III.—MORAL OBLIGATION.

By WILLIAM MITCHELL.

THE reason why, while Science makes a straight course, Philosophy makes a zigzag and doubling advance is that the one is aware from the first of the precise facts with which it has to deal, while the other labours under the disadvantage of having itself to determine what they are. Philosophy must somehow state its own problem, and it cannot do this without somehow first answering it. Could philosophy state with sufficient definiteness what it has to explain, its problem would be, if not solved, at least on the certain road to solution. It has to give the *rationale* of experience. But then, what is experience? It certainly includes much illusion, and neither thought nor experience is at once adequate to expel it. Not our thought, which of itself is a criterion not of truth but of consistency. Not experience, for it embraces the illusions. If you merely pick and choose facts that will harmonise, you may give a certain *rationale* of these; but it is neither the philosophy of experience, nor, if derogatory to other facts, is it more a philosophy at all than an arbitrary generalisation. That is why philosophy is so difficult to make and so easy to criticise. Theories are made which explain certain facts and the rest are fairly or foully thrust in along with them, while those that are too obstinate are treated as sour grapes and handed over to credulity. This is especially the case in respect of Ethics, the science of the practice of man as man, and still more in the case of Moral Obligation by which as man he isolates himself from the other animals and would unite himself with God.

Even for the purpose of mere criticism we must be sure that the facts we flourish are genuine realities and not illusions. But since we cannot adopt all the facts of experience, seeing many are illusory, we are in this dilemma. On the one hand we cannot pick and choose among the facts without adopting a theory to guide us; and on the other hand, we cannot find a theory except we begin from the facts. It is evident that no one part of our fact-experience can be condemned on the mere strength of another part. We can eliminate the contradictions of our thought by reference to the pure facts of experience. But how eliminate the contradictions among these facts themselves? We have to purify

experience, yet experience is the only instrument ; for it is the universal postulate from which alone reason can begin and to which alone it can return.

The consciousness of this circular progress of philosophical knowledge was especially evident to Hume, Kant and Fichte. Philosophy, they saw, must end where it began—illuminating, purifying, unifying, but never destroying or creating. And so, when none of the three could exhibit a rationally complete representation of the philosophical circle, they did not blind themselves to the deficiency. They did not strive to make experience correspond to their theories. Experience as such was their assumption, and their failure to complete the rational cycle in it was not obscured by charging experience with delusion in respect of that part of it which resisted them. So that philosophy was no *petitio principii* to them. They all consciously failed to find a metaphysic of knowledge, that is, of experience in general, which was also a metaphysic of ethics—of experience in practice. What they did was not to attenuate the latter but to leave thought and practice in isolation, each with an explanation of its own.

Now it is just in this respect that their successors have committed their most vital error. The result of it is seen in the existence of so many self-existent systems, each gaining adherents among the unattached but seldom or never proselytising at the expense of one another. We are accustomed to overlook the seriousness only from the commonness of the error. All plead the actual illusoriness and contradiction in experience. Are we, then, in the dilemma of either taking experience as we find it and maintaining our various beliefs however recalcitrant to theory, or of proceeding throughout on the logical fallacy of questioning and purifying our postulate—the standard of our truth? If these are the only alternatives, it is evident that Ethics must proceed in an eternal see-saw of equally possible contradictions. In a case where one refuses to question the validity of the feelings of Freedom, Obligation, Responsibility, while another explains them away, how can either be justified or condemned?

It would be a very easy matter to show that the philosophical interpretation of duty is not the interpretation of duty as I or all feel it, that the benevolence of altruistic Utilitarianism is to me no benevolence, and so on. Even supposing me to be right in such contentions, I am not justified in thus defending the testimony of my feelings to objective truth except from something in them which inevitably distinguishes them from feelings that are illusory. I may maintain with Reid and Hamilton that they cannot with

logical consistency be rejected if anything else is accepted—that I am perfectly ‘parsimonious’ in accepting them; but if I do no more I have only chosen the other horn of the dilemma and cannot defend myself from the suspicion of delusion. Whether to criticise an ethical doctrine or to make one, it is equally necessary to discover what precisely is the postulate from which to begin. If no inviolable postulate can be found, our morality can only be a more or less systematised theory of practice as in Hume; or if it professes to be anything else, it will fall into the logical chaos which he was able to avoid.

It has already been said that no one fact of experience as such can have any claim of itself to superiority in comparison with any other fact. The difference between contingent and necessary truth is a difference not of the validity of fact as fact, but of the function which we find facts displaying. The bare feeling of any characteristic of a particular fact is undoubtedly the key to its importance in the unreflecting consciousness. But in philosophy no such subjective criterion can be applied without dogmatism. It is not subjective but objective certainty that we require, and the problem of philosophy is just this: to convert our subjective certainty—our faith in the uniformity of nature, in freedom, in subjection to moral law—into objective certainty. How can I who feel bound to obey a moral law say that every one is bound to obey it? I may analyse my state of consciousness to the utmost, but I can get nothing beyond it in my analytical judgment. Whatever feelings of necessity, universality, immediacy I find it containing, I can only say they are so for me. To say that I recognise the law itself as that which contains necessity is still to say that I recognise only. So long, indeed, as I merely adopt the subjective position of common self-consciousness, so long is it possible for another to say that I may be deluded. I, as an individual, cannot from a mere individual’s standpoint—from the purest fact of my consciousness—prove that I am capable (as I *am* capable) of legislating for the world. As little, on the same conditions, can the world legislate for me. What it legislates for me is no moral obligation but force, unless it corresponds with what I legislate for myself. On the contrary, when I claim to legislate for society or society claims to legislate for me, both presuppose a system of law which is peculiar neither to society as such—as a majority say—nor to me as an individual.

In one sense then we can derive neither objective from subjective obligation nor subjective from objective. Yet in

another sense we do and must do both. The reason why criteria of actual truth have so often failed is that they have seldom had a true objective application given to them. This was the case with the Cartesian criteria which aimed at obviating contradiction, but they never could get beyond a subjective application. For the removal of objective contradiction some transcendent principle had to be assumed—either generally, as with Descartes, the perfection of God, or particularly, as with Spinoza, the agreement of the idea and its *ideatum*, and with Leibnitz, a pre-established harmony.

Equally valueless for objective certainty are the criteria of necessity, universality and immediacy or 'apriority' as mere characteristics of a cognition. If, in the first place, one says that he *must* believe so and so because of his own nature or because of the self-evident nature of the cognition, he satisfies himself, but is quite unable to satisfy another till he show that this necessary perception of a cognition or perception of a necessary cognition is independent of him as a particular individual. He must, in short, somehow universalise either himself or the cognition. But, in the second place, that cannot be done by pointing to the *universality* of the conception ; for the physical evolutionist will inquire as to its origin and then point to the uniformity of the circumstances of human life as its cause, whether it be true or delusive. And, in the third place, the *immediacy* or 'apriority' of a cognition equally fails to assure of objective validity. For, on the one hand, men differ in regard to the beliefs of which, nevertheless, each maintains that he has an intuitive or necessary knowledge ; and, on the other hand, one can never know whether or not he is using absolutely *a priori* knowledge. As a matter of fact, most of our perfectly intuitive knowledge was demonstrative at one time of our life ; and, as a matter of strong supposition if not of scientific demonstration, all our intuitive knowledge has had a similar history in the history of the race. Finally, all three criteria fail to give the transference from idea to fact, from conviction to truth, from subjectivity to objectivity. I may talk of a moral law which I for my part never excogitated or developed in me more than I do the light of the sun,—a law which I find in every one and which comes to me with a vividness and self-evidence that I cannot resist. But this alone will not prevent Hegel or Darwin from telling me that my inquiry should begin where I leave off. I cannot pass from conviction to truth by using the criteria of the former. The real criteria of both may be the same, but that is just what I have to prove, and I cannot prove it from an individualistic standpoint.

It is evident that we can assign reality or truth to the facts of which necessity, universality and immediacy assure us, only after we apply the question of evolution to them. Whence are they? What is that subjective necessity which is objective and transforms convictions into realities? It is not the necessity of conception to any one, but its necessity for existence or experience; not the fact that it is believed by all men, but that all experience requires it; not its underivedness in any one's mind, not its priority in time, but that it is the logical *prius* of the particulars from which it is thought to be derived. Our purpose is not to make a transcendental justification of the ethical conceptions. What we do is to assume this rather and to state its counterpart. That is to say, we assume the existence of an ethical sphere of action and develop the consequences of that assumption. If such a sphere of action is denied, if, in other words, Sceptical or Egoistic Hedonism is maintained, there is nothing further to be said. For it is quite possible to deny the validity of the whole scope of Morality. One has only to brand the whole thing as delusion to be secure against every demonstration, seeing that every proof must begin with part of what is denied. I might exhibit the chaos into which the world would fall were morality expelled and did only personal gratification remain, but no one could demonstrate that such chaos was not the natural state and that order was not a fraudulent imposition of schemers for their own behoof.

Proceeding then to constitute Ethics as concerned with a distinct round of experience, we apply our objective criterion and ask—What is the principle which determines the science of Ethics as such? The sphere of morality is notoriously the home of subjective conviction. What, then, is it that justifies or purifies these convictions to the individual in regard to their claim to actuality? Whatever it is, it is inviolable *for Ethics*. That is the cardinal point of this paper. We must find it in order to avoid the suspicion of delusion and subjective dogmatism in our assertions of freedom and in cases of conscience, as well as to justify our feelings of remorse and devotion. When we have found it we cannot tamper with it without begging the question, for it must be the universal postulate in ethical determinations.

As we have already hinted, it is Moral Obligation. There are many other elements without which morality would be impossible, but as these apply to other spheres of knowledge besides Ethics they are not the determiners of the ethical

sphere as such. Every science has both a general and a particular determination. Thus the physical sciences are generally determined under logical laws with reference to their generic element, while they are also particularly distinguished from one another. So in Ethics, though freedom is an indispensable characteristic, and even though it might be said that we should not have become aware of freedom but for morality, it is not freedom which constitutes Ethics as a separate branch of philosophy, seeing that we are as free in other spheres of experience to which morality as such does not extend. Nor is it the possession of self-evident practical laws or of an ideal; for we possess such in the sphere of prudence which is out of, or at least wider than, the sphere of Ethics. Finally, merit or demerit being the concomitant of freedom is likewise too wide, and responsibility is consequent upon obligation.

If, then, there is a distinct sphere in the round of human action—call it Ethics, as in this paper, or a branch of Ethics, it is no matter—it is determined from the rest of human action by moral obligation, which on that account becomes also the first determiner of its contents. When we say that Ethics exists for the enlightenment of our moral obligation, we do not mean that a doctrine of duty must always be the main feature of every system. We should rather expect it to be the least prominent part. But it should always be remembered that what affords the guiding line of the whole process, what enables us to get beyond our own subject to legislate in morals, and what makes society a legislator for us, is this obligation. However slightly therefore anyone treats of Duty, and this is naturally most apparent in Aristotle the founder of Ethics as a distinctive science, it is this conception which determines every other ethical idea. Our question, then, is—What theories of End, Freedom, Merit and Responsibility are consistent with the postulate which enables them to be ethical theories at all, and for the sake of whose ultimate enlightenment they ought to exist?

The character of any ethical system is known by the end, ideal or standard of action which it professes. Our question is—What must be the characteristics of the end by reason of its determination through obligation? It is just the converse of this question that is usually put. But every attempt to derive oughtness from rightness must, as we have shown, either end in an illogical system or destroy the possibility of a separate science of Ethics at all. The history of Ethics in England furnishes an apt illustration in

the three stages represented, say, by Bentham, Bain and Spencer. Each begins by determining the right or end and subordinates to this what should have been the postulate. The result, of course, is that morality coalesces with prudence. The three stages are marked by the aspect which obligation comes to assume. Bentham expels it, Bain admits it in an external way by handing it over to the police, and Spencer absorbs it by identifying it with existence. No other conclusion than this was possible: what ought to be, is, and that not more as a philosophical reality than in every the most contingent action. If there is a science of ethical practice at all, obligation cannot be subordinated to the end but the end must be subordinated to obligation. And so we repeat our question—What are the necessary characteristics of the ethical end in view of the postulate of morality as such?

They are, that it be at once subjective and objective and equally valid and harmonious in both respects. It must be subjective, that is, it must present some interest to my desire before I could recognise it as a law to *me*. It must be objective, that is, it must present some interest external to my individual desires as such before I can recognise it as *a law* at all. An obligation is just the principle which expresses the equal validity of the same law as subjective and objective. The end must be subjective but not individualistic, and objective but not external.

With this criterion of ends determined by the necessary postulate of Ethics, let us inquire how far it is satisfied by the ordinary ideals of moral systems. It is apparent how the history of Hedonism has throughout its progressive career endeavoured to realise it. Beginning from the Sophistical position of unlimited subjectivity, which is to Ethics what Pyrrhonism is to Metaphysics, *i.e.*, what neither can answer in any other way than by neglect, Hedonism has sought to find some end which should be at once of equal subjective and objective validity. But, though it has passed from a formula of pure egoism to a formula of pure altruism, it has failed to find an end which shall preserve equally the rights of the subject and the rights of the object: and this, just because it has always been forced by its presupposition to occupy only one of the two standpoints, and has consequently been unable to do justice to the other, since of themselves they manifest no inherent connexion with each other. Not that this dilemma has not been seen. Every system of Utilitarianism has been an attempt to overcome it and nothing else. But it cannot be

overcome till Mill's question—'Why should I promote the general happiness?' receives the answer—Because it is when and only when I promote the general happiness that I increase my own; in short, till there is no opposition between my own and my neighbour's good—till Egoism becomes Altruism and Altruism Egoism; till, that is, the collapse of Obligation or Ethics itself.

In such a hopeless condition Utilitarianism was bound to lie till it somehow should get out of itself and criticise the absolute value of its own end. Now this has been done in two opposite directions—by the Rational or Universalistic Utilitarianism, and by the Ethics of Physical Evolution.

We concern ourselves with these theories only in respect of their attitude to the necessary postulate of Ethics. The end we found must be such as to conserve the rights equally of the subject and of the object. Now it is to this condition that Utilitarianism has, in its two developments, sought however unconsciously to conform. They are both prompted by Mill's introduction of quality as the distinguishing feature in hedonical calculations; for that was really to oust happiness as such from being the determining end. Utilitarianism was forced, as Socrates had been, to apply the calculus, the 'measuring art,' with the purpose not merely of measuring pleasure but of constituting or determining its absolute value. And since the value of the pleasure which an object produces differs with the attitude of the individual towards it, it is the best attitude which becomes the end; in other words, it is the harmony of the subject and the object.

But now, what is required is not a mere assertion of the harmony but the *rationale* of it. This the Ethics of Physical Evolution has seen and seeks to give. But the Universalistic and Rational Utilitarianism really presents no end, but only an ideal fusion of the rights of the subject and the object, without discovering the ground or determiner, rather only the consequence, of the fusion. It begins with what was the common conclusion of the Stoics and Epicureans, and amalgamates without unifying the reasoning of both as justified by the presupposition of the conclusion. It gives no *rationale* of the connexion between Happiness as such—the right of the subject, and Virtue as such—the right of the object. Whether happiness causes virtue or virtue happiness remains still the antinomy of practical reason. Nor is Kant's barren conjecture further advanced. "It is not impossible," he says, "that morality of mind should have a connexion as cause with happiness (as an effect in the sensible world), if not immediate yet mediate, *i.e.*, through an intelligent Author of nature."

The other development does present the required *rationale*, namely, in physical evolution. It is this which determines the true ethical end—human development towards the complete realisation of function and adaptation to environment. At present it constitutes, says Mr. Spencer, a Relative Ethics, but in the distance we see it will bring out an Absolute Ethics, in which, “instead of each maintaining his own claims, others will maintain his claims for him”. This is just what Utilitarianism has always sought, as it had to seek; but it has obviously been gained only by reading ‘existence’ for ‘obligation,’ ‘is’ for ‘ought’. Morality is taken from the individual and habited in an external determiner, or, to say the same thing, it is left with an individual who, in everything he does, exhibits the resulting product of a determination, to which in ultimate analysis he is found to be the passive subject, if anything more than the resultant himself. The ethical end is thus not for, but of, man. Not only is morality proper taken from the individual; what ghost of it remains is equally claimed in kind by the meanest object of his environment. Just as Clifford found it necessary so to extend the psychology of this evolution as to find the elements of consciousness in material operations, for the sake of the same consistency this physical ethics has to be similarly extended. Thus, while Spencer would apply moral distinctions only to the actions of sentient beings, his natural successors see no reason whatever for the limitation. “Is a watch that won’t go the less a bad watch,” says a writer in *MIND*, “because it neither made itself nor wound itself up? Is a man the less a bad man because he only follows his bad will and did not originate it?”

The only other end we shall examine under the postulate of Obligation is Perfection. Now subjective perfection, the mere attainment of efficiency, is not the ethical end for the simple reason that it may not include the rights of the object. Accordingly all the famous systems of Perfection have had an objective as well as a subjective reference. This is prominent in the formulas—to realise, according to Aristotle, the perfect exercise of a perfect life; according to Kant, an absolutely good-will; and according to Hegel, universal self-consciousness. Each of these regards the perfection of the individual as only a constituent in the actual end which is at once internal and external, subjective and objective. Society and the individual reach perfection, not by the former acting for itself—the doctrine proper to Physical Evolution, nor by the latter acting for himself—the doctrine of Sophism or Egoism; neither according to such

impossible ideals as the former acting for the latter—the ideal of the Absolute Ethics, or the latter acting for the former—the ideal of modern Utilitarianism. Both are in essential relation; and that for which obligation rests on each is just the realisation and thereby the perfection of that relation. Only after discovering what that relation is, are these formulas admissible, and then they are all admissible. The discovery can emanate of course only from self-consciousness where we find an identity of nature and interest with one another. Here we discover that the relation is self-relation and that its perfection consists in its infinity—in our self-satisfaction or freedom from external determination. The perfection contemplated by Mr. Spencer, on the other hand, is the finite and necessitated ideal of a complete external adjustment. The laws of morality are the expressions of this ethical self-relation. What experience does is as little to produce them as to construct the ideal to which they point. It only determines them to greater particularity and definiteness. They are accordingly *a priori* without being abstract, and actual or concrete without being an external product.

The application of the postulate of Obligation has a double function relatively to moral freedom. In the first place it assures of the reality of that freedom, a thing which no demonstration could do (except for metaphysical freedom) in view of possible doctrines of association and unconscious cerebration. In the second place, it establishes the essential characteristics of moral freedom without which no theory of it can be adequate. Confining ourselves to this latter function, we have to ask,—What is the necessary characteristic of a moral agent in view of Obligation? The answer can only be that man must, in the first place, have power to perform every obligation, and, in the second place, that the exercise or non-exercise of such power must depend on himself alone. But for the former I should not recognise the law at all; but for the latter it would be no law for me.

We need not examine any of the many theories of freedom that are founded on a psychology which makes the realisation of these conditions impossible. If, as Spinoza says, “the mind cannot determine the body to motion or rest or any other state,” we need not care to discover whether mind is a function of brain or has its dynamical power and the reason of its existence within itself. Our freedom must be able to express itself in the determination of phenomena.

So, too, if the metaphysic of knowledge necessarily excludes it. Kant came dangerously near this position and is often actually in it when representing the sensible world

as self-determined, independently of the noumenal world. It is from this Kantian source that the undetermined will of Schelling and Schopenhauer is developed. Schelling, making the distinction between the noumenal and sensible worlds, defines free actions as those which proceed from the former. But before the noumenal *Ego* acts it must be disposed or determined to a specific nature. This nature we do not assume in time, and nothing we do in time can remove one particle of any essential evils it contains. Our sensible actions are therefore all inevitably determined. But we feel remorse in respect of them just because we know that we might noumenally have assumed another nature. Beyond the useless revealing of this noumenal freedom the feeling has no rational function. Similarly Schopenhauer is related to Kant, whom indeed Hartmann calls the father of theoretic as Schopenhauer is of practical pessimism. He lays the guilt of our actions on our character—a blind will—whose nature our actions reveal. We can never help acting as we do, seeing that willing always precedes knowing. Regarded from an external point of view our actions might have been different—that is, had our character been other than it is, or had we been some other person. When I regret it is my constitution I regret. I can only be sorry I am not another. Such doctrines of freedom are divorced from obligation, which nevertheless is the Kantian postulate for proving the existence of freedom at all.

The interpreter of Kant has two courses open to him. He may suppose either that Kant represents the sensible world as completely determined in itself, or that he makes it dependent on the noumenal world in some vital way. If the former, then to make Kant consistent, the interpreter must deprive him of the noumenal world (to which he held tenaciously) as an unwarrantable, because an unnecessary, assumption; which is to deprive him of his whole doctrine of morals and leave him in intellectual agnosticism. In the other alternative, we must find in his work that he has some living connexion between the two worlds. If this be found, the latter can evidently be the only just interpretation.

Causality is one of the scientific categories or categories of ordinary experience, and so has its full application in the sensible or phenomenal world. We cannot apply it in the same sense to anything else without dogmatism—such dogmatism as is expressed in the current agnosticism which manipulates the common categories at will as in Mill's question, Who caused God? From the standpoint of science or experience we know only that causality is becoming, but in morals we find that becoming is only the

phenomenal representation of causality. We find that causality is more than a mere time-relation. It is a determination of an object before it receives—before it can receive—the determination of time or of any other phenomenal relation. It is the logical *prius* of a phenomenon as such—the first predicate of every possible object of sensible experience. No phenomenon could be a phenomenon at all without it. On the one hand, then, we can represent the sensible world as complete and determined ; and, on the other hand, we can point to the freedom of the cogitable world as expressed in it. In the former sense, we say motives cause volitions or resolves ; in the latter, that I alone am their cause. Motives, I can say, become resolves just as I can say that a certain combination of gases becomes water. But analyse the antecedents in either case as I may, I can find no trace of the effect or of any causal nexus in them, for no phenomenon is adequate to express more than it is in itself. The causal nexus is not phenomenal. Before the time-relation of becoming, or, as we say, physical or phenomenal causation, is predicable of an object, the object must, like all phenomena, be causally determined by a transcendental unity implied in all systems of relation. The self-conscious agent in that unity *I* is the cause that determines my motives, my resolves and actions to be what they are. Motives become volitions and volitions become actions not in respect of any abstraction like a phenomenal succession, but by reason of the unity which gives them their first determination—and which we have called the causal determination—to be phenomena at all.

Such a function moral obligation postulates for will as the first of its two characteristics, namely, that it have power to fulfil its obligations. We proceed to the second, that the exercise and non-exercise of such power must depend on the agent—the subject of obligation. Under the former we have seen how he is free in his phenomenal relations, *i.e.*, How he *can*. We must now discover how he is free in his essential or self-relation, *i.e.*, How *he* can.

As it is the confusion of will and desire which creates the difficulty of conceiving the personal manifestation of freedom, so it is the confusion of will and knowledge which makes it difficult to keep man in his individuality. The history of ethics shows that it is hardly possible to escape from identifying will and desire without identifying will and knowledge. Thus the earliest moral speculators, the Sophists, committed the former error, being immediately followed by Socrates who committed the other ; and so on through all the ancient systems. The modern course was opened by Descartes with

the former error ; Spinoza added the other, and so on again till the present time when the doctrine of Evolution claims to resolve the difficulty—the physical, by uniting reason to desire, *i.e.*, under the form of physical necessity ; the dialectical, by uniting desire to reason, *i.e.*, under the form of freedom. We confine ourselves to the latter.

To say with Green that “ in the sense in which thought and desire enters into an act of will, each is the whole act,” or that “ will is equally and undistinguishably desire and thought,” is just to say that a man never acts but for an end he desires, and that he is free when that end is rational. Now, while this is a correct representation of the acts of men, it is not the freedom with which we are more immediately concerned. This metaphysical or general freedom when demanded from a man, as is done by obligation, postulates a particular freedom in him. The one is the freedom of God which we are commanded to realise, the other is the freedom which we demand for the purpose of performing that command. Obligation thus postulates both this objective and this subjective freedom. It could not impose the latter without presuming the former, nor if it imposed the former without presuming the latter would it be any longer obligation at all. The significance of freedom in Ethics as a science is the state of the individual before the harmony of thought and desire, before ideal freedom has been realised. That it can be realised we presume under the postulate of obligation. How it is realised we also know. It is through self-reflection, through thereby recognising the limitations of impulse, that man becomes superior to impulse and is released from physical necessity. Man shows his freedom when by such absolute reflection he harmonises reason and desire in the satisfaction of moral obligations—when practical reason is his sole guide and he acts under the idea of this complete self-satisfaction.

This distinction between the distinctively metaphysical or objective and the distinctively ethical or subjective freedom is not to be confounded either with Hegel's distinction between absolute and formal freedom or with that between determination and indifference. Absolute freedom is that which has been described. It has itself for its object, is wholly self-related and becomes determinate through no external impulse but by its own infinite self-reflection. The formal freedom has a limited or contingent content and is variously denominated by Hegel as caprice, arbitrariness, wilfulness. It is free at all just because it consciously transcends limitations ; but its transcendence is finite and relative, for its reflection is not self-directed but proceeds from impulse to

impulse, from cause to consequence, thereby being partly determined from without. Now the will must in action be always one or other of these two, that is, it must manifest itself either in absolute or in formal freedom. But obligation, as it applies to the individual before such manifestation of his will, applies to a state in which it is possible for the individual either to identify himself with the universal reason and be free or to refuse to do it. A murderer sentenced to death, says Hegel, is free only when he wills to get hung. We with the postulate of obligation, if in this case it applies, if the harmony of desire and knowledge is attainable, claim for him a freedom which shall enable him to attain it.

Nor is this distinction of subjective and objective will to be compared with that absurd outstart of much current discussion as to freedom,—‘Will is either determined or undetermined, that is, indifferent ; now, if it is not determined,’ and so on. The alternative is perfectly good in Psychology, but except for the misconception it breeds it has precisely the same importance to Philosophy as the fact that it was fair yesterday but it rains to-day. Indifference, indeed, is generally itself a form of determination and is always on a level with it in the case of a self-conscious being. Man has always subjective freedom—the power to realise or not his proper or objective freedom. If he does not so realise himself in his actions, he is *indifferent* to his proper self or is *determined* by the blind force of his external relations. If he does realise his objective freedom, he is indifferent to the blind force of his external relations and is determined—determining them—according to his proper self.

I ought now to examine in the same way the ideas of Merit and Responsibility, but it is better to close here as these subjects have lately become too prominent in ethical literature to be adequately treated within the limits of this paper. For the present purpose, too, a critical discussion is unnecessary. Merit and Responsibility are the necessary consequents or complements of the ideas already discussed. It is just as legitimate to reject them (in the only sense in which anybody gives them any meaning and value), on the ground of Physical Ethics, as it would be for a man who had gone round the world to deny the existence of some place which could not have lain in his way. Nor are these ideas in any way inconsistent with the fact that to make the moral law square with the appetites is, as Kant says, “to corrupt at the source the fountain of Duty and to banish and cloud all its dignity”; seeing that in ethics they spring from and are determined by that very fountain of Moral Obligation.