Matter is a mental picture in which mind-stuff is the thing represented.

Reason, intelligence, and volition are properties of a complex which is made up of elements themselves not rational, not intelligent, not conscious.

W. K. CLIFFORD.

NOTE.—The doctrine here expounded appears to have been arrived at independently by many persons; as was natural, seeing that it is (or seems to me) a necessary consequence of recent advances in the theory of perception. Kant threw out a suggestion that the *Ding-an-sich* might be of the nature of mind; but the first statement of the doctrine in its true connection that I know of, is by Wundt. Since it dawned on me, some time ago, I have supposed myself to find it more or less plainly hinted in many writings; but the question is one in which it is peculiarly difficult to make out precisely what another man means, and even what one means one's self.

Some writers (*e.g.*, Dr. Tyndall) have used the word *matter* to mean the phenomenon *plus* the reality represented; and there are many reasons in favour of such usage in general. But for the purposes of the present discussion I have thought it clearer to use the word for the phenomenon as distinguished from the thing-in-itself.

W. K. C.

V.—THE PHILOSOPHY OF ETHICS.

ETHICS is a subject which has suffered a somewhat singular fate: for whereas on its practical side there has been a more perfect agreement about it than about any other important branch of human knowledge, on its speculative side it has been, and it still is, the centre of apparently endless controversy—the subject of every species of confusion. In the course of the following remarks, which, though they must add to the controversy, will not, I hope, add to the confusion, I have attempted a treatment of the second or speculative side. I have not tried either to attack any old system, or to enunciate a new one. My sole aim has been to lay down the general lines to which *any* legitimate system must conform, and to point out as precisely as possible the relation which Ethics bears to other subjects of inquiry, and the kind of proof of which its propositions are susceptible. In doing so I have been compelled to begin with some general observations which may seem of disproportionate length when compared with the more strictly ethical part of the inquiry, but which cannot be omitted without in some degree prejudicing the clearness of what is to follow.

I.

Everything that we know, or think we know, may be classed under one of four heads, which, without departing very widely from ordinary usage, may be named thus: Science, Ontology, Ethics, and Philosophy. By Science is meant here, not only what commonly goes by that name, but also history, and knowledge of particular matters of fact: so that "knowledge of phenomena and the relations subsisting between phenomena" would be a more accurate, though less convenient, expression for what is intended. In Ontology is included not only Theology and all doctrines of the Absolute, but also (and this is not necessarily the same thing) all real or supposed knowledge of entities which are not phenomenal.

What is meant by Ethics will be shown in detail later on. Here it is only necessary to say that it includes not only what are commonly called moral systems, but also some analogous systems not usually so described.

Multitudes of propositions, all professing to embody knowledge belonging to one of these departments, are being continually put forward for our acceptance. And as no one believes all of them, so those who profess to act rationally must hold that there are grounds for rejecting the propositions they disbelieve, and for accepting those they believe. The systematic account of these grounds of belief and disbelief makes up the fourth of the classes into which possible knowledge is divided, and is here always called Philosophy.

If it be objected that this is not the common meaning of the term, I reply that it would be difficult to point out what the common meaning is. It has been used, perhaps most frequently in England, as being equivalent to Psychology, which is a department of science. But researches after the absolute are also called philosophical, and these belong to Ontology. Ethics is sometimes called moral philosophy, as science is sometimes called natural philosophy; while Logic, which a very common usage regards as a branch of philosophy, would, as I shall presently explain, be included in it also by my definition. So that there cannot, on the whole, be much harm in using the term to represent a definite subject of investigation for which there is no other word. In this sense it is not very different from what Kant called Critical Philosophy.

It follows directly from this definition that, however restricted the range of possible knowledge may be, philosophy can never be excluded from it. For unless the restriction be purely arbitrary, there must be reasons for it; and it is the systematic account of these reasons which is here called Philosophy. So

that even if it should turn out that Metaphysics is an illusion, and only "positive" knowledge is attainable, this discovery would be so far from destroying philosophy that it is only by philosophy that it could be established.

If mankind was in the condition of believing *nothing* and, without a bias in any particular direction, was merely on the look-out for some legitimate creed, it would not, I conceive, be possible, *a priori*, to name any of the positive characteristics which the philosophy corresponding to that creed must necessarily possess. But since this is by no means the case, since everybody has a certain number of scientific beliefs, and most people have a certain number of ethical and ontological (theological) ones, it may be possible to describe some of the attributes which should be found in a philosophy professing to support these provisional conclusions.

For example, since no one supposes that all the propositions we believe are self-evident, it may be assumed that the greater number of them are legitimate inferences from propositions which *are* self-evident. And from this it follows that philosophy must consist of two main departments, one of which deals with these ultimate or self-evident propositions, the other with modes of inference.

I do not forget that some writers have held that the truth of a system is to be inferred, not from any self-evident propositions lying at its root, but from the consistency and coherence of its parts, though each of these taken by itself is by no means self-evident. Of such a system it would apparently be incorrect to say that one part is ultimate, and another derivative; it ought rather to be said that the truth of the whole is an inference from the consistency of the parts, and the truth of the parts is an inference from the truth of the whole. But even on this theory the formula above stated holds good, for such systems so far from being self-contained (as it were), and sufficient evidence for themselves, are really, as a little consideration will show, dependent for their validity on some such proposition as this—"all that is coherent is true". Which is itself again either ultimate or derivative.

This double function is an important characteristic of a complete philosophy; let me now mention another which, though it would seem sufficiently obvious, is continually ignored. It may be stated thus: "The business of philosophy is to deal with the grounds, not the causes of belief".

There is no distinction which has to be kept more steadily in view than this between the causes or antecedents which produce a belief, and the grounds or reasons which justify one. The inquiry into the first is psychological, the inquiry into the second

is philosophical, and they belong therefore (according to the classification just announced), to entirely distinct departments of knowledge.

No doubt, in constructing a philosophy, a previous psychological inquiry may be required. It may be necessary to acquaint ourselves with the various modes by which we arrive at conviction, before we can select those which are legitimate. But what we must not do, and what we are very apt to do, is to suppose that by performing the first operation satisfactorily, we absolve ourselves from performing the second at all. In the face of modern discovery we have continually to recollect that no progress made in tracing the history of opinions, no development of the theory of association of ideas, no application of the doctrine of evolution to mind, however much they may prepare the ground for a philosophy, add, or can add, one fragment to its structure.

Thus, it is never a final answer to philosophy to say of a particular belief, it is "innate," "connate," "empirical," or "*à priori*," the result of inheritance, or the product of the association of ideas. Psychology is satisfied by such replies, but to make psychology the rational foundation for philosophy is to make a department of science support that on which all science is by definition supposed to rest. It is strictly impossible that any solution of the question "How came I to believe this?" should completely satisfy the demand "Why ought I to believe it?" though, especially in the case of derivative beliefs, it may go some way towards it. In the case of what profess to be ultimate beliefs, discussions as to their origin are either philosophically irrelevant, or else prove to demonstration that they are not ultimate. This will perhaps be clearer if we take a concrete case. Let us suppose that the result of a particular psychological investigation is that a certain judgment, *e.g.*, "Everything has a cause," is "*à priori*." The psychologist who makes this discovery is apt to trespass on the domain of philosophy, and add "it is therefore true." Now if "everything has a cause" is to be accepted as true, because it is "*à priori*," then for that very reason it is not ultimate; two propositions at least must be accepted before it: 1st, all "*à priori*," judgments are true, and 2nd, this is an "*à priori*" judgment. Both of which are assertions both disputable and disputed. So in loose philosophical discussion it is very common to advance some principle as being self-evident, neither requiring nor possessing any justification, and immediately afterwards to adduce in its support some such argument as that "it is common to all men," or that "it has been implanted in our nature by a benevolent and all-wise Creator". In such cases it is clear either that the principles in

question are not self-evident, or that the arguments used to support them are superfluous.

It is by the consideration of such fallacies as these that I have been induced to use the word "ultimate," when the expression "*a priori*" might appear the most natural. "*A priori*" means independent of experience, but "independent of experience" is ambiguous. It may mean either that experience has not produced the judgment in question, or that it furnishes no grounds for believing it. The first meaning is quite beside the purpose; philosophy has no direct concern with the origin of beliefs, which, as before stated, is part of the subject-matter of psychology. The second meaning, on the other hand, while it excludes experience as a ground of belief, and so far expresses the desired idea, does not express the full differentia of ultimate beliefs, *viz.*, that *there are no grounds for believing them at all*. On the contrary, it sometimes seems to suggest itself directly as a reason for accepting a judgment (as if the fact that experience did not prove anything was a ground for believing it), and sometimes mediately, as showing that the constitution of our mind when in a healthy condition impels us to believe it or that it was implanted in us by the Author of our being; which reasons, whether good or bad, show by the very fact that they are given as reasons, that the judgment called "*a priori*" is not ultimate.

While, then, it is evidently not the business of philosophy to account for ultimate axioms and modes of inference, it is also clear (though it may be hardly necessary to make the remark) that it is not its business to *prove* them. To prove any conclusion is to show that it legitimately follows from a true premiss; so that if we were obliged to perform this operation for our axioms and modes of inference before they were to be received as ultimate, we should be driven either to argue in a circle or to an infinite regress. Indeed, this will sufficiently appear if we reflect that all we mean by ultimate is "independent of proof".

But if philosophy is neither to investigate the causes nor to prove the grounds of belief, what, it may be asked, is it to do? Its business, as I apprehend it, is to disengage them, to distinguish them from what simulates to be ultimate, and to exhibit them in systematic order.

What is meant here by disengaging the grounds of belief in contradistinction to proving them, will appear more clearly if we consider what is done by deductive logic. Deductive logic, apart from the practical rules with which it is encumbered, is (according to the terminology here employed) neither an art nor a science, but a systematic account of an ultimate mode of inference by which it may be distinguished from all other modes,

whether legitimate or illegitimate, whether ultimate or derivative: it is therefore by definition a branch of philosophy.

Now when deductive logic says that any three propositions which can be reduced to the form "All A is B, all C is A; all C is B," are legitimately connected as premisses and conclusion, whatever may be their content, it is by no means intended that such pieces of reasoning derive their validity from the fact of their corresponding with the formula. What is meant is simply to distinguish and mark off a certain mode of inference by giving a general description of it; each particular example of such inference being in itself the witness of its own validity.

This example explains the procedure of philosophy with regard to *inferences*: the axioms of mathematics furnish an illustration of its procedure in the matter of ultimate *principles*. "240 pence and 20 shillings being each equal to a pound, are equal to one another," is one of an indefinite number of similar self-evident propositions, which are described by saying that "things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another"; but which do not require to be deduced from such general description in order to make them certain. Such a deduction is, no doubt, possible. I may, if I please, say: "Things which are equal, &c."; "240 pence and 20 shillings are things which are equal, &c."; "therefore they are equal to each other". But such a syllogism would be as frivolous as Mill supposes all syllogisms to be; and for this reason, *viz.*, that the conclusion is quite as obvious and certain as the premiss which is introduced to prove it.

It is conceivable, of course, that the axioms at the basis of knowledge are incapable of classification; that no two of them have anything in common except the fact that they are ultimate. In such an event the business of philosophy will be to enumerate, instead of describing them. But this can hardly be the case with modes of inference. The philosophy of deduction is already comparatively speaking, complete; and though the same cannot be said of any other mode of inference, it is difficult to believe that the bond connecting premisses and conclusion differs in every case, so as to exclude the possibility of classification. Something very distantly approaching this state of things would exist if each department of knowledge had a mode of reasoning peculiar to itself, as some have supposed (*e.g.*) theology to have.

To classify inferences is to exhibit what is called their common form. And it is plain that if of two inferences, which by classification have the same form, one is false and the other true, the classification which connects them is philosophically worthless. There would be no use in deductive logic, for instance, if some syllogisms in "Barbara" were trustworthy and others not.

It follows from this very obvious remark that every kind of logic if it is to be philosophical must be formal. The whole object of a philosophy of inference being to distinguish valid and ultimate inferences from those which are invalid or derivative, this can only be done either by exhibiting the common form or forms of such inferences, or (on the violent hypothesis that they have no common forms) by enumerating every concrete instance. To enunciate a form of inference which shall include both valid and invalid examples, can at best only have a psychological interest; philosophically, it is misleading.

The same remark applies *mutatis mutandis* to any classification of ultimate propositions.

There is no ground "*a priori*" (*i.e.*, following from the idea of a philosophy) for supposing that ultimate judgments are general, rather than particular. Of course if they are the latter, there must be some legitimate mode of reasoning from particulars without the help of general propositions.

Neither would I venture to assert that they must be *certain*. To say that our ultimate grounds of belief may be merely probable, will appear a paradox to some, and a truism to others. To me it seems to express a bare possibility. For there are these three remarks to be made on it:—1st. That the desire of certainty being the very thing which impels us to seek a philosophy, mere probability can never thoroughly satisfy our inquiries. 2nd. That, as a matter of fact, it will be found, I think, that no merely probable judgment is ever regarded as ultimate; nobody says of any judgment—"There are no grounds whatever for believing this, indeed none are required, *but I think it probable*". 3rd. That since, according to received doctrines, which for the moment I assume to be true, the probability of any conclusion diminishes rapidly with the number of probable premisses required to prove it, if *many* of our ultimate premisses are merely probable, anything remotely approaching certainty for ordinary knowledge will be out of the question. So that those who aspire to regulate their convictions according to reason, will have to modify considerably their ordinary attitude towards current doctrines.

II.

Before proceeding to extend and apply these remarks on the idea of a Philosophy in general to the philosophy of Ethics in particular, it is necessary to correct an error which, in these days, when science and the knowable are supposed to be co-extensive, is natural though not the less mischievous:—the error I mean by which Ethics is degraded to a mere section or department of Science. At first sight, and from some points of view, the opinion seems plausible enough. That mankind have passed through

many ethical phases (for example) is a fact in history, and history belongs to science: that I hold certain moral laws to be binding is a fact of my mental being; and, like all other such facts, is dealt with by Psychology—also a branch of science. Physiology, Ethnology, and other sciences, all have something to say concerning the origin and development of moral ideas in the individual and in the race; it is not unnatural, therefore, that some men of science, impressed by these facts, have claimed, or seemed to claim, Ethics for their own.

To hold such a view would be a most unfortunate error; not to hold clearly and definitely its contrary may lead to much confusion. For though, as will appear, scientific laws form necessary steps in the deduction of subordinate ethical laws, and though the two provinces of knowledge cannot with advantage be separated in practice, still the truth remains that scientific judgments and ethical judgments deal with essentially different subject-matters.

Every scientific proposition asserts either the nature of the relation of space or time between phenomena which have existed, do exist, or will exist; or defines the relations of space or time which would exist if certain changes and simplifications were made in the phenomena (as in ideal geometry), or in the law governing the phenomena (as in ideal physics). Roughly speaking, it may be said to state facts or events, real or hypothetical.

An ethical proposition, on the other hand, though, like every other proposition, it states a relation, does not state a relation of space or time. "I ought to speak the truth," for instance, does not imply that I have spoken, do speak, or shall speak the truth; it asserts no bond of causation between subject and predicate, nor any co-existence nor any sequence. It does not announce an event; and if some people would say that it stated a fact, it is not certainly a fact either of the "external" or of the "internal" world.

One cause, perhaps, of the constant confusion between Ethics and Science is the tendency there appears to be to regard the psychology of the individual holding the moral law as the subject-matter of ethics, rather than the moral law itself; to define the position which the belief in such a proposition as "I ought to speak the truth" holds in the history of the race and of the individual, its cause and its accompaniments, rather than its truth or its evidence; to substitute, in short, psychology or anthropology for ethics. The danger of such confusion will partly be shown by the few remarks which follow on the "*Idea of a Philosophy of Ethics*":—that is, on the *form which any satisfactory system of Ethics must assume, or be able to assume, whatever be its contents.*

The obvious truth that all knowledge is either certain in itself,

or is derived by legitimate methods from that which is so, was sufficiently dwelt on before; and this, which is true of knowledge in general, is of course also true of ethical knowledge in particular. A little consideration will enable us to go on, and state this further fact, which is peculiar to ethics: *The general propositions which really lie at the root of any ethical system must themselves be ethical, and can never be either scientific or ontological.* In other words, if a proposition announcing obligation require proof at all, one term of that proof must always be a proposition announcing obligation, which itself requires no proof. This truth must not be confounded with that which I have just dwelt upon, namely, that Science and Ethics have essentially different subject-matters. This might be so, and yet Ethics might be indebted for all its first principles to Science.

A concrete case will make this second statement clearer. A man (let us say) is not satisfied that he ought to speak the truth. He demands a reason, and is told that truth-telling conduces to the welfare of society. He accepts this ground, and apparently, therefore, rests his ethics on what is a purely scientific assertion. But this is not in reality the fact. There is a suppressed premiss required to justify his conclusion, which would run somewhat in this way—"I ought to do that which conduces to the welfare of society". And this proposition, of course, is ethical. This example is not merely an illustration, it is a typical case. There is no artifice by which an ethical statement can be evolved from a scientific or metaphysical proposition, or any combination of such; and whenever the reverse appears to be the case, it will always be found that the assertion, which seems to be the basis of the ethical superstructure, is in reality merely the minor of a syllogism, of which the major is the desired ethical axiom.

If this principle be as true as it seems to me to be obvious, at one blow it alters our attitude towards a vast mass of controversy which has encumbered the progress of moral philosophy. So far as the proof of a basis of morals is concerned, it makes irrelevant all discussion on the origin of moral ideas, or on the nature of moral sentiments; and it relegates to their proper sphere in psychology or anthropology all discussion on such subjects as association of ideas, inherited instincts, and evolution, in so far, at least, as these are supposed to refer to *ultimate* moral laws. For it is an obvious corollary from our principle, that the origin of an ultimate ethical belief never can affect its validity; since the origin of this belief, as of any other mental phenomenon, is a matter to be dealt with by Science; and my thesis is, that (negatively speaking) scientific truth alone cannot serve as a foundation for a moral system; or (to put it positively), if we have a moral system at all, there must be contained in it,

explicitly or implicitly, at least one ethical proposition, of which no proof can be given or required.

In one sense, therefore, all Ethics is "*à priori*". It is not, and never can be, founded on experience. Whether we be Utilitarians, or Egoists, or Intuitionists, by whatever name we call ourselves, the rational basis of our system must be something other than an experience or a series of experiences; for such always belong to science.

Limited indeed is the number of English moralists who have invariably kept this in view. However foreign it may be to their various systems, an inquiry into the origin or into the universality of moral ideas always appears to slip in, not in its proper place, as an interesting psychological adjunct, but as having an important bearing on the authority of their particular principle. And the necessary result, of course, of these efforts to support ultimate principles is, that they cease to be ultimate, and become not only subordinate, but subordinate to judgments which, if explicitly stated, would very likely appear far less obvious than they.

There is a whole school of moralists, for example, who find or invent a special faculty, intellectual or sensitive, by which moral truth is arrived at; who would regard it as a serious blow to morality if the process by which ethical beliefs were produced was found to be common to many other regions of thought. Oddly enough, these are the very people whose systems are often called "*à priori*". Now if by this term be meant that the ordinary maxims of morality are (according to these systems) independent of experience, it is appropriate enough; but if it be meant that they are self-evident, it is a singular misnomer. For it is clear that on their systems rigidly interpreted those maxims derive their evidence, not from their own internal authority, but from the fact that they bear a certain special relation to our mental constitution; so that the ethical proposition which really lies at the root of their ethics is something of this sort:—"We ought to obey all laws the validity of which is recognised by a special innate faculty, whether called conscience or otherwise." Now, I do not deny that from a philosophical point of view such propositions as these are possible foundations of morals; but what I desire to point out is that such a phrase (to take a concrete case) as "I ought to speak the truth because conscience commands it" may have two widely different meanings, and may belong to two different systems of ethics, not commonly distinguished. According to the first and most accurate meaning, "I ought to speak the truth" is an inference, of which the major premiss must be, "I ought to do what conscience commands," and being an inference, cannot obviously

be an *a priori* law. According to the second and inaccurate meaning, "I ought to speak the truth" is in reality received on its own merits, and conscience is very unnecessarily brought in, either to add dignity to the law or to account for its general acceptance among mankind, or for some other extra-ethical reason. The first of these views is open to no criticism from the point of view of ethical philosophy; so far as form is concerned it is unassailable. But I greatly suspect that most people who nominally found their morality on conscience really hold the second theory; and in that case, as I think, their statement is misleading, if not erroneous.

So far I have only given a negative description of the nature of an ethical proposition. I have said, indeed, that it announces obligation, but this statement is tautological; for if we knew in what obligation consisted, there would be no difficulty in stating the meaning of *ethical*. Beyond this I have only said that an ethical judgment deals with an essentially different subject-matter from either science or metaphysics. Is it possible to say more than this? Is it possible to give any description of ethical propositions which shall add to our knowledge of their character? On general grounds it is plain that this can only be done, supposing that what are *commonly* called ethical propositions form part of a larger class of judgments which resemble them in being neither scientific nor metaphysical, but differ from them in some other respect. This follows from the very nature of description. I myself hold this to be the case. I hold not only that the judgments commonly called ethical (but which, in spite of the clumsiness attendant on changing the meaning of a term in the middle of an essay, I shall henceforward call *moral*), have the two negative characteristics above mentioned in common with a larger class of judgments; but that the distinction between the two classes should be ignored by ethical philosophy, since it depends not on "form" but on "matter". All judgments belonging to either of these classes I shall henceforth call "ethical". Those commonly called ethical I shall describe as "moral"; the rest are either "non-moral" or "immoral". Every possible judgment, then, is either ethical or non-ethical; and every ethical judgment is either moral or non-moral or immoral. The terminology thus being defined, let me explain it, and at the same time my view on the subject.

If a man contemplates any action as one which he chooses to perform, he must do so either because he regards the action as one which he chooses for itself, or because he expects to obtain by it some object which he chooses for itself. And similarly, if he contemplates any object as one he chooses to obtain, he must do so either because he regards that object as chosen for itself,

or because it may be a means to one that is. In other words, deliberate action is always directed mediately or immediately to something which is chosen for itself alone; which something may either be itself an action, or what I loosely term an object. Including both, then, under the term "end," I define an ethical proposition thus:—*An ethical proposition is one which prescribes an action with reference to an end.* Nobody will deny that this definition is true of all moral propositions (most people, indeed, will think that it is too obvious to need stating); but they will probably say, and say truly, that it is also true of a great many propositions which are not usually called moral. Now my object is to show that the distinction between what are usually called moral propositions and that larger class which I have defined above, has no philosophic import—has nothing, that is, to do with the grounds of obligation. And for this purpose let me analyse more carefully this larger class (which I have called ethical) from a philosophic point of view, that is, with reference to the rational foundation and connection of its parts.

(1) Every proposition prescribing an action with reference to an end, belongs either explicitly or implicitly to a system of such propositions. (2) The fundamental proposition of every such system states an end, which the person who receives that system regards as final—as chosen for itself alone. (3) The subordinate propositions of that system are deduced from the fundamental proposition by means of scientific or theological minor premisses. (4) When two such systems conflict, their rival claims can be decided only by a judgment or proposition not contained in either of them, which shall assert which of these respective fundamental "ends" shall have precedence. [Ethics, then, rests on two sorts of judgments, neither of which can be deduced from the other, and of neither of which can any proof be given or required. The first sort declares an end to be final, the second declares which of two final ends is to be preferred, if they are incompatible. This second sort, of course, is not essential to an ethical system, but can only be required when an individual regards more than one end as final.] (5) No other sort of proposition can possibly lie at the root of an ethical system. [This is merely a re-statement of the law dwelt on before.]

Now, in so far as this is a complete philosophical diagram of every ethical system, it must show the sort of authority on which every ethical proposition, every imperative, must rest. Yet since it is plain that this diagram takes no account of the differences there may be between moral and immoral ethical systems, how, it may be asked, can we explain the wide-spread

delusion that these differences affect the authority of the former? This question takes us far afield into the regions of Psychology and Anthropology, but the answer to it may perhaps be suggested as follows. The main reason for this error appears to be false analogy, unchecked by any clear apprehension of the nature of the rational or philosophical peculiarities of an ethical system. And in order to illustrate this and at the same time to place the theory I am defending under as strong a light as possible, it may be as well to examine the exact bearing which Universality and the approval of Conscience (two of the chief characteristics of moral as opposed to non-moral or immoral systems) are supposed to have on obligation.

My position, of course, is that they have *no* bearing; and in order to show this I offer the following analysis to the reader—taking Universality first. A law may be said to be universal in one of four senses. It may mean, first, that all intelligences regard themselves as bound by it. This meaning we need not further consider, not only because it is a scientific assertion, and therefore, as I have shown, incapable of becoming the foundation of an ethical system, but also because it is a scientific assertion now entirely discredited. It is quite out of fashion to maintain that morality is the same in every race and every country, and therefore till, in the revolutions of thought, some one is found to re-assert this doctrine, we need not further discuss it.

The second possible meaning is that by a universal moral law we mean one by which all intelligences *ought* to regard themselves as bound. This also we may dismiss because it amounts to saying that there is a moral law which obliges all intelligences to be bound by other moral laws. Is then *that* moral law universal *in the sense we are discussing*? If it is, we are committed to an infinite series of moral laws, each commanding us to be bound by the preceding one. If it is not, then there can be a moral law which (in this sense) is not universal.

The next meaning which we can attach to the word universal is this—that by a universal moral law we mean one which *we* think all men ought to obey. That we do think this of most moral laws, and that we do not think it of the other ethical laws, namely the non-moral and the immoral ones, is tolerably certain. It remains to inquire whether the difference bears on obligation; and this inquiry, as it seems to me, may be settled by a very simple consideration. All intelligences means Me and all other intelligences. The first of these constituent parts would be bound by a law held by Me whether it were universal (in this sense) or not. The second would *not* be bound by a law held by Me whether it were universal in this sense or not. In other

words, to be bound by a moral law (and this, by the way, brings out very clearly the difference between being ethically bound and legally bound) is exactly the same thing as to regard it as binding on you; it is not to regard it as binding on some one else, and it is not for some one else to regard it as binding on you; it has therefore, and it can have, no connection with Universality in this third sense.

It is, of course, open to any one to assert that he recognises no imperative which is not universal (in this sense). This may very well be the fact, and I have no wish to deny it. What I deny is that the connection of the two is other than empirical and accidental, or that it has any place in the philosophy of obligation.

The fourth and last meaning which I am able to attach to the word universal when used of a law, is that it signifies that all people of "well-constituted minds" do as a matter of fact regard themselves as bound by a law so qualified. Now, if "well-constituted" is defined with reference to morality, and means "holding the one true moral system," a proposition that all true or right moral laws are universal is frivolous and merely verbal. If it be defined with reference to something else—if it means, for instance, sane, or well-educated, or Christian, or scientific, or anything non-moral, then the same arguments may be used to show that universality in this sense cannot be a ground of obligation as I used when speaking of the first sense. For a proposition asserting that any considerable body of men, distinguished from the rest of mankind by some non-moral attribute, hold the same moral code, is very likely to be questionable, and being a scientific assertion, is quite certain to be irrelevant.

As regards Conscience, I have shown before, that to assume a special faculty which is to announce ultimate moral laws can add nothing to their validity, nor will it do so the more if we suppose its authority supported by such sanctions as remorse or self-approval. Conscience regarded in this way is not ethically to be distinguished from any external authority, as, for instance, the Deity, or the laws of the land. Now, it is plain that no external authority can give validity to ultimate moral laws, for the question immediately arises, why should we obey that authority? Only two reasons can be given. The first is that it is *right in itself* to obey; the second is that (through a proper use of sanctions) it will be *for our happiness* to obey. Now, the first of these reasons is a moral law, which obviously does *not* derive its validity from the external authority, because the external authority is an authority only by means of it. And the same may be said of the second reason, substituting the words "ethical but non-

moral" for the word "moral". In neither case, then, is the external authority the ultimate ground of obligation.

The inevitable ambiguity which arises from the sudden extension of the meaning of the word "ethical" to imperatives which are immoral or non-moral, makes it, perhaps, desirable that I should very concisely re-state from another point of view the main position I have been attempting to establish.

All imperatives, all propositions prescribing actions, have this in common:—That if they are to have any cogency, or are to be anything but empty sound, the actions they prescribe must be to the individual by whom they are regarded as binding, either mediately or immediately desirable. They must conduce, directly or indirectly, to something which he regards as of worth for itself alone. The number of things which are thus in themselves desirable or of worth to somebody or other is, of course, very great. Pleasure or happiness in the abstract, other people's pleasure or happiness, money (irrespective of its power of giving pleasure), power, the love of God, revenge, are some of the commonest of them, and every one of them is regarded by some people as an end to be attained for its own sake, and not as a means to something else. Now, it is evident that to every one of the ultimate propositions prescribing these ends, and for which, as the ends are ends-in-themselves, no further reason can be given, there will belong a system of dependent propositions, the reasons for which are that the actions they prescribe conduce to the ultimate end or end-in-itself.

If, for instance, revenge against a particular individual is for me an end-in-itself, a proposition which prescribes shooting him from behind a hedge may be one of the subordinate or dependent propositions belonging to that particular system. But whereas the indefinite number of such systems is thus characterised by a common form, it is divided by ordinary usage into three classes, the moral, the non-moral, and the immoral, about the denotation of which there is a tolerable agreement. It would be universally admitted, for instance, that a system founded on the happiness of others was a moral system, while one founded on revenge was immoral: and, though there would be more dispute as to the members of the non-moral class, this is not a question on which I need detain the reader. The denotation then of these names being presumably fixed, what is the connotation? or to simplify the inquiry, what is the connotation of a *moral* system? The apparent answers are as numerous as the number of schools of moralists. But however numerous they may be, they can all be divided into two classes. The first class merely re-state the denotation, in other words, announce the ultimate end-in-itself of the system, and so, properly speaking, give no answer at all.

A Utilitarian, for example, may simply assert that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is for him the ultimate end of action. If he stops there he evidently shows no philosophic reason for distinguishing the system he adopts from the countless others which exist, or have existed. If he attempts to give any further characteristic of his system, he then belongs to the second class, who do indeed explain the connotation of the word moral according to their usage of it, but whose explanations have, and can have nothing to do with the grounds of action or the theory of obligation. The sanction of conscience, emotion of approval, expectation of reward, feeling of good desert, glow of conscious merit—these are all most undoubtedly marks or characteristics of moral actions; how they came to be so, whether by education, association of ideas, innate tendency, or howsoever it has happened, matters nothing whatever except to the psychologist; that they are so is certain, but the significance of the fact is habitually misunderstood. Are they simply the *causes* of good action? Then they have nothing to do with Ethics, which is concerned not with the causes but with the grounds or reasons for action, and would remain wholly unchanged if not a single man ever had done or could do right. Are they the *ends* of action? Is the fact that they are obtained by a certain course a valid reason for pursuing that course? In that case they stand to the person holding that opinion in precisely the same relation as money does to the miser, or revenge to the savage. They are the groundwork of an ethical system, and to state them is simply to denote *what* ethical system it is which is being alluded to. Are they, finally, not ends of action, but merely marks by which certain actions may be known to belong to a particular system? In that case, and for that very reason, they can have nothing to do with the grounds or theory of obligation. Therefore, finally, though under the general name “ethical” are included not only moral, but also non-moral and immoral systems, the distinction regarded from the outside between these sub-divisions is not essential, and has no philosophic import—which was the thing to be proved.

III.

Before concluding these remarks, I would point out three corollaries that may be drawn from them, which are not without interest. The first corollary is—that no instructive analogy exists between Ethics and *Æsthetics*. It is true, no doubt, that philosophers have talked about the Good and the Beautiful, as if they were co-ordinate subjects of investigation, and that in ordinary language we say both that a picture “ought” to be admired, and that an action “ought” to be performed. Nevertheless, reflecting on actual or possible *æsthetic* systems, it would

seem clear that they must be included under one of four heads. They must belong either (1) to Ethics, or (2) to Psychology, or (3) to Ontology, or, lastly (4), to Ontology with an ethical or psychological element superadded. And in none of these cases can *Æsthetics* be said to rank as a parallel subject of inquiry with Ethics.

The first of these possibilities, namely, that *Æsthetics* belongs to, or is included in Ethics, I mention chiefly for the sake of completeness. Even those art-critics whose denunciations of bad taste approach most nearly to the level of moral reprobation, hardly maintain that it is our *duty* to admire the Venus of Milo in the same sense as it is our *duty* to love our neighbour. If any do hold this view, the conclusion to be drawn is, not that their *æsthetic* code stands on a different, but similar, platform to their ethical code, but that their ethical code is larger than that of ordinary people, by the whole amount of their *Æsthetics*.

According to the second of these possibilities (namely that *Æsthetics* belongs to Psychology) *Æsthetics* is merely the investigation of the nature and causes of peculiar emotions—chiefly secondary—produced in us by certain external causes, objects, or representations, and has no more to do with Ethics, either by way of resemblance or contrast, than any other department of Psychology.

The third possibility, namely, that *Æsthetics* belongs to Ontology, includes all such theories of the Beautiful as deal exclusively with "objective standards," "ideas," or "archetypes," "the evolution of the Idea," or "the perception of the agreement of the Subject and Object," and such-like. Taken by themselves, these theories belong to Ontology; but if there be added any consideration of the relation these ontological entities or processes bear to the individual, these considerations must belong either to the first or the second of the above-mentioned possible treatments of *Æsthetics*, and must, therefore, be either ethical or psychological. This is the fourth possibility.

From this concise analysis, then, it would seem clear that no analogy exists between Ethics rightly understood and any system right or wrong of *Æsthetics*. But if that be so, how comes the existence of any analogy even to have been supposed? The reply to this is, that there does exist an analogy between some theories of *Æsthetics* and Ethics *wrongly* understood. Some moralists, for example, have dwelt largely on the emotion excited in us by virtuous actions. And if the scientific examination of these emotions really constitute the essence of Ethics, there is unquestionably an analogy between theories of the Good and some theories of the Beautiful.

Again, if ethical inquiries are thought to resolve themselves

into researches concerning the existence and nature of some objective standard of right, it is inevitable that they should suggest, and it is probable they would resemble, those other ontological inquiries concerning the objective standard of beauty. Now it must not be supposed that I pronounce either of these investigations irrational: all I contend for is that they are not ethical; or, rather (to avoid a dispute about words), what I contend for is, that they have nothing, and can have nothing, directly to do with Obligation.

The second corollary concerns the functions of the Moral Philosopher. It is clear from what precedes, that it is *not* the business of the moral philosopher to account for the origin of moral ideas, or to analyse and explain that growth of sentiment which collects around the time-honoured maxims of current morality. These are topics which belong to Psychology. Neither is he expected to prove the propositions which lie at the root of any system of morals; for these are incapable of proof. Nor, for the same reason, can he justify the judgments which declare which of two final ends is to be preferred in case of conflict, or how much of one is to be preferred to how much of the other. Nor, in reality, has he any but a subordinate part to play in expounding or deducing the derivative rules of morality; and this for the following reason.

The deduction of any derivative rule is always necessarily in this form: "The happiness of mankind ought to be promoted" (this, let us say, is the ultimate unprovable foundation of the system); "monogamy promotes the happiness of mankind" (this is the scientific—in another system it might have been theological—minor premiss); "therefore monogamy is a system which ought to be supported". This is the required derivative rule. Now the only difficulty in deducing this conclusion from the first principle of the system lies in the difficulty of demonstrating the minor premiss; in other words, it lies in the difficulty of a certain sociological investigation, which the speculative moralist as such cannot be expected to undertake.

The important duties of the moralist, for he has important duties, arise from the confused state in which the greater part of mankind are with regard to their ethical first principles. The two questions each man has to ask himself are:—What do I hold to be ultimate ends of action? and,—If there is more than one such end, how do I estimate them in case of conflict? These two questions, it will be observed, are questions of fact, not of law, and the duty of the moralist is to help his readers to discover the fact, not to force his own view down their throat by attempting a proof of that which is essentially, and by its very nature, incapable of proof. Above all, he must beware of sub-

stituting some rude simplification for (what may perhaps be) the complexity of nature, by deducing (as the Utilitarians do) all subordinate rules from one fundamental principle, when, it may be, this principle only approximately contains actual existing ethical facts.

Since these two questions can be answered, not by ratiocination, but only by simple inspection, the art of the moralist will consist in placing before the inquirer various problems in Ethics free from the misleading particulars which surround them in practice. In other words, his method will be casuistical, and not dogmatic.

It may perhaps seem strange that, after commenting at some length on the prevailing confusion between Ethics and Psychology, I should now have to announce that the business of the Ethical Philosopher (at least, so far as first principles are concerned) is as purely psychological as, according to the two preceding paragraphs, I make it out to be; and it may seem, therefore, as if the difference between my view and that of the philosophers whom I have attempted to criticise is by no means essential or important. This, however, is not the case. My complaint against these philosophers is that they appear to suppose that a psychological law can serve as a rational basis for an ethical system; so that their chief aim often seems to have been the establishment of their own particular views on the origin and nature of our moral sentiments. I, on the other hand, altogether deny the possibility of such a basis, and maintain that all that a moralist can do with regard to ethical first principles is, not to prove them or deduce them, but to render them explicit if they are implicit, clear if they are obscure. To do this effectually he must, of course, treat of ideas and notions, and his work will therefore, in some sense, be undoubtedly psychological. To make this statement complete, I should add that (as appears by my next paragraph) there is no absurdity in supposing that a moralist may in the course of his speculations hit on some entirely new first principle which he has not held even obscurely before, but which commends itself to his mind as soon as it is presented to him.

The third corollary I draw is this—that there are only two senses in which we can rationally talk of a moral system being superior to the one we profess. According to the first sense, superior means superior in *form*, more nearly in accordance with the ideal of an ethical system just sketched out. According to the second sense, in which the superiority attaches to the *matter* of the system, it can only mean that the system is one of which we are ignorant, *but which we should adopt if presented to us*. It is a hypothetical superiority.

Now it must be observed that the sense in which we speak of other hypothetical systems as being superior to our own, is by no means identical with that in which we speak of our own as being superior to that of other people. Looking back over history we perceive a change and development of the moral ideas of the race in the direction of the systems which now prevail; and this change we rightly term an improvement. But if, arguing from the past, we suppose that this improvement will continue through the indefinite future, we are misled by a false analogy. The change may very well continue; the improvement certainly will not. And the reason is clear. What we mean, or ought to mean, by an improvement in the past is an approach to our own standard, and since any change at all corresponding in magnitude to this in the future must involve a departure from that standard, it must necessarily be a change for the worse.

In other words, when we speak of another system as being superior (in matter) to our own, we speak of a possible system which we should accept if we knew it. When we speak of our own system being superior to that of some other person, we assert the superiority unconditionally, and quite irrespectively of the possible acceptance of it by that other person, supposing him to be acquainted with it. If then we believe that development will proceed in the future as it has done in the past, we must suppose that a time will come when the moral ideas of the world will be as much out of our reach, supposing them presented to us, as ours would be out of reach of primitive man. This is also true of scientific ideas: but there is this difference between them, that whereas the change in scientific ideas may be an improvement, that in moral ideas must be a degradation. The grounds of this distinction, of course, are obvious; *viz.*, that the standard of excellence in the case of scientific ideas is, or is supposed to be, conformity to an infinitely complex external world—a conformity which may increase with every change in the ideas. The standard of excellence, on the other hand, in moral ideas must necessarily be conformity to our actual ideal, and this conformity must diminish with every change in the ideas.

This point would not perhaps have been worth dwelling on, if it was not that the discussion brings into strong relief the nature, so far as form is concerned, of the criterion of Right, and has also some bearing on current theories of optimistic Evolution, with which I confess it does not seem possible easily to reconcile it.

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