V.—DISCUSSION.

HUMANISM, INTUITIONISM AND OBJECTIVE REALITY.

I.

I do not know that there is much in Father Walker's reply (N.S., No. 71) to my comments (N.S., No. 69) on his article in N.S., No. 67, to which I need take exception. He has certainly made much more intelligible in it the exact nature of the parallel between Humanism and the philosophy of Martineau which he originally sought to draw. But he has also qualified it considerably, and confessed that the comparison only holds between essentials in the one case and secondary features in the other. It is no wonder, therefore, that I failed to recognise so recondite a likeness.

It is true that the experience of consequences is not, in Martineau's philosophy, entirely cut off from all influence on the judgment of moral worth. Martineau admits that their computation "is already more or less involved in the preference of this or that spring of action," and again, that "the choice of means by which to carry out the workings of a spring of conduct can be made only by consideration of consequences". But these admissions, though they temper, can hardly be held to override, the dominant intuitionism of his view. In the very same passage in which they occur,¹ he goes on to explain that the "Canon of Consequences" is, "a subsidiary rule" and to be regarded as intellectual rather than moral, and contrasts it with "the Canon of Principles which gives the true *Moral Criterion* for determining the rights of the case" and "suffices for the estimate of *Character*". Plainly therefore the appeal to consequences was, for Martineau, quite a secondary and subsidiary affair, on which little stress was laid. Apparently, moreover, he supposes that it is possible to 'compute' the nature of the consequences once for all, and thereby to fix the order of the 'springs of action' for all time, though he says so little about this empirical factor in his system that one can feel sure of this only because otherwise the whole would crumble under the pressure of experience.

In the Humanist elaboration of truth on the other hand this

¹ *Types of Ethical Theory*, ii., 255 256.

constant pressure and reaction of experience is the essential thing that determines the direction of intellectual progress. For though experiments of all sorts are tried, only a few succeed; and so human needs and postulates can hardly sustain themselves against a persistently hostile course of events. Nay, they have themselves absorbed to a vast extent the lessons of experience. It is true that the initiative rests with them and that they always make the first move. They are psychologically primary and indispensable, and seem at first sight arbitrary. But ultimately this arbitrariness is an illusion, except in so far as the 'matter' they work upon is really plastic to their manipulation—as, to an as yet undetermined extent, it appears to be. Thus though the doctrine is psychologically an apriorism, it works out logically as an empiricism. This *change of quality* causes I believe the chief difficulty intellectualists seem to have with Humanism; they do not grasp that 'origin' does not necessarily determine 'validity' and that things may really *change* their character.¹ At any rate it is clear that because of this unceasing criticism of human demands by the course of experience, the notion that we can (or should) compile a hierarchy of human needs to be referred to in all doubtful cases, is essentially impracticable. It is impossible to say *a priori* and beforehand of what demands satisfaction may be obtained, or to guarantee that the particular order of rank which seems to be empirically proper now must be rigidly preserved to all futurity. Of course this does not deny that inquiries into the present rank of needs and satisfactions may have considerable interest and temporary value. But they would be concerned with the working out in detail of what it is as yet more urgent to establish as a principle. If Father Walker will help, he is very welcome; but it is no objection to Humanism that all the applications of its principles have not yet been made.

To conclude the subject of the relation between Humanism and Martineau it will suffice to refer to two of Father Walker's admissions. He admits (p. 408) that according to Martineau an intuitive judgment of Conscience lords it over the (partly empirical) springs of action. He also admits (p. 409) the distinction that whereas in Humanism "consequences determine logical values relative to human needs, in Martineau human springs of action determine ethical values relative to consequences". Plainly therefore what is primary in the one theory is secondary in the other and *vice versa*. I am quite content with these admissions and also with the way Father Walker has now dropped the Absolute. For it has long been the primary aim of my philosophic efforts to make clear the total and irremediable irrelevance of this treacherous notion to every problem of human knowledge.

¹ This difficulty ultimately no doubt arises from an old intellectualist postulate that change is unthinkable.

II.

But if I stopped at this point I might fail to content Father Walker, who considers that the charges of 'subjectivism' and 'minimising the intellect' have not been met by me, but only denied.¹ Hence I feel bound to attempt an answer to the questions he puts to me.

(1) He asks why, if I do not intend to minimise the intellect, I should reduce it to the powers of inhibiting impulsive reactions and analysing a situation. Now (a) in the first place the passage in *Studies in Humanism* (p. 356) to which (quite rightly) he refers, mentions also two other factors in the intellectual functioning, viz., the *rearrangement* of the presented continuum and the *salutary modification* of the habitual reaction. Both of these are subsequent to the 'analysis' at which intellectualism is content to stop; both are essential because they form the tests of the value or 'truth' which the 'analysis' claims, and the former at least might demand recognition even from the most abstractly intellectualist conception of intellectual functioning. The objections to intellectualism at this point are that in the first place it provides no reason why the mind should function at all, and in the second it provides no means of distinguishing valuable from worthless functioning.

(b) In the second place, while I willingly and fully admit that my own analysis (like many of my positions) might be greatly improved by further elaboration and exemplification, I can see nothing degrading to the intellect in the functions assigned to it. And so I can fairly claim that my *intentions* at least were innocent and void of offence. I was merely trying to state in definite psychological terms the value of the intellectual processes which all reflective men have always felt, but which hitherto have been the subject only of vague and uninformative eulogy. In other words, I was trying to answer the questions—'What is Reason?' and 'What does it do for man?' If Father Walker, or any one else, can give better answers, I shall be happy to adopt them. But I am not acquainted with any rationalistic attempt to define 'Reason' in scientific terms.

(c) I must protest against the false abstraction of Father Walker's distinction between the 'strictly cognitive' and the 'merely physiological' aspects in the 'rational' act. The whole point of my analysis was that the function of analysing a presented situation must *not* be separated from its *biological* value and that consequently no part of the whole process was either 'strictly cognitive' or 'merely physiological'. It is purposive and vital and

¹ I had always regarded every line that I had ever written as an implicit refutation of such charges, but can now also point to a more explicit treatment of both in articles in N.S., No. 70, and in the Aristotelian Society's *Proceedings*, 1908-1909.

personal *throughout*, and only truly *intelligible* as such. The humanist interpretation is in principle a protest against destroying the biological integrity of rational action by applying to it such artificial, dualistic and inadequate distinctions.

(2) Father Walker wants to know why, if we have not intended to insult man's intellect, we have called concepts 'symbols'. In reply, I may say (a) that I cannot remember that I have ever done so. But (b) even if I had, I should not certainly have conceived a symbol as "an arbitrary sign which has no meaning apart from a concept and cannot of itself represent, though it may stand substitute for, objective reality". 'Arbitrary' could not mean for me 'illegitimate' and absurd. Nor could signs be said to 'have' meanings *per se*. Again, the distinction between 'representing' and 'standing substitute for' is hard to swallow for one who has discarded the 'correspondence' theory of truth. And lastly (c), I can see no reason why "symbolism, when applied as a general principle to the product of intellectual activity," should "imply subjectivism".

(3) Father Walker ascribes to us the doctrine that as all knowledge has a personal tinge and is relative to our needs, it to some extent *mutilates* even the perception of facts. On this he bases a 'dilemma'. If the 'personal tinge' and the 'effects of mutilation' do *not* permeate all knowledge, but leave some intact, it is possible to abstract from them; while if they *do*, "knowledge can have for us no really objective significance and meaning". For we cannot then "eliminate what is the product of our own subjective activities from what is due to the reaction of the object" (p. 410).

I must point out (a) that while it is a humanist contention (and one which has never seriously been impugned), that all knowledge is personal and relative to human needs, it is emphatically *not* asserted that it is any the *worse* for this. The 'object' is not 'mutilated' by becoming an object of knowledge. But for this process it would not *be* at all. And it does not lose, but gain. It is not deprived of any value, but literally receives thereby all the *value* it has. To interpret the *selectiveness* which pervades all perception and all thinking as a 'mutilation' of 'fact' is not a humanist doctrine at all. It once was the pet doctrine of Mr. Bradley in his absolutist days. As compared with the uncritical 'objectivism' (which apparently some forms of modern 'Realism' are anxious to share with sensationalism and Hegelian panlogism) which imagined that 'objects' entered minds *proprio motu* and that the percipient had nothing to do with the way in which his 'objects' appeared to him, it was no doubt an enormous advance. For it began to recognise the activity of the human knower. But in itself the position was totally untenable and could only end in scepticism. For though it was not naïve enough to look for incorruptible 'facts' on earth, it was sophisticated enough to represent 'knowing' as a way of corrupting facts.

I take some little credit for discovering (some years apparently

before Mr. Bradley himself) that this interpretation of human activity as a 'mutilation' was a fatal mistake, and for making this discovery a starting-point for the humanist criticism of that eminent ex-absolutist. To escape from the arbitrary and gratuitous scepticism in which the rationalist theory of knowledge had needlessly involved itself seemed easy enough. One merely had to take the bull by the horns, and to recognise the so-called 'mutilation' as a normal, necessary and salutary procedure, which far from undoing knowledge, was literally the making of it. For how could determinate objects and scientific facts arise out of the primary chaos of presentations and come to exist for us at all, without such selecting, shaping and adjusting to our purposes?

In adopting this attitude Humanism does not of course stand unsupported by philosophic precedent. It is only carrying through more resolutely, completely and consistently the principles of every critical theory of knowledge there has ever been. That the objects of ordinary perception cannot be simply taken as given without more ado, is common ground which Humanism shares with Hume, Kant and modern psychology. Indeed it is mainly the growth of scientific psychology that enables it to show that what for Hume was merely an incitement to doubt, and for Kant merely an unproved postulate of metaphysics, *viz.*, the so-called 'subjective' factor in knowing, is a thoroughly indispensable item in any scientific treatment of actual knowing. Only instead of saying intellectualistically 'the *understanding* makes the object,' Humanism ascribes this function to the whole man as the heir of all the ages, and explains in detail how he does it. The advance is so direct and obvious that I cannot believe that merely dogmatic assertions about the intuitive givenness of objects, which make no attempt to explain the facts of perception, will induce philosophy to sacrifice a principle it has laboured so long to make clear.

It is evident, therefore, which horn of Father Walker's dilemma we must choose. Personality and choice cannot be disavowed. They pervade *all* knowing and participate in the building up of *all* objects. But does it follow that therefore knowledge can have no objective significance and meaning? Nothing could be further from the truth. The significance and meaning of knowledge are thoroughly human. Relation to human purposes is the sole source of its value. It is what discriminates the real from the unreal, the true from the false, the good from the bad. All value is strictly 'subjective'; it is an attitude which cannot be conceived without a mind which is a judge of values. Neither can meaning exist without a mind which means, nor can any 'object' or 'fact' be recognised, except through a cognitive process which always selects, *i.e.*, reacts on, rearranges and reconstructs its data.

Call this process 'mutilation' if you please, but realise at least the implications of the bad name you are affixing to our knowing. It commits you to the dogma that the real object is unknowable,

and that knowledge is impossible. And do not imagine that you can close your eyes to processes which occur in every act of cognition, even by the desperate device of denying the existence of psychology.

III.

But I am not of course accusing Father Walker either of a self-sought scepticism or of a wilful blindness. His real position is well brought out by his final paragraph. It is that of practical commonsense realism, which takes for granted the reality of objects of perception until there is occasion to doubt them.

This is a position no pragmatist can assail without compunction. If philosophy were *merely* commonsense, and if commonsense were *never* puzzled, there would be no assailing it. But though our commonsense acceptance of objects works pragmatically for most purposes, it inevitably engenders the difficulties which incite to philosophic wonder. After all even in ordinary life men *sometimes* perceive falsely and reason wrongly. They desire therefore to avoid error and illusion, and to be told how to do this. Hence the question arises *how* false perception and error are to be detected and conceived. And to this question the humanist epistemology gives the only answer in existence. Its answer is the only real one, because it is the only one which *discriminates* between a 'truth' and a 'reality' which *excludes* and one that *includes* 'error' and 'unreality'.

To effect this discrimination successfully, and to satisfy the practical man who means something more by 'truth' than formal 'claim,' it may be necessary to transcend naive realism. It may require 'methodical doubt' and a recurrence to the principle of Descartes. But I fail to see anything 'methodical' about a 'credulity' which fights shy of any systematic account of error and illusion, and merely 'hopes' that on each occasion what it apprehends as 'reality' may not turn out to be 'illusion'. Neither practically nor 'theoretically' does such an attitude seem to meet the requirements of a theory of knowledge. And inasmuch as after all this procedure is merely what "the realist *prefers* to start from," it does not seem clear even how he escapes from the charge of 'arbitrariness' in the worst sense which he has himself attached to this term. Surely it is a perverse intellectualism that would prefer to fail by remaining uncritical to succeeding by becoming 'arbitrary' (*i.e.*, *selective*). And it is only in the eyes of a dogmatic determinism that the exercise of choice which the 'arbitrary' implies carries with it its irrevocable condemnation.

F. C. S. SCHILLER.