of moral action, though it was based on intuition instead of on a social contract.

Clark (1675-1729) was another ethicist who approached the problem of ethics from a rational intuitionistic point of view. Unlike More, Clark maintained that the awareness of self-evident principles is, in itself, a sufficient motive for a rational being to act in compliance with them, quite

independently of any pleasure or pain connected with them. Though, however, moral rules are binding apart from divine sanctions, nevertheless, he said, they are divine laws, with appropriate sanctions attached to them. He insisted that both these propositions were necessary, because God is a rational and a just being, and consequently must punish the evil-doer. Clark did not satisfactorily reconcile these two propositions, as far as common sense is concerned, though he did show their logical compatibility. He showed that from the abstract point of view, it is reasonable to prefer virtue to interest; but he had to admit that from the practical point of view, it is reasonable to prefer interest. He used the manifest difficulty of reconciling these two propositions about rightness, to demonstrate the need for theology to define ethical standards. Clark's ethical speculations also showed the impossibility of establishing ethics on an independent philosophical basis, so long as psychological egoism is admitted.

A different expression of the rationalistic approach was given by Wollaston (1660-1724). He contended that a wrong act is really a lie, or false judgement of the true relation of things. A person denies that true relation when he acts wrongly. In Wollaston's system, the rational recognition of truth, apart from pleasure or pain, is the sufficient motive to good conduct.

The jural approach to the problem of ethics thought of morality as a code of divine legislation, to be discovered by investigating the relation of man to God, independent of any artificial governmental sanctions. In other words, a certain act is right, because God has willed that it be right, not because it is inherently right, as a mathematical proposition is, nor because an earthly ruler has ruled it so.

Cumberland (1631-1718) adopted the jural approach. While he admitted that man has certain egoistic inclinations, he denied that man is wholly selfish, and maintained that certain social and benevolent affections are innate in man's nature. Man finds an immediate satisfaction in doing good to others, quite apart from any ulterior benefits he may hope to gain. Also, there is a natural connection between the welfare of the individual and the welfare of the state, so that the individual can be happy only when he subordinates himself to the good of mankind. This connection Cumberland called the "Law of Nature". This connection is based primarily on God's decree; not on any rationalistic basis.

It is then man's social nature which leads him to the performance of ethical actions, which Cumberland defined as those which tend to the common good. Cumberland, indeed, claimed that the standard of morality is the common good of all.⁹

⁹ Sidgwick, op. cit., p. 174.

He was the first to insist that all other moral laws must be determined by that standard.

As the "Law of Nature" is the result of God's decree, it is God's law which affords the ultimate motive to ethical actions. Cumberland's attempt to prove this was not too successful: instead of relying on the concept of innate ideas, as the intuitionists had done, he sought empirical evidence in the social nature of man. What he claimed to discover was that while in the first stages of moral obedience, man's motive lies in the knowledge of the sanctions of reward and punishment, which God has attached to the observance or violation of the Law of Nature, yet in the later stages it is possible for man, as a rational being, to obey out of love for God and the common good. He did not make clear how his discoveries proved his theory.

By being first to contend that the common good of all is the standard of morality, Cumberland laid a foundation on which the later Utilitarians built their systems. His own system, however, was far from complete: for he had no clear idea of the nature of the Good, and he did not put his own theory into practice by deducing particular moral laws from his standard; neither did he satisfactorily relate the ultimate and immediate motives of moral action.

Another ethicist who adopted the jural approach to the problem of ethics was Locke (1632-1704). It was he who

founded the empirical school of philosophy, as a reaction against rationalism. One of his basic principles, as an empiricist, was the denial of innate ideas. He did not, however, deny the possibility of intuition, and he stated that ethical rules can be scientifically constructed on principles intuitively known. These rules, he continued, are binding on man apart from any political society, insofar as they comprise the law of God. They can be constructed and formulated by considering the relations of men to God and to one another, without any reference to the common good as the ultimate end. Locke rejected the view that the mere apprehension by man's rational nature of the obligatoriness of such rules, is, or ought to be, a sufficient motive for his obeying them. Rather, motive power is provided by the sanction of reward and punishment which God has attached to them. Thus Locke, quite plainly, recognised egoistic tendencies in man's nature.

It should be noted that neither the jurial ethicists, Cumberland and Locke, nor the rational intuitionist ethicists, Cudworth, More, Clarke and Wollaston, in replying to Hobbes' theories, attacked with conviction his doctrine of psychological egoism. Many of them recognised his doctrine by admitting the necessity of rewards, in one form or another, to provide motive force for moral actions. The main attack of all of them was against Hobbes' doctrine that morality

depends on the establishment of a governmental ruler.

It was Shaftesbury (1671-1713) who eventually led the attack against Hobbes' doctrine of psychological egoism. His method was to look for a rationale for moral action and social duties, not in their reasonableness, but in their naturalness. The foregoing ethicists, emphasising the reasonableness of such action, had found an irreconcilable conflict between what man knew to be reasonably right, and that to which he felt himself psychologically inclined. Shaftesbury contended that in man's nature there is a natural harmony between tendencies to social duty and tendencies to self-regard. Man's nature, he declared, is not wholly selfish.

Shaftesbury began by denying Hobbes' egoistic definition of 'good': namely, that the objects of appetite are good. Such a definition, said Shaftesbury, could only apply if man existed in isolation. But man is a social individual, and consequently it is only the objects of his appetites, when the various inclinations in his nature, both social and self-regarding, are in harmony, that can be called good. We can call the individual good only when his motive is aimed at the common good, regardless of his outward actions.

Shaftesbury contended not only that man has natural social tendencies, but also that it is the proper blending of these tendencies with self-regarding tendencies, which alone

is conducive to the private good. There are, he said, three types of affections in man's nature: (1) "natural affections", defined as "such as are founded in love, complacency, goodwill, and sympathy with the kind"; (2) "self-affections", including bodily appetites, desire for fullness of life, and resentment at injury; and (3) "unnatural affections", including hateful and superstitious impulses. Shaftesbury contended that "natural affections" must be present if the individual is to be happy; that "self-affections" can be carried so far as to be detrimental to the individual; and that "unnatural affections" should be excluded altogether.

As to the source of motive power by which man, by blending his affections properly, aims at the common good, Shaftesbury said that it is the "moral sense". He held that any rational man would find it to his own benefit to maintain the balance of self-regarding and social affections which is conducive to the common good, even without the aid of the "moral sense"; but the "moral sense" furnishes an additional impulse to good conduct. By the "moral sense", Shaftesbury meant a unique faculty in every man, by which he is intuitively aware of good and evil. The "moral sense" detects, he said, not only impersonal objects, as being in themselves conducive to good or evil, but also personal relationships to objects, such as kindness, pity and their contraries. Thus, by reflection, the "moral sense" gives

rise to affections toward affections, and a love of goodness for its own sake. It is a fact, said Shaftesbury, that the "moral sense" is always in harmony with rational judgement as to just what is conducive to the common good; but a man does not have to deduce such conclusions, for he intuitively apprehends them. It should be noted that Shaftesbury taught implicitly that virtue lies, not in love for man, but in love for order and beauty and goodness for its own sake; and he harmonised, to his own satisfaction, his "natural affections" and his "self-affections" by subordinating them both to goodness for its own sake.

Shaftesbury made a new beginning in English ethics. He was not original in insisting that man is bound to his fellows by natural affections: indeed, Cumberland taught a similar theory. Shaftesbury was, however, the first to make that claim the central point in an ethical system. He was the first to direct ethical investigation to the emotional impulses that prompt social duty, and away from the rational apprehension of social duty as being based on either inherent rightness or jural legislation. He was the first to distinguish clearly the social and self-regarding impulses in man's nature. By his theory of the "moral sense", he introduced into ethical speculation a new concept, which later on, in the form of "conscience", played an important part in that speculation.

Shaftesbury's thought was developed by Hutcheson (1694-1747) into an elaborate system of moral philosophy; and eventually, through Hume (1711-1776), it influenced the later utilitarians. Joseph Butler (1692-1752) also adopted the substance of Shaftesbury's argument, though he revised it in important ways. Both orthodox theologians and freethinkers criticised Shaftesbury's teaching. The theologians criticised it because it was based on a theology of nature, rather than a revealed theology, and implied a deistic interpretation of the universe. The freethinkers criticised its conception of virtue. Mandeville (1670-1733), for example, insisted that all moral regulation is foreign to man's nature and imposed on him from without; so he, as a freethinker, could not accept Shaftesbury's contention that it is natural.

Summary. When Joseph Butler came upon the scene in England, he was faced, both as a bishop and as an ethicist, with great problems. The Renaissance, which had upset the political stability of western Europe, had upset also its philosophical stability as expressed by the scholastics, and its moral stability as vested in the authority of the Church. The individual thinker had come to consider himself as free from all outside restraints, both religious and political. Free-thinking ethicists, like Hobbes, had developed a corresponding ethical theory, which was still

popular, though many ethicists of note had denied or criticised it, and which contended that moral restraints are artificial and foreign to the human soul.¹⁰ Along with this ethical egoism went a religious outlook, developed by the Deists, which was a form of "natural" religion.¹¹ In his preface to his Analogy of Religion, Butler described conditions in eighteenth century England in these words:

It is come to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principle subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.¹²

10 This ethical theory Butler dealt with in his Fifteen Sermons, and in Dissertation II, appended to his Analogy of Religion.

11 Butler's direct discussion of Deism occurs in his Analogy of Religion (main text), though he did introduce the subject in his ethical writings. The interest of this thesis in Deism extends only to the degree that it has been so introduced. Cf. post p.89 ff.

12 Joseph Butler, "Analogy of Religion". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCXLIX), Vol. I, pp. lvi-299; p. lvi.

CHAPTER II

BUTLER'S PLACE IN ENGLISH ETHICS

Hobbes' theory of human nature provided the starting-place for the ethical discussions of Bishop Butler, as it did for the ethical discussions of the other English ethicists of the period. The immediate impetus for Butler's arguments, however, was provided by a more recently developed perversion of Hobbes' theory.

Hobbes had taught that, even though morality is the artificial product of a social contract, it is nevertheless obligatory on man as a rational being. In spite of the fact that unrestrained egoism is natural for man, Hobbes had said, conditions of social living are such that he is bound to restrain his egoism for his own benefit. There were not wanting, however, those who seized upon Hobbes' theory of psychological egoism as a rationale for teaching that if unrestrained egoism is natural, then it is right. It was against this latter theory that Butler launched his moral campaign.

In the preface to his Fifteen Sermons, Butler set forth his purpose in writing:

The following discourses . . . were intended to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it;¹ and by explaining to shew that the assertion is true.¹

¹ Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. ix.

Thus Butler's first task was to distinguish his theory, that virtue consists in following nature, from that of his opponents.² He contended that his theory was basically the same as that of both the ancient moralists and the generality of mankind of his own day. In order to fulfill his task, it was necessary that he explain what he meant by man's "nature".

It is a mistake, said Butler, to think of human nature as being merely a collection of its parts, just as it would be a mistake to think of a watch as being merely a collection of its parts. In the case of any constitution or system, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. To obtain a proper conception of the whole, the relations of the several parts to one another must be taken into consideration. When this is done in considering a watch, he said, it is evident that its nature is adapted to measure time. Likewise, when this is done in considering a man, it is evident that his nature is adapted to virtue:

² Butler's method throughout his ethical writings was based on naturalistic investigation. This same method was used by the Deists. The method of orthodox Christian ethics on the other hand, was based on the disclosures of the Christian revelation, rather than on a study of man's nature. Cf. post p. 89 f. and p. 99 ff.

It is from considering the relations which the several appetites and passions in the inward frame have to each other, and above all, the supremacy of reflection or conscience, that we get the idea of the system or constitution of human nature. And from the idea itself it will as fully appear, that this our nature, i.e. constitution, is adapted to virtue, as from the idea of a watch it appears, that its nature, i.e. constitution or system, is adapted to measure time.³

Butler's conception of human nature was complex, being similar to Shaftesbury's conception in many respects, yet differing in important ways. Butler made a distinction between two sides of man's nature, one side being naturally regulative, and the other side being naturally submissive. The submissive side consists of the several basic appetites, passions, and affections, which contribute to both public and private good, although each of them contributes primarily to either public or private good. The regulative side consists of: the principle he called "self-love", which regulates the basic impulses which tend primarily to private good;⁴ the principle he called "benevolence", which regulates the basic impulses which tend primarily to public good;⁵ and the principle he called "conscience", which is the supreme regulator in man's nature, under which self-love and benevolence are but subordinately regulative.

³ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xii.

⁴ Cf. post p. 46 ff.

⁵ Cf. post p. 49 ff.

Butler followed Shaftesbury in contending that social affections are just as natural in man as are self-affections; and that, as both are natural, it is conducive to man's happiness that both be blended together in practice in their proper proportion and place.

He used three arguments to show that man's nature is social. The first argument was the fact that, from empirical investigation, there is found to be a natural principle of benevolence in man, which has a similar relationship to society, to that which self-love has to the individual; and that we cannot advance either self-love or benevolence without automatically advancing the other. Secondly, the several basic appetites, passions, and affections, which are distinct from both benevolence and self-love, are, in general, as conducive to public good as to private good. In this connection, Butler advanced a new theory of pleasure, stating that none of the basic impulses aims at pleasure directly, but rather at a particular objective goal: pleasure is the result of the attainment of that goal. Thirdly, Butler argued that man's nature is social by pointing out that the reflective principle in man, called conscience, by which he approves and disapproves of actions, exercises itself in regard to the actions of other people as much as in regard to his own actions.

By means of these arguments, Butler conclusively refuted the validity of Hobbes' theory of psychological egoism. Furthermore, he maintained that, by means of their social nature, men have a natural attraction for one another:

Men are so much one body, that in a peculiar manner they feel for each other, shame, sudden danger, resentment, honour, prosperity, distress . . . and therefore to have no restraint from, no regard to others in our behaviour, is the speculative absurdity of considering ourselves as single and independent . . . and this is the same absurdity, as to suppose a hand, or any part to have no natural respect to any other, or to the whole body.⁶

It can be seen that to a considerable extent, Butler's theory of man's nature and Shaftesbury's theory were alike. Butler soon found, however, that he must part company with Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury had said that it is conducive to man's happiness that both his self-regarding and his social impulses be employed for the welfare of society as a whole. The validity of that statement, he had maintained, would be evident to anyone who rationally considered the matter, and he would thus be led to act in the proper moral manner. Man had, however, a peculiar faculty, by which he was intuitively informed of the moral worth of actions, and this faculty gave an additional impulse to good conduct.

⁶ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 12.

Shaftesbury called this faculty the "moral sense".

Butler pointed out that there was a great omission in Shaftesbury's arguments. During Butler's day, there were those who said that the expression of any natural impulse is right; and they defined "natural impulse" to mean any impulse suggested by any part of man's nature. Such a theory was often accompanied by that type of action which is commonly called immoral. Butler saw that Shaftesbury's position was not free from this difficulty. What it was necessary to make clear, said Butler, was that man's nature is not just a collection of equally authoritative principles and feelings. The principle of reflection or conscience is not just another principle, equal in status to the others. It is rather the supreme authority in the constitution of man's nature. It is not in keeping with man's nature to allow the principle of conscience to govern only when its temper is particularly keen and eager, and then to let other principles govern when they are stronger. Rather, conscience has authority at all times; indeed, it is our business, as moral agents, to bring the whole of our lives into conformity with it.

In the ethics of Shaftesbury, the concept of the authority of conscience is missing, and Butler deplored its omission. Though Shaftesbury had admitted that man feels an approbation of what is good, and a disapprobation of what is

bad, he had not, said Butler, noticed the fact that the very idea of reflex approbation implies authority and obligation to virtue.⁷ This implication, he continued, is extremely significant, for it means that, ". . . man is thus by his very nature a law to himself."⁸

The theory of the obligation to virtue, which Butler recognised to be implied in the reflex approbation and disapprobation of conscience, enabled him to overcome certain difficulties left unsettled by Shaftesbury. Thus, for example, Shaftesbury had said that in case there were a sceptic who did not agree with the claim that virtue is in man's interest and happiness, there would be no way of determining which of two impulses he ought to obey: his impulse to virtue or his impulse to self-interest. Butler pointed out that in such a case, the man would really have no impulse to virtue; and that consequently, he would have an impulse to self-interest only, which is, in effect, an obligation to self-interest. By introducing the authority implicit in the concept of reflex approbation and disapprobation, Butler showed that in no case could a dilemma exist, in which a man was not able to decide whether he should follow self-interest or virtue, for he would never be faced with the problem of choos-

7 Ibid., p. xvi.

8 Ibid., p. xviii.

ing between two impulses only, but rather between an impulse on the one hand, and a known obligation on the other. The authority of conscience gives man a definite obligation to virtue, while it can never be more than probable that vice is in man's interest. Thus man is obligated to virtue, quite apart from any consideration of his belief in a future life or a punitive authority.

As to the question of the nature of virtue, Butler, in his Fifteen Sermons, seems to have assumed that there was a general agreement among people that the sum of virtue is benevolence, i.e. regard to the common good. By the time he wrote Dissertation II, ten years later, he had recognised the possibility of a divergence between benevolence and the dictates of conscience, and he had taken his stand on the side of conscience. His ethical standard then became that which conscience dictates: namely, ". . . justice, veracity, and regard to common good."⁹

It was in such a fashion that Bishop Butler answered

⁹ Joseph Butler, "Dissertation II." See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCXLIX), Vol. I, pp. 312-323; p. 313.

those of his day who had inverted Hobbes' teaching and were claiming that it is right for man to give full expression to any of his impulses, without regard to the rest of his nature, or to other people. He did not simply state dogmatically the authority of conscience as over against the impulses to which his opponents were giving allegiance. Instead he used a more subtle argument, showing that indeed, what is natural is right; but that what is natural for man is not a life of unregulated egoism, but instead, a life lived in obedience to the authority of conscience; and that conscience is not an artificial fabrication, deriving from belief in the supernatural articles of faith of a revealed religion, but instead a natural element in the orderly constitution of his nature.

CHAPTER III

THE BASIC IMPULSES

According to Butler's theory, the submissive side of man's two-fold nature consists of what will here be called the basic impulses.

Butler referred to the basic impulses in man's nature as, "appetites, passions, affections".¹ They include all those deriving from man's bodily, mental, and social needs. Although Butler did not enumerate systematically all of the basic impulses, he did mention, in various places throughout his ethical writings, such of them as ambition, compassion, the love of power, sensual appetites, gratitude, resentment, curiosity, hunger, love of arts, fancy, any vagrant inclination, desire of esteem from others, contempt and esteem of others, hatred, love of society as distinct from affection to the good of it, indignation against successful vice.

The two kinds of basic impulses. Butler divided man's basic impulses into two kinds: those which tend primarily to the good of the self; and those which tend primarily to the good of the public. Though every basic impulse tends primar-

¹ Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. xi.

ily to one or other of these ends, still it advances the other end as well. The two kinds are complementary:

The sum is, men have various appetites, passions, and affections . . . all of these have a tendency to promote both public and private good, and may be considered as respecting others and ourselves equally and in common: but some of them seem most immediately to respect others, or tend to public good; others of them most immediately to respect self, or tend to private good.²

Indeed, Butler claimed that the two kinds of basic impulse are even more closely related, it being impossible to advance one without the other: ". . . their mutual coinciding, so that we can scarce promote one without the other, is equally a proof that we were made for both."³

Basic impulses disinterested. Hobbes had taught psychological egoism, stating that all of man's impulses are selfish and interested. Butler denied Hobbes' theory, and maintained that none of man's impulses is interested.⁴ Each basic impulse, he said, is aimed, not at the interest of the

² Ibid., p. 8.

³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴ In order to do this, Butler had to invent his own definition of "interest". It is foolish, he said, to speak of actions as "interested", which are done contrary to the known interest of the agent, just for the sake of gratifying an impulse. Therefore he limited the word "interest" to self-love and actions proceeding from it, which were, he said, directed to man's long-range interest.

self, but at its own appropriate naturally-appointed object. Butler was at particular pains, therefore, to distinguish the basic impulses from the regulative principles of self-love and benevolence; at the same time, in a footnote, he gave examples of the disinterested nature of both private and public impulses:

If any desire to see this distinction and comparison made in a particular instance . . . Hunger is to be considered as a private appetite; because the end for which it was given us is the preservation of the individual. Desire of esteem is a public passion; because the end for which it was given us is to regulate our behaviour towards society. The respect which this has to private good is as remote as the respect that has to public good: and the appetite is no more self-love, than the passion is benevolence. The object and end of the former is merely food; the object and end of the latter is merely esteem: but the latter can no more be gratified without contributing to the good of society; than the former can be gratified, without contributing to the preservation of the individual.⁵

To support his contention that the basic impulses are disinterested, Butler advanced a definitely non-Hobbist

⁵ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", *op. cit.*, p. 7. C. D. Broad, in Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 67, suggests a correction to Butler's contention that the object of hunger is food: "The object of an impulse is never, strictly speaking, a thing or person; it is always to change or preserve some state of a thing or person." Butler should, therefore, have said that the object of hunger is "to eat food". It should be noted that Broad's correction does not affect Butler's argument that the basic impulses are disinterested.

theory of pleasure. Hobbes had said that the object of an appetite, such as hunger, is pleasure: indeed, he even went so far as to say that the objects of the appetites constitute man's good. Butler claimed, instead, that the object of an appetite is not pleasure, but its own peculiar goal: the object of hunger is food. Pleasure, he said, is that which results when the appetite achieves its object.⁶ The resultant pleasure is based on a natural connection between the impulse and its object:

That all particular appetites and passions are towards external things themselves, distinct from the pleasure arising from them, is manifested from hence; that there could not be this pleasure, were it not for that prior suitableness between the object and the passion: there could be no enjoyment or delight from one thing more than another, from eating food more than from swallowing a stone, if there were not an affection or appetite to one thing more than another.⁷

6 Broad, op. cit., pp. 68-71, remarks that Butler's theory of the disinterestedness of the basic impulses seems odd at first sight. For instance, is it not nonsense to say that hunger is disinterested? It is only by reference to Butler's own definition of "interest", says Broad, that this difficulty can be overcome. Broad attempts to clarify the situation by making four observations about the basic impulses, all of which were called "disinterested" by Butler: First, some impulses have their exciting causes in the agent (hunger), some in other persons (pity), some in inanimate objects (covetousness); Second, some impulses aim at producing results within the agent himself (hunger), some in other men (pity), some in inanimate objects (blind rage); Third, the collateral effects of satisfying an impulse may be in the agent, or in others, or in both; Fourth, the pleasures of satisfied impulse and the pains of frustrated impulse are naturally confined to the owner of the impulse. Some of these impulses, Broad notes, are of special interest to self-love. However, none of them aims directly at the general welfare of the self, and hence, none of them is to be called "interested", according to Butler's definition.

7 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 131.

The basic impulses, self-love, and benevolence.⁸ The distinction between the basic impulses and the subordinately-regulative principles of self-love and benevolence is manifest, said Butler, by the fact that the basic impulses may, upon occasion, function independently of the regulative principles:

. . . they [men] are often set on work by the particular passions themselves, and a considerable part of life is spent in the actual gratification of them, i.e. is employed, not by self-love, but by the passions.⁹

The distinction is shown also by the fact that that independence may develop into actual conflict: either kind of basic impulse may work contrary to its corresponding regulative principle, by operating out of the due proportion assigned to it by the constitution of man's nature. Thus, Butler said:

. . . as they [men] neglect the duties they owe to their fellow creatures, to which their nature leads them . . . so there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification.¹⁰

⁸ Butler discussed these relationships at some length. It is noteworthy that in the illustrations he used, self-love appeared much more frequently than benevolence. This was probably due to his own lack of clarity regarding the nature of benevolence. Cf. post p. 49.

⁹ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xxiii.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

In spite, however, of the fact that a basic impulse may sometimes work in opposition to a regulative principle, the normal procedure, said Butler, is for the principle to regulate the impulse: ". . . if passion prevails over self-love, the consequent action is unnatural; but if self-love prevails over passion, the action is natural . . ."11. Thus, for example, when a person is miserable, for some reason or other, self-love effects a remedy of the situation by arousing one of the basic impulses to seek its appropriate goal, the achieving of which affords satisfaction to the person. Even in such a case, it should be noted, the goal of the basic impulse is not the satisfaction of the person, but its own natural and disinterested object.

Furthermore, Butler continued, the basic impulse is absolutely necessary to the functioning of the regulative principle. The regulative principle can express itself through the basic impulse only:

. . . the very idea of an interested pursuit necessarily presupposes particular passions or appetites; since the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object. It is not because we love ourselves that we find delight in such and such objects, but because we have particular affections towards them. Take away these affections, and you leave self-love absolutely nothing at all to employ itself about; no end

11 Ibid., p. 25.



or object for it to pursue, excepting only that of avoiding pain.¹²

Butler pointed out the practical difficulty of sometimes not being able to determine precisely how much an action has been inspired by self-love and how much by a particular basic impulse. That is so, he said, because the two are often mutually responsible for inspiring an action, but that difficulty does not alter the fact that self-love and the particular basic impulse are distinct entities.¹³

Conclusions. From his consideration of the basic impulses, Butler reached three conclusions.

His first conclusion was that, because "Self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good, as any affection whatever"¹⁴, and because any basic impulse, ". . . has absolutely no bound or measure, but what is set to it by this self-love, or moral considerations"¹⁵, therefore ". . .

12 Ibid., p. xxiii. "Avoiding pain" is a negative expression of self-love. It is doubtful whether the concept has any content.

13 Broad, op. cit., p. 70, observes that actions originally done from particular impulses, may subsequently be done from benevolence or self-love. Thus, a boy may originally play cricket simply because he likes it; but, when he becomes a man, he may play it to teach it to boy scouts, because of benevolence.

14 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xxv.

15 Ibid., p. xxvii.

self-love, though confined to the interest of this life, is, of the two, a much better guide "16. The following of this principle, said Butler, prevents numerous follies and vices.

Butler's second conclusion was that man's nature is social, and not, as Hobbes had said, selfish; for, "the several passions and affections, which are distinct both from benevolence and self-love, do in general contribute and lead us to public good as really as to private."17

In saying this, Butler anticipated than an objection might be raised against it: that, though man may have socially-inclined principles in his nature, yet he has also inclinations which lead him to do evil to others, and it is consequently not correct to say he has a social nature. Butler answered that objection by saying that man has no evil-inclined impulses: man no more has ill-will toward others than he has self-hatred. What man does have is eager desires after certain external objects. Sometimes these desires run contrary to his benevolence or his self-love.

Butler's third conclusion was that people are

16 Loc. cit.

17 Ibid., p. 6.

instruments in the hands of God. The fact that when man acts upon a basic impulse tending primarily to the good of the self, he automatically acts for the good of the public also, and the fact that when man acts upon a basic impulse tending primarily to the good of the public, he automatically acts for the good of the self also, are:

. . . instances of our Maker's care and love both for the individual and the species, and proofs that he intended we should be instruments of good to each other, as well as that we should be so to ourselves.¹⁸

18 Ibid., p. 9.

CHAPTER IV

SELF-LOVE AND BENEVOLENCE

The two subordinately regulative principles in Butler's ethical system are "self-love" and "benevolence".

Self-love. Butler did not give any one precise definition of "self-love". No doubt he assumed that the term itself would be self-explanatory. He did, however, make certain statements which reveal his meaning. For example, he said, "Self-love . . . is an affection to ourselves; a regard to our own interest, happiness, and private good."¹ Again, he used the expression, ". . . the cool principle of self-love, or general desire of our own happiness."² It is noteworthy that Butler described self-love as a "cool principle"; for he distinguished it very thoroughly from the basic impulses. Whereas the impulses are impetuous in nature, self-love has a definite reflective factor in it. It is that reflective factor which makes it a "general desire", and provides the basis for its being a regulative principle in the

¹ Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. 132.

² Loc. cit.

constitution of man's nature. That self-love is a regulative principle, Butler made clear, when he stated:

. . . if passion prevails over self-love, the consequent action is unnatural; but if self-love prevails over passion, the action is natural: it is manifest that self-love is in human nature a superior principle to passion.³

Butler pointed out that, as self-love is a regulative principle, it must have something to regulate, if it is to function at all. It is consequently dependent upon the basic impulses for its operation.⁴

There are many moralists who are eager to denounce self-interest as evil. With such moralists, Butler disagreed: "Self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good, as any affection whatever."⁵ Indeed, Butler claimed that men usually have not enough self-interest: "The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough" ⁶ If men had more self-interest, i.e. if self-interest were strong enough that it were not diverted from its pathway by any basic impulse, then men

3 Ibid., p. 25.

4 The opposite is not the case: cf. ante., p.41. As to the dependence of self-love on the basic impulses, cf. ante., p. 42.

5 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xxv.

6 Loc. cit.

would be spared from many of their vices and follies. To support his contention, Butler claimed that Christianity recognised the good nature of self-love:

. . . religion, from whence arises our strongest obligation to benevolence, is so far from disowning the principle of self-love, that it often addresses itself to that very principle, and always to the mind in that state when reason presides.

In spite, however, of the need for man to possess a stronger self-love, it is possible for self-love to work to the detriment of man's interest, by being, as sometimes happens, too strong comparatively, and displacing the proper functioning of the basic impulses:

People may love themselves with the most entire and unbounded affection, and yet be extremely miserable. Neither can self-love in any way help out, but by setting them on work to get rid of the causes of their misery, to gain or make use of those objects which are by nature adapted to afford satisfaction. Happiness or satisfaction comes only in the enjoyment of those objects, which are by nature suited to our several particular appetites, passions, and affections. So that if self-love wholly engrosses us, and leaves no room for any other principle, there can be absolutely no such thing at all as happiness.⁸

Therefore, said Butler, self-love must control itself: " . . . even from self-love we should endeavour to get over all inordinate regard to, and consideration of ourselves."⁹

7 Ibid., p. 145.

8 Ibid., p. 133.

9 Ibid., p. 134.

As to the immediate regulative influence of self-love in the constitution of man's nature, Butler made a revealing comment:

The influence which it has seems plainly owing to its being constant and habitual, which it cannot but be, and not to the degree or strength of it. Every caprice of the imagination . . . is perpetually showing its weakness, by prevailing over it.¹⁰

Thus Butler made it clear that self-love, though a regulative principle, has not the advantage of authority to enforce its considered regulative opinions. To that extent Butler's "self-love" was similar to Shaftesbury's "moral sense". It will be seen later¹¹ that Butler alleged to supply the need for authority in his concept of "conscience".

Benevolence. One evident inconsistency in Butler's theory of human nature is his concept of "benevolence". It appears that he had not formulated in his own mind a clear idea of benevolence as a separate entity, distinct on the one side from the basic impulses, and on the other side from conscience.

Butler made many statements implying that benevolence is a general and regulative principle, designed to regulate the basic impulses which tend primarily to the good of

10 Ibid., p. xxv.

11 Cf. post., p.60.

society, just as self-love is designed to regulate the basic impulses which tend primarily to the good of the individual. Thus, for example, in Sermon Eleven, he stated:

Self-love and interestedness was stated to consist in or be an affection to ourselves, a regard to our own private good: it is therefore distinct from benevolence, which is an affection to the good of our fellow creatures.¹²

Again, at the beginning of Sermon One, he implied that benevolence is a regulative principle, when he said: ". . . there is a natural principle of benevolence in man; which is in some degree to society, what self-love is to the individual."¹³

Butler, on the other hand, made many statements implying that benevolence is simply a particular basic impulse, directed to a particular person. Thus, for example, in Sermon One, immediately following the next before quotation (13), he said:

And if there be in mankind any disposition to friendship; if there be any such thing as compassion, for compassion is momentary love; if there be any such thing as the paternal or filial affections; if there be any affection in human nature, the object and end of which is the good of another, this is itself benevolence or the love of another.¹⁴

In addition to making such an implication, Butler, in

12 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 135.

13 Ibid., p. 4.

14 Ibid., p. 5.

many places, definitely stated that benevolence is a particular impulse. For example, in Sermon Eleven he said: "Every particular affection, even the love of our neighbour" ¹⁵ Again, in the same sermon, he used these words:

Thus it appears that there is no peculiar contrariety between self-love and benevolence; no greater competition between these, than between any other particular affections and self-love. ¹⁶

In still another place in Sermon Eleven, he made a statement which, more clearly than the others mentioned, shows his uncertain mind. Indeed, he spoke of benevolence in both senses at once:

Happiness consists in the gratification of certain affections, appetites, passions . . . Love of our neighbour is one of these affections. This, considered as a virtuous principle, is gratified by a consciousness of endeavouring to promote the good of others; but considered as a natural affection, its gratification consists in the actual accomplishment of this endeavour. ¹⁷

In addition to these conflicting uses ¹⁸ of the term,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁸ C. D. Broad, in Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 73, suggests a solution. He contends that benevolence is a general principle, just as is self-love. From the point of view of self-love, says Broad, benevolence is just one impulse among many: but from the point of view of benevolence, self-love is just one impulse among many. This theory of Broad seems reasonable; but there is no evidence that Butler held it. On the other hand, there is no conclusive evidence that Butler may not have held it.

Butler further manifested his own lack of clarity in regard to it, by making this casual definition: ". . . being in good humour, which is benevolence while it lasts, is itself the temper of satisfaction . . ."19

So then, Butler, in his attempt to define a concept, about which he was not himself clear, gave three independent definitions of "benevolence": benevolence is a regulative principle; benevolence is a basic impulse; benevolence is good humour. Sidgwick noted that Butler did not, ". . . distinctly recognise a calm regard for general happiness as a normal governing principle parallel to the calm regard for private happiness which he calls self-love."20 Such a recognition would have given to Butler's ethical system a good deal of the consistency which it lacks.

Butler had said, in connection with self-love, that it would be to man's welfare if it were stronger, comparatively, in his constitution. The same thing is true, he said, of benevolence:

The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems

19 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 139.

20 Henry Sidgwick, History of Ethics (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1925), p. 195.

plainly owing to their being so much engaged in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love.²¹

Thus, in the cases of both self-love and benevolence disharmony may arise because of the strength and impetuosity of the basic impulses. Also, Butler had said that self-love may operate to excess, and militate against the welfare of the self. The same is true, he contended, in connection with benevolence:

Benevolence toward particular persons may be to a degree of weakness, and so be blamable; and disinterestedness is so far from being in itself commendable, that the utmost possible depravity that we can in imagination conceive, is that of disinterested cruelty.²²

In the former case, Butler had said that it is the responsibility of self-love to keep itself operating in due degree. He did not here complete the analogy by saying that benevolence should keep itself operating in due degree; neither did he explain whether benevolence should be controlled by self-love or conscience. This omission was probably due to his own uncertainty about the nature of benevolence. It would seem that, according to Butler's system, benevolence should be controlled by conscience, if it is a regulative principle, and by self-love, if it is a

21 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xxv.

22 Loc. cit.

particular basic impulse.

Self-love and benevolence compared. As a result of Butler's uncertainty as to the real nature of benevolence, he sometimes, in comparing benevolence and self-love, compared a regulative principle to a regulative principle, and sometimes he compared a particular basic impulse to a regulative principle. In all cases, however, he contended that self-love and benevolence are not contrary; and indeed, that they are complementary. As, "Every particular affection, even the love of our neighbour, is as really our own affection as self-love; and the pleasure arising from its gratification is as much my own pleasure as the pleasure self-love would have . . . "23, and as, " . . . benevolence is no more disinterested than any of the common particular passions . . . "24, it is evident that, " . . . benevolence is not in any respect more at variance with self-love, than any other particular affection whatever . . . "25, and, " . . . self-love and benevolence . . . are not to be opposed, but only distinguished from each other . . . "26 Not only, said

23 Ibid., p. 131.

24 Ibid., p. xxiv.

25 Loc. cit.

26 Loc. cit.

Butler, is there no opposition between self-love and benevolence themselves, but neither is there any opposition between the courses of action to which they respectively lead. That they are complementary, Butler stated in these words:

Though benevolence and self-love are different; though the former tends most directly to public good, and the latter to private; yet they are so perfectly coincident that the greatest satisfactions to ourselves depend upon our having benevolence in a due degree; and that self-love is one chief security of our behaviour towards society.²⁷

Butler discussed at some length the problem of the ambiguous use of the word "interest" and its derivatives. It is foolish, he said, to call an action "interested", just because it gratifies a basic impulse, as Hobbes and the Epicureans had done; for it may also contradict man's overall interest, as taught him by self-love. It is better to call only those actions which proceed from self-love "interested", and those which seek a particular goal, deriving from a basic impulse, "disinterested", because:

The principle we call self-love never seeks anything external for the sake of the thing, but only as a means of happiness or good: particular affections rest in the external things themselves.²⁸

27 Ibid., p. 6.

28 Ibid., p. 131.

Observations. Butler made three general observations in connection with man's nature.

First, he observed:

The general mistake that there is some greater inconsistency between endeavouring to promote the good of another and self-interest, than between self-interest and pursuing anything else, seems, as hath already been hinted, to arise from our notions of property; and to be carried out by this property's being supposed to be itself our happiness or good.²⁹

If property and happiness were synonymous, said Butler, then by increasing the property of another, one would be decreasing his own property; and in that case, benevolence would run contrary to self-love.

Second, Butler observed that benevolence, not only is no more disinterested than any other basic impulse, but that, indeed, ". . . in one respect benevolence contributes more to private interest, i.e. enjoyment or satisfaction, than any other of the particular common affections, as it is in a degree its own gratification."³⁰ To illustrate this, he compared the benevolent man to the man of personal ambition. In the case where each of them is successful in his pursuit, the benevolent man achieves as much satisfaction as the personally ambitious: in the case where each of them is disappointed, the benevolent man still has the satisfaction

29 Ibid., p. 143.

30 Ibid., p. 145.

of knowing that he had engaged in a virtuous pursuit, while the personally ambitious has nothing.

Third, Butler observed that the benevolent principles in man's nature are not violated any more frequently than those tending to private good:

. . . men in fact as much and as often contradict that part of their nature which respects self, and which leads them to their own private good and happiness; as they contradict that part of it which respects society, and tends to public good.³¹

Conclusion. One conclusion which Butler reached from his consideration of self-love and benevolence, was that, because they both may function either deficiently or to excess, satisfaction for man can result only when they function to their constitutional degrees. The implication of that statement is that both self-love and benevolence must be regulated by some higher principle. Butler contended that that higher principle is "conscience".

31 Ibid., p. 14.

CHAPTER V

CONSCIENCE

Butler's unique contribution to the study of ethics was his theory of "conscience", in which he claimed to supply the authority required in the constitution of man's nature, if virtue is to consist "in following nature".

That man has a conscience, said Butler, is recognised by all:

That we have this moral approving and disapproving faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourselves, and recognising it in each other whether it is called conscience, moral reason, moral sense, or divine reason; whether considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart; or, which seems the truth, as including both.¹

Conscience analysed. Butler discovered that there are several different factors involved in the faculty of conscience. Among those he mentioned were: reflection and the power to survey, judgement of right and wrong, approval or disapproval, discernment of good and ill desert, superintendency, direction. The following quotations illustrate these factors:

¹ Joseph Butler, "Dissertation II". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCXLIX), Vol. I, pp. 312-323; p. 312.

. . . there is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of the heart, as well as his external actions: which passes judgement upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good; others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust; which without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly²

. . . our sense or discernment of actions as morally good or evil, implies in it a sense or discernment of them as of good or ill desert. . . . Upon considering then, or viewing together, our notion of vice and that of misery, there results a third, that of ill desert. And thus there is in human creatures an association of the two ideas, natural and moral evil, wickedness and punishment.³

. . . that principle, by which we survey . . . [is] to be considered . . . as being superior; . . . insomuch as you cannot form a notion of this faculty, conscience,⁴ without taking in judgement, direction, superintendency.

. . . this faculty was placed within to be our proper governor; to direct and regulate all under principles, passions, and motives of action.⁵

The authority of conscience. Shaftesbury had included in his ethical system, a peculiar faculty, which he called the "moral sense". By means of the moral sense,

² Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. ix.

³ Butler, "Dissertation II", op. cit., p. 315.

⁴ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 27.

⁵ Loc. cit.

man was able intuitively to recognise moral good and moral evil. The moral sense alleviated the necessity of man's deducing by reason, right courses of action. The moral sense had not, however, as Butler pointed out, any authority implicit in it; and consequently it was ineffectual, he said, in guiding man's conduct. Shaftesbury's system was merely an arrangement of impulses, in which there had to be maintained a certain balance and harmony, to keep the system in good condition.

In Butler's conception of the constitution of man's nature, he was particularly concerned to supply the needed authority. As was mentioned earlier⁶, he denied that the principles and basic impulses in man's constitution are equal except in regard to strength⁷: rather, he said, just as in a society some men have authority over others, so in man's nature, some principles have authority over others. Thus, he explained, "All this is no more than the distinction, which everybody is acquainted with, between mere power and authority"⁸ In that way, Butler arrived

6 Cf. ante Chapter II.

7 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 21. Here Butler noted: "If by following nature were meant only acting as we please, it would indeed be ridiculous to speak of nature as any guide in morals"

8 Ibid., p. 27.

at his conception of the submissive and regulative sides of man's nature, and gave to conscience the position of supreme regulator and ultimate authority.

He began by showing that there is a gradation of principles in man's constitution. Comparing the place of passion and the place of self-love in a rash act, he noted that if man were to, ". . . act according to that principle or inclination which for the present happens to be strongest . . ." ⁹, he might at the same time be acting, ". . . in a way disproportionate to, and [violating] his real proper nature" ¹⁰ Then, considering the possible relationships between passion and self-love, Butler concluded that it is natural for self-love to prevail over passion, and unnatural for passion to prevail over self-love. That is because, he said, there is a difference in kind between the two, self-love being a superior principle to passion. "Thus, without particular consideration of conscience, we may have a clear conception of the superior nature of one inward principle to another . . ." ¹¹

That being established, Butler went on to show that conscience is supreme over all. The argument he used to do

9 Ibid., p. 24.

10 Loc. cit.

11 Ibid., p. 26.

so was simple. He merely claimed that authority implicitly resides in any principle which naturally approves and disapproves of situations: ". . . this authority, which is implied in the idea of reflex approbation or disapprobation"12 Thus a man is obligated to do that which his conscience approves, and he is obligated not to do that which his conscience disapproves, when, and only when13, the functioning of conscience is "reflex".14

As a result of that implicit authority, said Butler, man's constitution provides him with his own moral law:

This prerogative, this natural supremacy, of the faculty which surveys, approves or disapproves the several affections of our mind and actions of our lives, being that by which men are a law to themselves"15

It is by this faculty, natural to man, that he is a moral agent, that he is a law to himself: but this faculty, I say, not to be considered merely as a principle in his heart, which is to have some influence as well as others; but considered as a faculty in kind

12 Ibid., p. xvi.

13 The functioning of conscience is always reflex when it refers to the actions or inner principles of ourselves. Sometimes, however, it functions in reference to others; and in those cases, while it still approves or disapproves, it has no authority. It is not reflex then.

14 Butler made no attempt to justify his contention, that authority naturally resides in the idea of reflex approbation and disapprobation, except by an implicit appeal to the introspection of his hearers.

15 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 24.

and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so.¹⁶

The practical effect of man's being, by his very constitution, a law to himself, said Butler, is that man is naturally bound to live virtuously, quite apart from any exterior dictates.¹⁷ This is so because man is, by conscience, immediately aware of a certain obligation to virtue; whereas any supposed obligations to his self-interest through vice, can never be more than probable, " . . . and thus the certain obligation would entirely supersede and destroy the uncertain one" ¹⁸

A corollary of this, Butler said, is that man is a responsible agent:

Our constitution is put in our own power. We are charged with it; and therefore are accountable for any disorder or violation of it.

Thus nothing can possibly be more contrary to nature than vice, meaning by nature not only the several parts¹⁹ of our internal frame, but also the constitution of it.

Furthermore, it is not enough that man should accept

16 Loc. cit.

17 Cf. Ibid., p. 32. Here Butler said: " . . . man by his nature is a law to himself, without the particular distinct consideration of the positive sanctions of that law; the rewards and punishments which we feel, and those which from the light of reason we have ground to believe, are annexed to it."

18 Ibid., p. xvii. Butler pointed out that the violation of a known obligation is recognised as an offence by even civil justice, quite apart from any divine sanction.

19 Ibid., p. xii.

the dictates of conscience, only when conscience initiates the process. Rather, man must positively submit all his actions to the judgement of conscience, and then obey it:

. . . in reality the very constitution of our nature requires, that we bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty; wait its determination; enforce upon ourselves its authority, and make it the business of our lives, as it is absolutely the whole business of a moral agent, to conform ourselves to it. This is the true meaning of that ancient precept, Reverence thyself.
20

As to the question, whether the dictates of conscience are in keeping with the dictates of God, which would be a very important question to any theist considering the adoption of Butler's ethical system, Butler answered in the affirmative. First, he noticed that conscience, as it judges and approves or condemns situations, ". . . if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course, goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own."²¹ The implication of this is that conscience is "sacred": "Conscience . . . carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide; the guide assigned us by the

20 Ibid., p. xvi. C. D. Broad, in Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 79, remarks: "I do not think that Butler means to say that every trivial detail of our lives must be solemnly debated before the tribunal of conscience." Butler's statement in Sermon XI, that "Disengagement is absolutely necessary to enjoyment . . .", would seem to support Broad's interpretation.

21 Ibid., p. 23.

Author of our nature"22 Butler denied the possibility, or at least the practical possibility, of the conscience's ever rebelling against God; and claimed that conscience is to be obeyed, even apart from any rationalising of its authority which may occur as a result of belief in revelation:

. . . exclusive of revelation, man cannot be considered as a creature left by his Maker to act at random, and live at large up to the extent of his natural power, as passion, humour, willfulness, happen to carry him; which is the condition brute creatures are in . . . [for] he hath the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attends to it.²³

Conscience violated. Although there is inherent authority in conscience, it is a fact that man frequently violates his conscience:

This indeed is impossible, to do that which is good and not to approve of it . . . [but the opposite is not the case] for men often approve of the actions of others, which they will not imitate, and likewise do that which they approve not.²⁴

Butler described how this comes about, when he said:

. . . as in civil government the constitution is broken in upon, and violated by power and strength prevailing over authority; so the constitution of man is broken in upon and violated by the lower faculties

22 Ibid., p. 32.

23 Ibid., p. 31.

24 Ibid., p. 10.

or principles within prevailing over that which is in its nature supreme over them all.²⁵

Thus, the reason Butler gave for the violation of the authority of conscience was the same as that for the violation of the subordinately regulative principles, self-love and benevolence: a lower principle, by reason of its brute force, revolts against its regulator or regulators. He observed, that in the case of the violation of conscience, as in the violation of self-love or benevolence, man neglects his real interest for the sake of the gratification of an impulse: "How many instances in which persons manifestly go through more pains and self-denial to gratify a vicious passion, than would have been necessary to the conquest of it!"²⁶

What is lacking, as concerns man's welfare, is sufficient strength for conscience to enforce its dictates: "Had it strength, as it had right; had it power as it had manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world."²⁷

Butler had earlier pointed out that self-love and benevolence may not only function with deficient strength, but also function excessively. Both conditions are detrimental to man. Here he pointed out that conscience may function with

25 Ibid., p. 30.

26 Ibid., p. 35.

27 Ibid., p. 27.

deficient strength; but he made no mention of the possibility of conscience's functioning excessively. This is undoubtedly the result of the fact that in Butler's system of human nature, conscience occupies the position of supreme and ultimate authority. The appeal of conscience is not to the welfare of either the self or society, but to God, whose instrument it is. Butler noted that disengagement is absolutely necessary to man's welfare;²⁸ but a man may be completely engaged in giving obedience to conscience, and yet be happy, because obedience to conscience is an objective pursuit.

Conscience and self-love. Butler taught that self-love and conscience, being parts of the constitution of man's nature, are naturally harmonious, and that their natural harmony is not often disturbed:

In the common course of life, there is seldom any inconsistency between our duty and what is called interest: it is much seldomer that there is an inconsistency between duty and what is really our present interest; meaning by interest, happiness and satisfaction. Self-love then, though confined to the interest of the present world, does in general perfectly coincide with virtue; and leads us to one and the same course of life Whatever exceptions there are to this . . . are much fewer than they are commonly thought²⁹

28 Cf. post p. 87.

29 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 35.

There do exist, however, some apparent cases of inconsistency; but, said Butler, if we take into consideration the future, ". . . all things shall be set right at the final distribution of things".³⁰ Any final inconsistency is impossible; as perfect harmony is implied in the conception of an administration by a perfect mind. This was, of course, an appeal to religion.

As to the cases which do, nevertheless, exist, Butler seemed unwilling to state explicitly, as the whole of his ethical system would require, that conscience is to be preferred to self-love. In some places he indicated that the two principles are of parallel superiority. For example, he said:

Reasonable self-love and conscience are the chief or superior principles in the nature of man: because an action may be suitable to this nature, though all other principles be violated; but becomes unsuitable, if either of those are.³¹

In other places, Butler apparently gave a slight precedence to self-love, in theory, although he maintained that no inconsistency could exist in fact. Thus, he said:

. . . our ideas of happiness and misery are of all our ideas the nearest and most important to us; that they will, nay if you please, that they ought to prevail over those of order, and beauty, and harmony, and proportion, if there ever should be, as it is

30 Loc. cit.

31 Ibid., p. 36.

impossible there ever should be, any inconsistency between them: though these last too, as expressing the fitness of actions, are as real as truth itself. Let it be allowed, though virtue and moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good, as such; yet, that when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it.³²

Butler's reservations as to the possible inconsistency between man's duty and his self-interest, are an indication of his complete honesty. As he pointed out, it is only in rare cases that the question arises. It would have been easy for Butler to overlook those cases, but he was more interested in being completely truthful, than in being completely consistent.

The result was that Butler was content to leave his ethical system inconsistent, and to recognise that a difficulty remained. He himself was certain that ultimately it would be seen that, in these rare cases, the inconsistency is only apparent; just as even now, there is seen to be no inconsistency in the vast majority of cases. In the meantime, he said, it is reasonable to assume that duty and self-interest are harmonious, until proof to the contrary is given.³³ Such proof can never be given, because the dictates

32 Ibid., p. 145.

33 Henry Sidgwick, History of Ethics (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1925), p. 197.

of conscience are always certain, whereas the calculations of self-interest are always uncertain.³⁴

Conscience and benevolence. Just as conscience is harmonious with self-love, said Butler, so it is harmonious with the other subordinate regulative principle, benevolence:

This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves . . . is conscience . . . And that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon.³⁵

Butler gave a specific example of how conscience harmonizes with, and supports, benevolence:

. . . a parent has the affection of love to his children: this leads him to take care of . . . them; the natural affection leads to this: but the reflection that it is his proper business, what belongs to him, that it is right and commendable so to do; this added to the affection becomes a much more settled principle, and carries him on through more labour and difficulties for the sake of his children, than he would undergo from that affection alone³⁶

As to the question, whether conscience respects self-love or benevolence more, Butler said, ". . . it plainly tends as much to the latter [benevolence] as to the former, and is commonly thought to tend chiefly to the

³⁴ This problem is undoubtedly related, in Butler's ethics, to the problem of the nature of virtue. Cf. post., p. 74 ff.

³⁵ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 9.

³⁶ Loc. cit.

latter." 37

37 Ibid., p. 10.

CHAPTER VI

VIRTUE AND HAPPINESS

In Butler's ethical system, the concepts of "virtue" and "happiness" are intimately related; for his contention is that a virtuous life is the surest means to happiness.

I. VIRTUE

Most of Butler's ethical statements are contained in his Fifteen Sermons. His views on the nature of virtue, however, are to be found, both in that work and in Dissertation II, which was appended to his Analogy of Religion. The latter work was written ten years later than the former; and it can be seen that Butler considerably modified his views during the interim.

Virtue constitutional. Closely related to Butler's theory of the nature of conscience, was his contention that man's constitution is adapted to virtue. Such a view, he affirmed, had been held by the ancient moralists, whose position was, ". . . that man is born to virtue, that it consists in following nature, and that vice is more contrary to this nature than tortures or death . . ." ¹ From his own

¹ Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. ix.

consideration of the constitution of man's nature, with its various submissive and regulative principles, Butler stated his position thus:

It is from considering the relations which these several appetites and passions in the inward frame have to each other, and, above all, the supremacy of reflection or conscience, that we get the idea of the system or constitution of human nature. And from the idea itself it will as fully appear, that this our nature, i.e. constitution, is adapted to virtue, as from the idea of a watch it appears, that its nature, i.e. constitution or system, is adapted to measure time.²

Butler exemplified his position by explaining the relationship of man's self-regarding and benevolent principles:

The nature of man considered in his single capacity, and with respect only to the present world, is adapted and leads him to attain the greatest happiness he can for himself in the present world. The nature of man considered in his public or social capacity leads him to a right behaviour in society, to that course of life we call virtue.³

He pointed out, in agreement with the ancient moralists, an important moral implication of this position, namely, "Thus nothing can possibly be more contrary to nature than

2 Ibid., p. xii.

3 Ibid., p. 15.

vice Poverty and disgrace are not so contrary to it."⁴

Butler then went on to claim that virtue is not only natural for man, but also obligatory upon him. He did this by employing the same argument with which he had proved the authority of conscience. Shaftesbury had shown that virtue is naturally man's happiness; Butler showed it to be man's duty, implicit in his having a conscience:

Take in then that authority and obligation, which is a constituent part of this reflex approbation, and it will undeniably follow, though a man should doubt of everything else, yet, that he would still remain under the nearest and most certain obligation to the practice of virtue; an obligation implied in the very idea of virtue, in the very idea of reflex approbation.⁵

Man's knowledge of where his duty and his path of virtuous conduct lies, said Butler, is immediately known to him, by the reflex functioning of conscience. If he claims that his duty lies along the path of vicious conduct, he is being dishonest.

Virtue and self-love. According to Butler, virtue and self-love are not in opposition to each other: ". . . self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest, are not to

⁴ Ibid., p. xii.

⁵ Ibid., p. xviii.

be opposed, but only distinguished from each other"6
 The lack of opposition between them can be seen, said Butler, by the fact that they are independent: " . . . we may judge and determine that an action is morally good or evil, before we so much as consider whether it be interested or disinterested."7 Also, virtue is a natural affection: it may be pursued, therefore, as an end in itself, just as other natural affections may. Consequently, as it has its own particular goal, its goal cannot be opposed to self-love.

The delicate question of the theoretically possible, though practically impossible, conflict between the dictates of self-love and the dictates of conscience, arose also in connection with virtue. The reason for this was that it is virtuous conduct that conscience dictates. Here again, the same inconsistency which was noted earlier8 is to be seen:

. . . though virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good, as such, yet when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our

6 Ibid., p. xxiv. Butler here equates virtue and benevolence.

7 Ibid., p. xxv.

8 Cf. ante, pp. 67 ff.

happiness or at least not contrary to it.⁹

Virtue not benevolence. Butler's final conception of the nature of virtue showed a marked development over those of his predecessors. Cumberland had been the founder of utilitarianism: he had been the first to state that the standard of virtue is the common good of all,¹⁰ i.e. benevolence.¹¹ Likewise, Shaftesbury had followed Cumberland's utilitarianism, in stating that only those actions which tend to the good of society can be called "good".¹²

With this limited conception of virtue, Butler was not content. At the time of the writing of his Fifteen Sermons, he had already become skeptical of the utilitarian theory, and by the time of the writing of his Dissertation II, ten years later, he quite explicitly contradicted it.

There are some references, in the earlier pages of the Fifteen Sermons, which imply that virtue is synonymous with benevolence. In the Preface, for example, he said: ". . . self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest, are not

9 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 145.

10 Cf. ante p.21.

11 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 135. Butler here said benevolence is, ". . . an affection to the good of our fellow creatures."

12 Cf. ante p.23.

to be opposed"13 Soon, however, it is implied that the concept of virtue contains more than just benevolence. In Sermon I, something more than the happiness of society seems to be meant: "The nature of man . . . leads him to a right behaviour in society, to that course of life we call virtue."¹⁴ Again, in Sermon XI, the same is implied: ". . . virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good"15 Then, in Sermon XII, there is an apparent reversion to the original position. In this sermon Butler proposed to consider what is meant when it is said that all virtues are included in the moral precept "love thy neighbour as thyself".

This contention, said Butler, must be understood in a certain setting:

Thus, when benevolence is said to be the sum of virtue, it is not spoken of as a blind propension, but as a principle in reasonable creatures, and so to be directed by their reason: for reason and reflection comes into our notion of a moral agent.¹⁶

The function of reason here is to inform man to what degrees, and to what people, his benevolence is to be expressed. Man is more obligated to some people, near relatives

13 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xxiv.

14 Ibid., p. 15.

15 Ibid., p. 145.

16 Ibid., p. 160.

for example, than to others. By giving man this information, reason, in effect, informs him what acts of benevolence are most conducive to the common good.¹⁷ Reason being thus included, it is true to say that benevolence leads man to the common good. Now, the common good is happiness, for it is the only thing of real consequence to mankind. The sum of all virtues is included in benevolence: "We can therefore owe no man anything, but only to further and promote his happiness" ¹⁸ "From hence", concluded Butler, "it is manifest that the common virtues, and the common vices, may be traced up to benevolence or the want of it."¹⁹ This conclusion to Sermon XII seems at variance with what he had been formerly implying -- that benevolence alone is not an adequate standard of virtue. In a footnote to Sermon XII, however, Butler once again reversed his position, and even gave instances to show that virtue is more comprehensive than benevolence. The footnote was undoubtedly written

17 Though Butler said that reason is to be recognised as a factor in benevolence, still his emphasis on reason is an indication that benevolence alone is an inadequate standard of virtue. Certainly if Butler was thinking of benevolence as "good humour", it would be aimless and inadequate.

18 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op., cit., p. 161.

19 Ibid., p. 163.

after the main body of the sermon was delivered.²⁰ In it, Butler pointed out that such things as greatness of mind, fidelity, honour, and strict justice, are considered by all to be virtuous, " . . . in quite another view than as conducive to the happiness . . . of the world."²¹

By the time he wrote Dissertation II, Butler's position was clear. He openly attacked the utilitarian theory of the standard of virtue, and explained more fully the position he had adopted in the footnote. He gave a precise definition of the standard of virtue:

For as much as it has been disputed wherein virtue consists, or whatever ground for doubt there may be about particulars; yet in general, there is in reality an universally acknowledged standard of it . . . namely, justice, veracity, and regard to common good.²²

To make his contention evident, he analysed the factors involved in the moral approbation or disapprobation effected by conscience. He found that those moral judgments are based on actions, motives, and abilities, rather than on events: whether the resulting events are conducive to the common good, is beside the point. He concluded that:

20 C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 81, suggests that Butler's inconsistency is to be explained by the fact that here he was not speaking as a philosopher, but as a preacher, trying earnestly to recommend the practice of benevolence to people who lacked it.

21 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 164.

22 Joseph Butler, "Dissertation II". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCXLIX), Vol. I, pp. 312-323; p. 313.

. . . benevolence, and the want of it, singly considered, are in no sort the whole of virtue and vice. For if this were the case, in the review of one's own character, or that of others, our moral understanding and moral sense would be indifferent to everything, but the degrees in which benevolence prevailed²³

One particular case in point, which Butler mentioned, was that of prudence, which is a virtue, and directed, not to benevolence, but to self-interest.

Virtue and duty. It follows from these considerations, argued Butler, that man's duty lies, not in attempting to bring about the greatest happiness of all, as he sees fit, but rather " . . . within the bounds of veracity and justice, to contribute to the ease, convenience, and even cheerfulness and diversion of our fellow creatures"²⁴ Man's duty is to follow the dictates of his conscience, which is God's instrument. Butler maintained:

. . . as we are not competent judges, what is upon the whole for the good of the world, there may be other immediate ends appointed us to pursue, besides that one of doing good or producing happiness. Though the good of creation be the only end of the Author of it, yet he may have laid us under particular obligations, which we may discern and feel ourselves under, quite distinct from a perception, that the observance or violation of them is for the happiness or misery of our fellow creatures.²⁵

23 Ibid., p. 319.

24 Ibid., p. 322.

25 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 163.

. . . the happiness of the world is the concern of him who is the lord and proprietor of it; nor do we know what we are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways but those which he has directed; that is, indeed, in all ways not contrary to veracity and justice.²⁶

Butler made no attempt to list the moral regulations dictated by conscience; nor indeed, did he try to show their self-evident reasonableness. He was content to leave moral judgements, as the need for them arose, to conscience. He definitely rejected the utilitarian theory of the standard of virtue; and took his stand with intuitional ethics, making his whole system dependent on his most important concept, that of conscience.

It is interesting to note that he did not deny the possibility that, though man is not an utilitarian in ethics, God might be.

26 Butler, "Dissertation II", op. cit., p. 322.

II. HAPPINESS

Butler found that, on the one hand, happiness is closely related to both self-love and the basic impulses, and that it consists in a moderate indulgence of sensual appetite; and that, on the other hand, it is closely related to duty and virtue, and consists in a total expression of virtuous conduct.

The life of indulgence versus the life of virtue.

Butler observed that many people think happiness is to be found in a life of indulgence:

Take a survey of mankind: the world in general, the good and bad, almost without exception, equally are agreed, that were religion out of the case, the happiness of the present life would consist in a manner wholly in riches, honours, sensual gratification . . .

With such people Butler heartily disagreed:

. . . on the contrary . . . persons in the greatest affluence of fortune are no happier than such as have only a competency; . . . the cares and disappointments of ambition for the most part far exceed the satisfactions of it; . . . [as seen in] the miserable intervals of intemperance and excess, and the many untimely deaths occasioned by a dissolute course of life.²⁷

Butler's belief was that happiness is rather to be found in the life of virtuous conduct:

Let it not be taken for granted that the temper of

27 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 14.

28 Loc. cit.

envy, rage, resentment, yields greater delight than meekness, forgiveness, compassion, and good will; especially when it is acknowledged that rage, envy, resentment, are in themselves mere miseries; and the satisfaction arising from the indulgence of them is little more than relief from that misery; whereas the temper of compassion and benevolence is itself delightful; and the indulgence of it, by doing good, affords new positive delight and enjoyment. Let it not be taken for granted, that the satisfaction arising from the reputation of riches and power . . . is greater than the satisfaction arising from the reputation of justice, honesty, charity, and the esteem which is universally acknowledged to be their due . . . the man of virtue is by no means upon a disadvantage in this respect.²⁹

He gave, as an illustration of his contention, the case of the man of personal ambition and the man of benevolence.³⁰ He claimed that if both were successful in their pursuits, the benevolent man would certainly have as much satisfaction as the personally ambitious; whereas, if both were disappointed in their pursuits, while the ambitious man would have nothing, the benevolent man would still be gratified by his awareness that he had undertaken a virtuous pursuit.

Furthermore, said Butler, there have been people in all ages who have followed a virtuous course of conduct, because of their belief in God. They have professed that in the exercise of charity they found satisfaction.

29 Ibid., p. 34.

30 Here Butler considered benevolence to be a particular affection.

Believing that God is present everywhere, they could find no satisfaction in vice; and they have claimed that the satisfaction of referring all their actions to God, " . . . is a more continued settled satisfaction than any this world can afford."³¹ With such people, Butler was in full accord: "Will anyone take upon him to say . . . that such a person has not consulted so well for himself, for the satisfaction and peace of his own mind, as the ambitious or dissolute man?"³² He concluded:

. . . that he who has given up all the advantages of the present world, rather than violate his conscience and the relations of life, has infinitely better provided for himself, and secured his own interest and happiness.³³

Happiness analysed. In order to explain what happiness consists in, Butler introduced his theory of disinterested pleasure.³⁴ Hobbes had said that man's basic impulses, and indeed all other of his impulses, aim directly at pleasure. Butler maintained instead that the basic impulses aim, not at pleasure, but each at its own particular disinterested object; and he gave the example of hunger, aiming at food, not at the pleasure of eating food. The only principle in man which does aim at happi-

31 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 140.

32 Loc. cit.

33 Ibid., p. 37.

34 Cf. ante p. 39.

ness³⁵, said Butler, is self-love; and indeed, aiming at happiness is the only function of self-love:

. . . private happiness or good is all which self-love can make us desire, or be concerned about: in having this consists its gratification: it is an affection to ourselves; a regard to our own interest, happiness, and private good.³⁶

Self-love can not, however, achieve happiness alone.

It must work through one or more of the basic impulses:

" . . . by setting them [people] on work to . . . make use of those objects which are by nature adapted to afford satisfaction."³⁷ This is because, " . . . the very idea of interest or happiness consists in this, that an appetite or affection enjoys its object."³⁸

It is as the result of one or more of his basic impulses' achieving its object, that happiness is experienced by a man: "These particular enjoyments make up the sum total of our happiness" ³⁹ Butler made it clear that,

35 Hobbes and his followers equated pleasure and happiness.

36 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 132.

37 Ibid., p. 133.

38 Ibid., p. xxiii.

39 Ibid., p. 139. Butler noted that because, " . . . any affection tends to the happiness of another, does not hinder its tending to one's own happiness too." Ibid., p. 139. Cf. post p.105 f.

in spite of the fact that, " . . . nothing can be of consequence to mankind or any creature, but happiness"⁴⁰, and in spite of the fact that, " . . . when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it."⁴¹, still, "Happiness does not consist in self-love. The desire of happiness is no more the thing itself, than the desire of riches is the possession or enjoyment of them."⁴²

Butler pointed out a corollary of this: that self-love may even work contrary to our happiness, if it operates to excess:

Happiness or satisfaction consists only in the enjoyment of those objects, which are by nature suited to our several particular appetites, passions, and affections. So that if self-love wholly engrosses us, and leaves no room for any other principle, there can be absolutely no such thing at all as happiness. . . .⁴³

Man can then achieve his greatest happiness, as far as self-love and its control of the basic impulses are concerned, by following the road of moderation: "Can anything be more manifest, than that the happiness of life consists in these [riches, honours, sensual gratifications]

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 145.

⁴² Ibid., p. 133.

⁴³ Loc. cit.



possessed and enjoyed only to a certain degree"44

Happiness and virtue. The implication of all this is, Butler remarked, that, "Disengagement is absolutely necessary to enjoyment".45 He might have gone on to remark that an objective disengagement could be attained through a universal submission to the dictates of conscience, i.e. duty.46 Though he did not mention this theoretical truth, he did mention the practical advantageous consequences of such a practice:

Duty and interest are perfectly coincident; for the most part in this world, but entirely and in every instance if we take in the future, and the whole; this being implied in the notion of a good and perfect administration of things.47

Thus, Butler taught that man ought to find happiness in the fulfillment of duty, which is virtue; rather than to engage in a direct pursuit of happiness. To support his teaching, he referred to divine sanctions:

The happiness of the world is the concern of him who is the lord and proprietor of it; nor do we know what we

44 Ibid., p. 15.

45 Ibid., p. 134.

46 Cf. post p. 105f.

47 Ibid., p. 36. Henry Sidgwick, History of Ethics (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1925) p. 197, notes of Butler that: ". . . a further psychological reason for anticipating the ultimate coincidence of Virtue with the Happiness of the virtuous agent is found by him in the 'discernment of good and ill desert', which by an 'unquestionable natural association' accompanies our discernment of moral good and evil."

are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways but those which he has directed.⁴⁸

Many people, Butler noted, ignore their duty as taught them by conscience, refuse to live a life of virtue, and in so doing deny themselves real happiness; and they do so for a miserable reason:

. . . there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is⁴⁹ inconsistent with a present gratification

⁴⁸ Butler, "Dissertation II", op. cit., p. 322.

⁴⁹ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 16.

CHAPTER VII

BUTLER'S ETHICS IN RELATION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ETHICS¹

Joseph Butler was an Anglican theologian and bishop. As has been noted earlier, his ethical writings -- Fifteen Sermons and Dissertation II -- were mainly directed to a refutation of the Hobbist theory that moral restraints are artificial and foreign to the human soul. There are in his ethical writings, however, certain references to the Christian faith.² Now these references bear a different emphasis from that which might be expected of a man in his position. This is to be explained by the fact that he wrote at a time when Deism was exerting a strong influence.

Deism was a "natural" religion: and it taught that supernatural revelations are unnecessary for man's welfare.³ Sufficient knowledge of God's design to enable man to live a full and happy life, it claimed, could be acquired by an investigation of nature. Deism thus was opposed to orthodox Christianity, whose whole theological system was based on the presumption that in Jesus of Nazareth, previously

1 Joseph Butler was an Anglican: "orthodox Christian ethics" will here be considered from the Anglican viewpoint.

2. Cf. ante p. 27. Butler's main thesis on the significance of the Christian faith, as a revealed religion, in relationship to Deism, which was a "natural" religion, is contained in his Analogy of Religion.

3 Cf. ante p. 9.

unknown factors in the realm of religious truth, which are necessary for man's welfare, had been made explicit.⁴ Deism, nevertheless, made a remarkable impression, even upon many of the orthodox theologians who claimed to be opposed to it. The result was that these theologians tended to devote more of their attention to the religious factors inherent in man's nature, than to the disclosures of revelation; and to transform religion into a life of moral conduct only. No doubt, a considerable part of this change of emphasis was due to a deliberate attempt, on the part of the theologians, to answer the allegations of Deism in its own terminology, and from its own naturalistic approach. The importance of revelation in their eyes, however, diminished; and the tendency was for revelation to be considered as, and introduced as, only an auxiliary factor in the scheme of Christian ethics.

Bishop Butler was one of the theologians so affected.

⁴ Articles of Religion (An official statement of Anglican doctrine, ". . . agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops of both provinces and the whole clergy in the Convocation holden at London in the year 1562." All those receiving Anglican orders since that date, including Joseph Butler, have been required to subscribe to this statement.) See the Book of Common Prayer (Canada), pp. 657 to 675; Article XVIII: "They also are to be had accursed that presume to say, That every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law, and the light of Nature. For holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."

There is consequently, in his ethical system, a manifest confusion of outlook. He implicitly adopted the naturalistic approach; yet he was unwilling to deny the orthodox position. These two trends may be traced throughout his ethical writings.⁵

I. THE ETHICS OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In orthodox Christian ethics the importance of revelation is paramount. Ethical theory is primarily based, as Butler noted it had been in the early days of the Christian faith, on, " . . . the consideration that God sent his Son into the world to save it, and the motives which arise from the peculiar relation of Christians, as members one of another under Christ our head."⁶

The orthodox conception of the nature of God.

Orthodox Christian theology is built on the doctrine of the "Incarnation". Briefly stated, the doctrine of the Incarnation teaches that in the person, life, death, and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, was expressed, on the human level, the

⁵ It is interesting to see that Butler, whose Analogy of Religion is recognised as a main Christian refutation of Deism, should, nevertheless, be so influenced by Deism.

⁶ Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v-202; p. 2.

final truth about the nature of God and the nature of man. When it is claimed that this was the final truth, the intended meaning is that it was the final, unique, and complete truth about God and man, which is necessary for the fulfilling by man, of his total function as a man; and the intended implication is that this truth can be ascertained in no other way, naturalistic or otherwise. There is undoubtedly a greater truth about God and man, which is far beyond the abilities of human comprehension; but all of the truth which is required by man was revealed to man, as a man -- Jesus Christ. The historical fact of the Incarnation means, to the orthodox Christian, that Jesus was both perfect God and perfect man, and, as such, Saviour.⁷

Relative to the nature of God, the corollary of the doctrine of the Incarnation is that God's nature is trinitarian. Orthodox Christianity means by this that God eternally stands in three personal relationships to man: that of Father, of Son, and of Holy Ghost. The primary work of the Father is

⁷ Articles of Religion, op. cit., Article II: "The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man; who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men."

that of creator; the primary work of the Son is that of saviour; the primary work of the Holy Ghost is that of spiritual guide. These three personal relationships are constant in relation to man: they are also constant in God himself. There are, that is, three eternal persons in God.⁸ The doctrine that God is "three persons in one God", means, from the point of view of Christian mysticism, that, ". . . God is love."⁹

Relative to the nature of man, the corollary of the doctrine of the Incarnation is that man is a "child of God", who was created by God, out of love, for the sole purpose of sharing and enjoying the love of God. Man was created in a state of perfection, with that relationship of love between God and man in effect. In order that man might share this love, it was necessary that he be endowed with "free-will", for love must be voluntary. In that perfect relationship of love between God and man, the place of God as creator and father, and the place of man as creature and child, were recognised. Man misused his freedom by attempting to usurp

⁸ Ibid., Article I: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

⁹ The First Epistle General of John, Chapter 4, v. 8.

the prerogative of God. In that fashion, "sin" entered the realm of man's existence. Sin is an implicit denial, by man, of God's pre-eminence.

The result of sin, for man, was a loss of that perfect relationship of love with God: that being lost, man's whole creaturely nature becomes infected with what the orthodox Christian theologian calls "original sin". Man's mind becomes stupefied; man's emotions become unbalanced; man's will becomes inadequate.¹⁰ In this condition, man is helpless, by himself, to restore that original relationship of love, in which alone his fulfillment is to be found.¹¹

10 Articles of Religion, op. cit., Article IX:
 "Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk:) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil And this infection of nature doth remain"

11 Ibid., Article X: "The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God: Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will."

He is thus also helpless, by himself, to do his duty.¹²

The result of sin, for God also, was a loss of that perfect relationship of love: that being the case, God's love leads him to remedy the situation, and restore that perfect relationship. This could be done, according to orthodox theologians, only by God's taking upon himself human nature; and thus, by becoming man, to nullify the separation between himself and man, to reveal his love afresh to man, and to open the way for the restoration of man to a state of welfare. Man can re-enter that perfect relationship by sharing in the life of God the Son¹³: and such

¹² This orthodox conception of man's "fallen" nature is contrary to the Deistic conception of man's nature, which was implicit in Butler's method and arguments. Cf. post p. 107. Deism conceived of man as being able, of his own nature, to achieve his own Welfare, providing he gives his whole attention to the attempt. It should be noted that orthodox Christianity did not claim the contradictory of Deism -- that man is totally depraved, and completely unable to do anything toward his own improvement. What orthodox Christianity did claim was that man is unable, by himself, to achieve his welfare; as Article IX said: ". . . man is very far gone" Man's need of help is explained in Article X: ". . . the grace of God preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will."

¹³ Articles of Religion, op. cit., Article XI: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings"

is still historically possible, because the Son has provided for a continuation or "extension of the Incarnation" in his self-appointed Church. To share in the life of Christ, man must submit himself to those ordinances of the Church which Christ has established, admitting his own weakness. The weakness man must admit is a weakness of his whole nature, and includes that of conscience.¹⁴

Man's response to God. The method by which God has chosen to lead man back to that perfect state of love, through his Church, may be likened to a schooling. Man's first response to God's love must be one of obedience to God as master. This stage of man's spiritual progress is typified by the divinely-revealed "Ten Commandments"¹⁵, which list a number of actions forbidden to man as servant. At this stage, man's motive is probably based on religious sanctions.

¹⁴ In orthodox Christian ethics, the concept of "conscience" does not assume the proportions which it did in Butler's ethics. Its nature is not defined. It is not recognised as the voice of God within. It is recognised to exist and function, however; and the dictates of conscience have ascribed to them a degree of authority. Conscience must be superseded by the authority of revelation; for, by itself, conscience is in a "fallen" state and liable to err. Though conscience does afford a degree of enlightenment, it is God the Holy Ghost, who leads man to true judgements. Cf. post p. 97.

¹⁵ Exodus, Chapter 20, vv. 3-17.

Man's next response must involve a degree of enlightenment, an appreciation of his sin, of God's remedy, and of the state of love to which he is being restored. This stage is typified by "Our Lord's Summary of the Commandments"¹⁶, which enjoins man's duty in higher, positive, terms. Now man lives not according to the "letter of the law", but according to the "spirit of the law". No longer is man only the servant of God: he now begins to share the blessings of the revealed love of God, and assumes a certain amount of responsibility -- "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends" ¹⁷ Increasingly, man's motive is based on pure love, apart from religious sanctions.

Throughout this whole redemptive process, it is God the Holy Ghost who is guiding man's response: as Jesus said -- "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth (the Holy

¹⁶ The Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chapter 22, vv. 37-40: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

¹⁷ The Gospel according to St. John, Chapter 15, v. 15.

Ghost] , is come, he will guide you into all truth"18

It is only by means of the influence of the Holy Ghost that man can reach the "friend" stage of spiritual development. The ultimate stage is reached when man's original sin has been entirely abolished, and when he manifests his having been restored to the perfect relationship of love by the fact that there is evident in his life, " . . . the fruit of the spirit which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"19

Man's duty then, as a Christian pilgrim, is not exclusively or primarily to obey the dictates of his conscience, nor indeed, exclusively or primarily to seek the common good of all, but rather to assume his appropriate place as a "child of God", in the comprehensive plan of God for man's salvation. This will involve obedience to the God-given "Ten Commandments", or living the selfless life of a "friend" of God, according to one's own spiritual progress. In all cases, the ultimate authority for man's ethics is to be found in those objective, and supernaturally-revealed ordinances, based on God's love and the needs of the fallen constitution of man's nature, which are instituted in Christ's Church.

18 The Gospel according to St. John, Chapter 16, v. 13.

19 The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, Chapter 5, vv. 22 -- 23.

In the fulfillment of such duty, virtue consists.

II. BUTLER'S ETHICS AND THEOLOGY

The two trends in Butler's ethical writings -- the trend toward Deism and the trend toward Christian orthodoxy -- are evident even in the opening pages of his Fifteen Sermons. In the preface, Butler explained that his method of writing would be based upon the naturalistic approach to the study of ethics:

There are two ways in which the subject of morals may be treated. One begins from enquiring into the abstract relations of things: the other from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is, which is correspondent to this whole nature. In the former method the conclusion is expressed thus, that vice is contrary to the nature and reason of things: in the latter that it is a violation or breaking in upon our whole nature. Thus they both lead us to the same thing, our obligations to the practice of virtue; and thus they exceedingly strengthen and enforce each other. The former seems the most direct, formal, proof, and in some respects the least liable to cavil and dispute: the latter is in a peculiar manner adapted to satisfy a fair mind; and it is more easily applicable to the several particular relations and circumstances of life.

The following discourses proceed chiefly in this latter method . . . They were intended to explain what is meant by the nature of man, when it is said that virtue consists in following, and vice in deviating from it; and by explaining to show that the assertion is true. ²⁰

²⁰ 20 Joseph Butler, "Fifteen Sermons". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCL), Vol. II, pp. v -- 202; p. ix.

Revelation, Butler admitted, had been the chief authority for Christian ethics in the early days of the Christian faith; but he implied that its importance as an authority had now been superseded:

It cannot indeed possibly be denied, that our being God's creatures, and virtue being the natural law we are born under, and the whole constitution being plainly adapted to it, are prior obligations to piety and virtue, than the consideration that God sent his Son into the world to save it, and the motives which arise from the peculiar relation of Christians, as members one of another under Christ our head. However, though all this be allowed, as it expressly is by the inspired writers; yet it is manifest that Christians at the time of the revelation, and immediately after, could not but insist mostly upon considerations of this latter kind.

These observations shew the original particular reference of the text [Romans xii. 4,5: For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.]; and the peculiar force with which the thing intended by the allusion in it must have been felt by the primitive Christian world. They likewise afford a reason for treating it at this time in a more general way.²¹

The ethical implications of the Christian revelation still remain, however, as an additional or auxiliary motive to duty:

. . . the consideration of it is plainly still an additional motive, over and above moral considerations, to the discharge of the several duties and offices of a Christian²²

21 Ibid., p. 2.

22 Ibid., p. 1.

His conception of the nature of God. These two trends in Butler's ethical system are evident in the terminology which he used to refer to God. Indeed, two different sets of terminology employed by him may be distinguished. The reader of Butler's ethical works could easily imagine that he was reading the works of two different men; for in those passages wherein the significance of the Christian revelation as an auxiliary motive to duty is discussed, the terminology is distinctly Christian; whereas in those passages wherein the ethical implications of the constitution of man's nature are discussed, the terminology used is such as would be acceptable to the Deists.

The former terminology includes such terms as: "the Son of God", "that divine Person", "Christ our head", "our Saviour". The characteristics which Butler implicitly ascribed to God by the use of this terminology, and which he explicitly ascribed to God in the passages containing it, were those of orthodox Christian theology.²³

The latter terminology includes such terms as: "the Deity", "God", "Maker", "universal Being", "infinite Being", "Almighty Being", "Creator", "Author of Nature", "Supreme Being", "Providence".

²³ Cf. ante. p. 91 ff. In his Fifteen Sermons and in his Dissertation II, Butler made no reference to the work of God the Holy Ghost: cf. ante. p. 97.

The characteristics which Butler implicitly ascribed to God by the use of this terminology, and which he explicitly ascribed to God in the passages containing it, were those ascribed to God by the Deists. These characteristics, however, though not specifically Christian, did not contradict Christian characteristics: definitely Christian characteristics were simply omitted in these passages. The characteristic most frequently referred to here, by Butler, was benevolence. He described it thus: "It is said that the interest or good of the whole must be the interest of the universal Being, and that he can have no other. Be it so."²⁴ God's benevolence is manifest in several ways. One is by the fact that man's basic impulses, some of which tend primarily to the public good, and some of which tend primarily to the private good, are complementary:

. . . as the former are not benevolence, so the latter are not self-love . . . but only instances of our Maker's care and love both to the individual and the species²⁵

Indeed, God's benevolence is a universal principle throughout mankind, said Butler: ". . . general benevolence is the great law of the whole moral creation" ²⁶

²⁴ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. xix.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

God's benevolence is further shown by the fact that God has given to man a code of behaviour which is designed to give him happiness:

The happiness of the world is the concern of him who is the lord and proprietor of it; nor do we know what we are about, when we endeavour to promote the good of mankind in any ways but those which he has directed . . . "27

Closely related to God's benevolence is his goodness. According to Butler, the chief characteristic of God, in so far as man can understand his nature, is goodness: "We have no clear conception of any positive moral attribute in the supreme Being, but what may be resolved up into goodness."²⁸ The ultimate degree of goodness is to be found in God: ". . . the perfection of goodness consists in love to the whole universe. This is the perfection of Almighty God."²⁹ The creation is due to God's goodness: "Since perfect goodness in the Deity is the principle from whence the universe was brought into being, and by which it is preserved"30

Closely related again are the power and wisdom of God: ". . . this Being is not a creature, but the Almighty God; .

27 Joseph Butler, "Dissertation II". See The Works of Joseph Butler (Oxford: at the University Press, MDCCCXLIX), Vol. I, pp. 312 -- 323; p. 322.

28 Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 164.

29 Ibid., p. 149.

30 Ibid., p. 87.

. . . he is of infinite power and wisdom and goodness"31
 Furthermore, God has authority: this is implied in the fact
 that he gave authority to man's conscience, which is, "
 . . . the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature . .
 . ."32 Only he who already possesses authority, has the
 right to assign authority to another.

Man's response to God. The two trends in Butler's ethical system are evident also in his teaching regarding man's proper response to God. The two trends are once again exemplified by the two sets of terminology previously mentioned. Butler implicitly taught that there are two kinds of response to be made by man. They result from the two conceptions of God's nature, the naturalistic and the Christian, which were inherent in his theology. Butler consistently gave priority to the response resulting from the peculiar constitution of man's nature; and he considered the response resulting directly from Christ's revelation as of secondary significance, though nevertheless real. Butler's hesitancy, due to the modifications which he allowed Deism to make in his orthodoxy, is particularly to be seen here.

In his discussion of the response which man should

31 Ibid., p. 173.

32 Ibid., p. 32.

make to God as a result of the peculiar constitution of his nature, Butler first of all attempted to prove that it is natural for man to worship God. He began by remarking:

It is plain that the nature of man is so constituted, as to feel certain affections upon the sight or contemplation of certain objects. Now the very notion of affection implies resting in its object as an end.³³

In this statement, Butler was referring to the several basic impulses in man's nature, each of which is directed to its own particular object. There are, said Butler, equally elementary in man's nature as these, several natural principles directed to God, as their object:

. . . if we are constituted such sort of creatures, as from our very nature to feel certain affections or movements of mind, upon the sight or contemplation of the meanest inanimate part of creation . . . ; certainly there must be somewhat due to him himself, who is the Author and Cause of all things . . . there must be some movements of mind and heart which correspond to his perfections, or of which those perfections are the natural object³⁴

Butler then explained what the principles in man, to which he referred, are. He said: "Thus Almighty God is the natural object of the several affections, love, reverence, fear, and desire of approbation."³⁵

Having thus demonstrated that it is natural for man

33 Ibid., p. 167.

34 Ibid., p. xxvii.

35 Ibid., p. 177.

to worship God, Butler went on to enjoin it upon man as the proper fulfillment of his nature:

Resignation to the will of God is the whole of piety: it includes in it all that is good, and is a source of the most settled quiet and composure of mind. There is the general principle of submission in our nature.³⁶

Our resignation to the will of God may be said to be perfect, when our will is lost and resolved up into his; when we rest in his will as our end, as being itself most just and right and good.³⁷

Such a practice, said Butler, is religion itself: "Religion consists in submission and resignation to the divine will."³⁸

The method by which man is to express his worshipful resignation to God is, he explained, to obey without question the dictates of conscience, conscience being the instrument of God:

That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action is itself alone an obligation. Conscience does not only offer itself to us to show us the way we should walk in, but it likewise carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide; the guide assigned to us by the Author of our nature: it therefore belongs to our condition of being, it is our duty to walk in that path, and follow this guide, without looking about to see whether we may not possibly forsake them with impunity.³⁹

36 Ibid., p. 179.

37 Ibid., p. 180.

38 Ibid., p. 195.

39 Ibid., p. 32.

The practice of worshipping God in this manner, said Butler, will lead ultimately to man's happiness:

It is plain that there is a capacity in the nature of man, which neither riches nor honours nor sensual gratifications nor anything in this world, can perfectly fill up or satisfy: there is a deeper and more essential want, than any of these things can be the supply of. Yet surely there is a possibility of somewhat, which may fill up all our capacities of happiness; somewhat in which our souls may find rest; somewhat, which may be to us that satisfactory good we are enquiring after. But it cannot be any thing which is valuable only as it tends to some further end.⁴⁰

Though the achieving of their objects by the various basic impulses affords happiness to man, to a degree, complete happiness will be found in the achieving of their object by those principles in man which are directed toward God:

. . . God himself will be an object to our faculties, that he himself will be our happiness; as distinguished from the enjoyments of the present state, which seem to arise, not immediately from him, but from the objects he has adapted to give us delight.⁴¹

In these arguments, Butler's implicit conception of the nature of man was that of Deism, which held that man possesses in his own nature, quite apart from revelation, all of the qualities required for his welfare. All that is

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 188.

needed is that man should employ those qualities.⁴²

In his discussion of the response which man should make to God as a result of Christ's revelation, Butler, having already emphasised the primary importance of the response due to God as a result of the constitution of man's nature, spoke rather apologetically of the worship required by revelation, which he considered to be only an auxiliary motive to worship. Being in a confused state of mind, however, he did not, with the Deists, go so far as to say that revelation is absolutely unnecessary. Indeed, he said that the additional motive afforded by revelation is real and binding. Yet, in all of this discussion, Butler's tendency was to utilize the Christian revelation to support the validity of the response inherent in the constitution of man's nature, rather than to utilize the constitution of man's nature to support the validity of the response required by the revelation. This latter alternative is adopted by orthodox Christian ethicists.

Butler made reference, first of all, to that

⁴² Cf. Ibid., p. 31. Here Butler said: ". . . exclusive of revelation, man cannot be considered as a creature left by his Maker to act at random, and live at large up to the extent of his natural power, as passion, humour, willfulness, happen to carry him . . . [for] he hath the rule of right within: what is wanting is only that he honestly attends to it." Cf. ante p.95 ; note the contrast between this and the orthodox conception.

statement of Jesus Christ which is called, "Our Lord's Summary of the Commandments", and which is considered by orthodox Christian ethicists to be a definite divinely-revealed ethical command.⁴³

The response enjoined in that statement, said Butler, is quite consistent with the natural response inherent in man's nature. The statement consequently, he suggested, is to be commended. Speaking of the various aspects of the response inherent in man's nature, he explained:

. . . they may all be understood to be implied in these words of our Saviour, without putting any force upon them: for he is speaking of the love of God and our neighbour, as containing the whole of piety and virtue.⁴⁴

Again, speaking specifically of the second part of Jesus Christ's statement, which enjoins the love of one's neighbour, Butler pointed out that it is consistent with the response inherent in man's nature:

This divine precept, to forgive injuries and love our enemies . . . is in a peculiar sense a precept of Christianity One reason of this doubtless is that it so peculiarly becomes an imperfect, faulty, creature. But it may be observed also, that a virtuous temper of mind . . . may itself, such is the imperfection of our virtue, lead a person to violate this obligation And it may well be supposed that this is another reason why it is much insisted upon by him who knew what was in man.⁴⁵

⁴³ Cf. ante p. 97.

⁴⁴ Butler, "Fifteen Sermons", op. cit., p. 167.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. xxi.

At last, however, refusing to admit the logical conclusion -- Deism -- implicit in his statements, Butler maintained that the motive force of the Christian revelation is real and obligatory:

. . . Christianity lays us under new obligations to a good life, as by it the will of God is more clearly revealed, and as it affords additional motives to the practice of it, over and above those which arise out of the nature of virtue and vice.⁴⁶

Butler did not, however, go so far as to say that the additional awareness of God's design, which may be derived from the Christian revelation, is necessary for man's welfare. This latter is the conclusion, and indeed the basis, of orthodox Christian ethics; and it alone completely contradicts Deism.

III. CONCLUSION

Joseph Butler, who began his career in the Church by subscribing to the Articles of Religion, which were and are the standard for Anglican orthodoxy, became strongly influenced by the individualistic mood of his period, the eighteenth century, and by the unorthodox religious movement, Deism, which expressed that individualistic mood in religious terms. There can consequently be traced throughout his ethical writings two definite trends: an orthodox, and an unorthodox.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 146.

Butler's approach to the study of ethics was the naturalistic approach. That approach implied the Deistic conception of the nature of man, a corollary of which is the Deistic conception of the nature of God.

Butler was, however, unwilling to follow the naturalistic method to its logical conclusions. He was unwilling to deny the orthodoxy to which he had subscribed. Therefore he introduced several references to the Christian revelation, and attempted to superimpose them upon his ethical system. The result was a confused presentation of two diverse ethical systems, and an unsatisfactory attempt to reconcile them.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In The Analogy of Religion, which contains Butler's main thesis and attack against Deism, his conclusion was that the claims of the Christian religion are no less improbable than the claims of the Deistic religion. Though Butler presented his discussion of the relationship between Christianity and Deism at greater length, and more concisely, in The Analogy of Religion, than in his Fifteen Sermons, his conclusion was no more decisive. Deism can be finally refuted only by contradicting its premises. This is done by orthodox Christianity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Broad, C. D., Five Types of Ethical Theory. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1930. 288 pp. #
- Butler, Joseph, The Works of Joseph Butler. Oxford: at the University Press; Vol. I, MDCCCXLIX, Vol. II, MDCCCL. Vol. I, 340 pp.; Vol. II, 357 pp.
- Hobbes, Thomas, Leviathan; London: 1651. See The Classical Moralists. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909. pp. 213-228.
- Mackenzie, John S., Manual of Ethics. New York: Noble and Noble, 1925. 472 pp.
- Rogers, Arthur Kenyon, A Student's History of Philosophy. Third edition; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932. 487 pp. #
- Selby-Bigge, L. A., British Moralists. 2 vols.; Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1897. Vol. I, pp. xi-lxx. #
- Sidgwick, Henry, Outlines of the History of Ethics. Fifth edition; London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1925. 288 pp. #
- "Butler, Joseph", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, IV, 463. #
- Smith, Preserved, and Symonds, John Addington, "Renaissance, The", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, XIX, 122-135. #
- Wolf, Abraham, "Ethics", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, VIII, 757-761. #
- Wolf, Abraham, "Philosophy, History of", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, XVII, 743-759. #
- Wolf, Abraham, and Sidgwick, Henry, "Ethics, History of" Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th edition, VIII, 761-778. #
- Blunt, John Henry, "Deism", Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology. Second edition; London: Rivingtons, 1872. pp. 190-196. #
- Cutts, Edward L., "Butler", Dictionary of the Church of England. Second edition; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889. p. 100. #

Matthew, Shaler, and Smith, Gerald Birney, editors, "Butler Joseph", "Deism", "Enlightenment, The", "Renaissance", A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921. #

Articles of Religion; London: 1562. See The Book of Common Prayer (Canada). Cambridge: at the University Press, 1918. pp. 657-675.