HUMANISM AND INTUITIONISM.

RELUCTANT as I naturally am to deprecate research into the philosophic affinities of Humanism, and great as was the interest with which I read Mr. Walker's ingenious paper in N.S., 67, I cannot honestly advise our critics to commit themselves very deeply to the line of argument it advocates.

The reasons for this advice are (I.) that Mr. Walker has wholly overlooked important differences between Humanism and the Intuitionism of Martineau, and (II.) that he seems incautiously to have adopted some of the most indefensible of the misconstructions of Humanism which are still current.

I.

(1) While it is perfectly true that Intuitionism makes morality, as Humanism makes truth, depend on judgments of Value, yet there is an important difference in their respective conception of these primary values. For though there are no intrinsic reasons why intuitions should not be treated empirically, in all extant intuitionism judgments of value are taken to carry with them a guarantee of their validity which seems to be essentially *a priori*, and Martineau's originality lay merely in his gallant attempt to overcome the empirical contradictions arising out of conflicting intuitions, by arranging the intuitive springs of action in an order of merit. Hence it is of the essence of ethical intuitionism both that the formal *claim* to value should be taken as assurance of validity and that no appeal to the *consequences* of acting on intuitions should be allowed to reflect upon and to determine their value.

Humanism, on the other hand, has the utmost respect for intuitions of all sorts. It regards them as psychological facts of the greatest interest, importance, and significance. It would not attempt to do without them either in ethics or in logic. It would define them as immediate judgments of value. But it would respect without adoring. It could not refrain from examining claims before admitting them as infallible guides to validity. It would regard it as uncritical to treat them as anything else than psychological. In the first instance at any rate it would treat the claims of Intuition as something which might require confirmation by experience. In this respect truth-claims and intuitive moral judgments are fundamentally alike: both are made constantly and

freely and spontaneously, and are chronologically prior to the sciences which criticise them. Hence they form the data from which a prudent theory of logical and ethical values will set out. But the mere fact that such claims are made does not prove that they are infallible: they may still require confirmation, and God knows they mostly need it!

(2) Now this confirmation is conceived differently in the two systems. For whereas in ethical intuitionism it comes once for all (as we saw) *before* experience in the table of the priority of the springs of action, for logical humanism it comes gradually *in experience*, in the empirical consequences of acting out the various claims. Mr. Walker has apparently quite forgotten this empirical side of Humanism.

(3) Yet herein lies the answer to his complaint that no attempt is made to tabulate the *a priori* values of logical intuitions. If humanism attempted anything so foolish as to construct a preliminary scale setting forth the relative importance of different satisfactions, it would first of all have to cease to be empiricism, and in the next place have to stultify itself by laying claim to a knowledge of absolute values, which no one has ever yet got hold of, and the despair of which has manifestly driven the chief modern exponents of absolutism over into utter scepticism.

(4) Mr. Walker has unfortunately failed to observe that humanism commits itself as little to an insuperable dualism between the 'true' and the 'right' as it does to a vain attempt to reduce the right to a matter of mere intellect. By calling 'truth' logical value humanism includes it in the same genus with 'right' and 'good' and 'beautiful' and 'pleasant,' and accounts for the persistent habit of all men to transfer the terminology of one species of value to another. This, however, is not to confuse, but to give a clue to current confusions, and why any one should regard it as in any way derogatory to the intellect baffles my understanding.

II.

(1) Why then Mr. Walker should assent to this baseless calumny, and accuse us of 'degrading' and 'belittling' the human intellect rather than of restoring its self-respect together with its efficiency, it is hard to conjecture. If he would try to discount his bias and think the matter out, he could not but perceive that the real degraders and belittlers of the intellect are those who alienate it from life, set it useless, meaningless, and impossible tasks, and finally denounce it as incompetent when it refuses to perform them.

(2) At any rate until such time as intellectualism has excoagitated an account of truth that will not be either manifestly incoherent or else formal and unmeaning, and will succeed in discriminating truth from error and overcome the scepticism to which Messrs. Joachim and Bradley have now openly confessed, humanism can

hardly be blamed for renouncing the presumptuous attempt to say what absolute truth may be, and for confining itself to the humbler task of describing what human truth actually is. And in the execution of this task it will not allow itself to be intimidated by accusations that its truth is 'relative' and 'subjective' and 'probable' and devoid of 'objective validity'. If there is any force in these epithets, so much the worse for all human truth, i.e., for all the truth we any of us have. Scepticism, which by Mr. Bradley's own confession has already devoured the Absolute, will then triumph over man also. But I cannot see that these epithets do anything but beg the question. What is 'relative' to man is at any rate related to him. What is 'subjective' is something *we* can possess. Even a probable truth seems preferable to an impossible ideal. As for 'objective validity' (if it is properly defined), our truth has quite as much of it as we need or it needs, if it is to be progressive. It is preposterous to define 'objectivity' in such a way that no objects of human thoughts can attain it. All this flinging about, then, of dialogistic terms does not alter the facts that human truth we have, that no other seems possible, and that we may as well get reconciled to its character.

(3) Further reflection upon this situation may possibly convince Mr. Walker that humanism has no need to impinge on either horn of his dilemma, 'either a return to absolutism or a return to Aristotle'. It is protected against the fury of the bull that bears them both by an impassable chasm. For (a) the Absolute does *not* "provide the common ground" truth is supposed to presuppose, just because it is plainly impotent to *get to* the position of human knowledge. It can, therefore, neither explain nor confirm nor invalidate it. Its "immanent revelation of itself in finite centres of consciousness" would *not* "secure an approximate conformity of their thinking to its own". For the vital connexion is merely a dogmatic assertion and a matter of faith. No one has ever been able to think the relation of the Absolute to the "finite centres". All the attempts to do so have ended by annihilating either the Absolute, or the finite centres, or both. Moreover, even if the relation could be thought, it would leave the actual difficulties of knowledge just where they were before. We should have no new means of getting human thoughts to converge towards an "approximate conformity". For the thought that the thought of each of us is approximately conforming to the Absolute, besides being the mere postulate of an unverifiable faith, a mere *credo quia impossibile*, provides no standard whatever for the correction of human errors. We shall not be better disposed to acknowledge our errors by the belief that we are vehicles for the enunciation of absolute truth. Nor could it reasonably serve as an ideal for us, because we should have to admit that we in our finitude were necessarily precluded from realising it. Instead of helping, therefore, it would hinder, by implanting in us the discouraging conviction that abso-

lute truth was the only truth worth having, but that man *qua* man could not possibly attain it.

(b) Aristotelian realism is nothing like so bad. It is no hindrance : but it is no help. The 'objective validity' to be secured by grasping "objective entities and their relations" is a harmless notion. But it is quite unmeaning so long as no one is prepared to tell us *when* the 'object' we are contemplating is an 'objective entity' as defined, and not a 'subjective' approximation to it that will have to be transcended with the next step forward. What then is the use of talking about independent 'objects,' without being able to say either how we are to know when we have got them, or how once grasped by human thought they can continue to be 'independent'?

(4) It is quite a mistake, however, to attribute to humanism any hostility to any sense of 'object' which performs any actual function in our knowing. There is no philosophic position which is less open to the imputation of solipsism, or better in accord, if not with "the philosophy of common-sense" (p. 315), yet with common-sense itself. Nor will it shrink from 'agreeing' with Aristotelian and Absolutist that "the knowledge of subject and object is immediate and is simultaneously developed" (p. 312). It will insist only on adding (1) that to a human 'subject' there must 'correspond' a human 'object,' (2) that it has never asserted the life we know to be merely an 'inner' one, and (3) that the 'immediate knowledge' alleged does not carry us out of the region of 'claims'. It will mildly inquire how self-evident intuitions which are true are to be discriminated from those which are false, except by experience of their consequences.

After that it will set itself seriously to solve the problem which no form of intellectualism has so far recognised as a problem, *viz.*, as to how among the mass of 'objects' which all alike claim 'reality,' we contrive to *select* those which are *really real*? When Mr. Walker has discovered or devised a better, surer and more expeditious way of doing this than ours, he will not find humanists slow to welcome it. But until he has perceived that this is the vital problem, he can hardly claim to have adequately differentiated himself from the multitude of those who do not yet perceive the point at issue.

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