

PAPERS READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, 1904-1905.

I.—MORAL OBJECTIVITY AND ITS POSTULATES.

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I.

A CURIOUS revolution seems of late to have taken place in the attitude of the higher speculative Philosophy towards Morality. There was a time when all idealistic or spiritualistic Philosophy, whatever its attitude towards Religion and Theology, was regarded as the unswerving ally not merely of practical Morality but of what may be called the theoretical claims of the Moral Law. Kant used Morality to build up again, as he thought on firmer foundations, the spiritual structure which the critical Philosophy had speculatively overthrown. The idealistic Philosophers who followed him, amid all divergencies, were agreed in this—that Morality is rational and moral obligation no mere subjective experience of the human mind. Even Hegel, though his attitude towards evil, his thoroughgoing vindication of things as they are—from the Universe at large down to the Prussian Constitution in Church and State—paved the way for moral scepticism, still believed that Religion, as he conceived it, was the ally, the natural complement and crown, of Morality, and he did not quarrel with the Christian teaching about the love and goodness of God. Still more intimate was the association of an enthusiastic belief in the Moral Law with a philosophical Theology in the minds of more or less Hegelian English Idealists like Green. At the present day there are many

indications of a revolt against this attitude of mind. We have Mr. Bradley demonstrating the non-morality of the Absolute and (though it may be in a moment of not too serious petulance) vindicating the existence of human error on the ground of the diversion which the spectacle of it affords to an Absolute who is not human enough to love though he is human enough to be amused. By not a few speculative writers the claim of Morality to be a revelation of the ultimate nature of things is treated with something like contempt, while Religion receives a somewhat patronizing recognition just on account of its alleged superiority to mere Morality, even if our new Idealists do not (like Professor Taylor) actually repudiate the old claim of Morality to be rational and talk of placing it upon a purely psychological foundation—that is to say, in plain words, reducing it to a particular kind of human feeling: while if we turn to an entirely different philosophical quarter, we find Morality wounded in the house of its friends. Professor James, the avowed defender of the position that we may believe whatever we find it edifying to believe, still makes Morality consist merely in feeling. Of writers more decidedly inclining to Naturalism, like Höffding and Simmel, it is of course only to be expected that they should treat Morality as merely a peculiar kind of human feeling of little or no objective or cosmic significance.

In this state of philosophical opinion I trust it will not be unsuitable to attempt, in the sketchy and inadequate way which alone is possible in an hour's address, to discuss these questions—(1) Whether Morality is essentially rational; (2) what we mean by its being rational; (3) what implications this rationality, if accepted, carries with it as to the ultimate nature of things.

II.

I have not time here to defend the position that the ultimate moral judgment is a judgment of value. Particular judgments

as to what it is right to do are, it seems to me, ultimately judgments as to the means to be adopted with a view to some end that is judged to be essentially good or intrinsically valuable. And if the action is really right, it must tend towards the realization of the greatest good that it is possible for a given individual under given conditions to promote. The idea of value is an ultimate conception or category of human thought. Like other ultimate conceptions, it cannot be defined or explained in a way which shall be intelligible or satisfactory to minds destitute of the idea. "The absolute end," "the end which it is reasonable to pursue," "that which has value," "that which it is right to promote," "that which has intrinsic worth," and "that which we approve," are synonyms for the term "good." The clearness with which he expresses this idea of the unanalysable character of "the good" is one great merit of the late Professor Sidgwick's ethical writings, and that idea has recently received an impressive restatement in Mr. Moore's *Principia Ethica*—all the more valuable on account of Mr. Moore's repudiation of Hedonism; though I can only describe as preposterous Mr. Moore's claim that the idea of an indefinable good was an original discovery of Henry Sidgwick. Certainly it is the last claim he would have made for himself.

How can we prove that the judgment of value is essentially rational, and is not merely a mode of feeling? The task is as difficult as that of meeting the argument of a writer who should contend that the ideas one, two, three are mere feelings. The contention could only be met by a thorough examination of the whole fabric of knowledge; in short, by a refutation of Sensationalism in all its forms from the time of Heraclitus to that of Hume or of Professor James. The best way of meeting the contention in a limited space will be simply to try and make plain what we mean by the assertion that Morality is rational: and this may perhaps best be done by asking what difference it makes whether we regard moral judgments as truly rational, or put them down as mere modes

of feeling, and then going on to remove some of the misconceptions which have prevented the recognition of this truth.

(a) Feeling is essentially a subjective thing. When I say that a doctor's gown is red, and a colour-blind man says that it is green or grey, neither of us is in the wrong. It really is as much a fact that it is green to him as that it is red to me and other normal-sighted persons. If, therefore, the proposition "this is right" means merely this gives certain persons a particular kind of feeling called a feeling of approbation, the same act may be right and wrong at the same time. A bull-fight excites lively feelings of approbation in most Spaniards, and lively feelings of disapprobation in most Englishmen. From the "moral sense" point of view neither of them is in the wrong. True, you may insist with the Moral Sense writers on the specific, *svi generis* character of the idea of moral approbation; but (since Hume) it ought to be evident that the merely specific character of a feeling can be no ground for assigning it a superiority over any other feeling. It may give me a disagreeable twinge of the Moral Sense to tell a lie, but, if I happen to prefer putting up with a feeling of disapprobation to the pains of the rack, no possible reason can be given why I should not follow my own bent and accuse an innocent man to the relief of my own pain. The only kind of objectivity which a Moral Sense theory can give to the ethical judgment is by an appeal to public opinion. You may mean by a bad act an act which causes feelings of disapprobation in the majority. From this point of view it becomes evident that (as Hume explicitly taught*) acts are not approved because they are moral: they are moral because they are approved. And from this position it must follow that a man who is in advance of public opinion is, *eo ipso*, immoral. Of course constructive Moralists of the Moral Sense School, like Hutcheson, would not accept this conclusion. They really

* Cf. Alexander, *Moral Order and Progress*, p. 150 sq.

regarded the Moral Sense as a feeling which merely recognised a quality in good action which is really there independently of the individual's feeling about it. But if I know that the moral sense feeling is intrinsically superior to the feeling of a whole skin and easy nerves, it is not the feeling to which I am really appealing, but a judgment about the feeling which claims universal validity, which asserts something more than the fact of the feeling, and which cannot be got out of the feeling as such. I imply the existence in my mind of an absolute ideal which, though its materials are derived from experience, is not simply created by experience. It is not because I have a feeling of approbation in doing a kind act that I judge it ought to be done, but because I judge that such a feeling is one which I ought to have and to respect.

Now, is it not the fact that our moral judgments do claim this universal validity? When I pronounce an act right or wrong, an end good or bad, do I not mean something more than that I happen to approve it? The very core of the moral consciousness is the conviction that things are right or wrong in themselves, whether I, or even any number of human bipeds, think so or not. I mean that moral laws possess objective truth just like the laws of Mathematics or the physical laws of nature, and that anybody who thinks them to be other than what they are is in error, just as much as the man who thinks that fire does not burn. If anyone likes to say that this idea is a delusion, there is no final answer to this or any other kind of scepticism; but there is as much reason for thinking that the distinction between good and evil is part of the ultimate nature of things as for thinking that two and two make four, or that for every change there must be a sufficient reason. We have no means of proving the validity of any part of our thought except by showing that we cannot help thinking so.

(b) What then are the misunderstandings which hinder the recognition of so obvious a truth over and above those general sensationalistic arguments to which Kant and his followers are

usually thought to have constructed an unanswerable reply? One of these misunderstandings is of so naïf a character that I am ashamed of having to point it out. It is astounding to find an eminent teacher of Ethics like the late Professor Gizycki insisting that, if ethical truth were a matter of the intellect, the most intellectual man would be the best man, as if the man who knew what was right necessarily did it, or as if there were no variety or specialisation in intellectual capacity.* Just as there are eminent classical scholars who are incapable of understanding a proposition of Euclid, so there have been men of genius who have been almost destitute of the ideas of good and evil, right and wrong; while persons of small intellectual capacity in other respects may have this particular side of their intellectual nature highly developed.

(c) Another misunderstanding is that to claim objective validity for the moral judgment is to claim personal infallibility for the individual moral consciousness. When I maintain that this act is right, I may be wrong unquestionably; I may have grave doubts about the matter myself. But I do mean that, *if* I am right in asserting it to be right, you cannot also be right in maintaining that it is wrong. The diversities of ethical ideal no more destroy the objectivity of the moral judgment than the fact that a boy may do a sum wrong undermines the objectivity of the multiplication table, or than history is proved to be a merely subjective affair because the earlier chapters of our Greek histories are re-written every ten years or so.

(d) A more serious line of objection is reached when we come to the plea that the moral judgment is closely connected with feeling and emotion, that people seem to fail in moral discrimination as well as in moral practice, not so much from want of an abstract category of thought or the power of

* *Student's Manual of Ethical Philosophy*, adapted from the German by Stanton Coit, Ph.D., p. 87.

employing it, as from want of sympathy, feeling, emotion of one kind or another. I think it ought to be admitted that ethical Rationalists have very inadequately stated the closeness of the connection between ethical judgment and various modes of feeling. In the first place, ethical Rationalism has been discredited by Kant's attempt to make not merely the form but the content of the moral law *a priori* or independent of experience. If the moral judgment is essentially a judgment of value, I must have experience not merely of the means which will promote a certain end, but of the end itself, before I can pronounce whether that end is good. No experience could tell me whether an end is good if I had not the category of good or value. Feeling assures me that sugar is pleasant, but sensation will not tell me that pleasure is good, as is shown by the fact that some people who know very well what pleasure is deny that it is good. But I must have the experience before I can pass the judgment, though the judgment asserts something more than the fact of the experience. I cannot tell whether listening to the music of Wagner is good until I have heard enough of Wagner's music to know what sort of music it is. Not only is experience necessary to pronouncing the moral judgment, but, though I do not hold that feeling (abstracted from will and from knowledge) is the only thing which possesses value, I do think it may be maintained that some kind of feeling must be an element in any state of consciousness to which we can assign ultimate value. Undoubtedly feeling is an element in all states of consciousness, and it seems to me as unreasonable to attempt to make abstraction of the feeling side of consciousness in pronouncing upon its value, as to make the opposite mistake of attending to nothing but feeling. Sometimes the feeling which I judge valuable may be a mere ordinary feeling of pleasure and pain. I cannot judge that it is wrong to stick a pin into my neighbour unless I know that pain is bad, and I cannot judge that without some personal experience of what pain is. It would be impossible to convince

a feelingless intelligence that the act was wrong. I might say "it is wrong because it hurts": such an intelligence would reply—"Hurts! what is that?" And this question would admit of no reply. But sometimes the feeling which constitutes the value of an act is not mere pleasure or pain, but some particular kind of emotion; and here the judgment will not be made by a man who had not experienced that emotion, or something sufficiently analogous to it, to enable him to understand what it is. We judge infanticide to be wrong in part because it checks those feelings of humanity and family affection to which we attribute a high value. A man who had never experienced any such feelings could not assign value to them, and consequently could not (apart from authority) judge that infanticide is wrong. It is here that the Moral Sense position seems nearest to the truth. Its mistake lies, as it seems to me (as regards this particular class of judgment) in not distinguishing between the feelings which may be excited by an act or result from it, and the judgment that such feelings have value.

The arguments which I have used in support of the idea that the moral judgment is the work of Reason and not of feeling are old and threadbare enough, but they seem to me never to have been satisfactorily met by the numerous writers who are now trying to place Ethics upon a "purely psychological" foundation. I do not understand what this means if it does not mean the reduction of moral judgments to modes of feeling. At bottom the whole movement represents merely a recrudescence of the old Moral Sense theory—a recrudescence for which no doubt the exaggerations and one-sidedness of ethical Rationalists and metaphysical Moralists are largely responsible. But in one respect the recent psychological Moralists do exhibit an advance upon the older and cruder school of naturalistic Ethics. Writers like Höfding do admit as a psychological fact the existence of a distinctive idea of moral obligation, and do not attempt to reduce it to a mere fear of ancestral ghosts or the like. Professor Simmel, the

most original of recent ethical writers, even calls the idea of duty a category, though he treats the content of the category as derived wholly from psychological—that is to say, non-rational—processes. This seems to me as impossible a position as to contend that we have indeed a category of number, but that we are absolutely incapable of counting correctly. To insist upon the enormous extent to which our ethical judgments are in point of fact swayed by custom, passion, prejudice, and a thousand non-rational influences—a task which Simmel has performed with extraordinary penetration—does not show that those influences can never be corrected by deliberate efforts at ethical thinking, any more than the objectivity of our mathematical judgments is brought into question by the undoubted fact that the estimate which a reporter will form of the numbers present at a political meeting may be materially swayed by the extent of his sympathy with its objects.

III.

What, then, may we infer from the existence of these objective ethical judgments as to the constitution of the Universe? What, in other words, is the relation of Ethics to Metaphysics? Are there such things as metaphysical postulates of Ethics? I believe that there are.

I should not fall behind any champion of what is sometimes called in a polemical sense “ethical thought” in asserting the “independence” of the moral judgment. The judgment “this end has value, therefore I should promote it” is a judgment which does not by itself contain any explicit reference to any particular belief about the Universe, or its origin, or its destiny. It is assuredly made, to some extent understood, and unreservedly acted upon, by persons of the most diverse theological or metaphysical creeds, or of none. But it does not follow that what is implied in that judgment can justify itself on reflection, or that the validity of the judgment can be defended without making certain assumptions. Even physical

science has its metaphysical postulates, though distinguished men of science may be ignorant of them or deny them.

I will not insist on the implications of the moral judgment as to the nature of the self. That we are capable of self-determination, that action really does spring from character, is a proposition which is hardly likely to be denied by anyone who professes to attribute objective validity to the idea of moral obligation or moral value. At all events I have no time to dwell on that side of the matter. But it is otherwise with metaphysical postulates about the ultimate nature of the Universe in general. There are persons who appear to think that the idea of an absolute objective validity in our moral judgments can be reconciled with any view, or with the absence of any view, as to the ultimate nature of the world; though at the present day such a position is rarely defended by professed Metaphysicians. Those whose metaphysical creed does not supply the requisite basis for the assertion of such an objective validity have for the most part frankly given up the idea, however unwilling they may be to admit that such a surrender need have any injurious effect upon practical morality.

The question which I wish to raise, then, is what are the metaphysical postulates of that belief in the objectivity of the moral law which appears to me to be a clear and unmistakeable datum of the moral consciousness. Now, with regard to matters of ordinary scientific knowledge, there are undoubtedly metaphysical positions which really destroy the objective validity of our scientific beliefs, but that tendency is for the most part not apparent to those who hold those positions.* No one (be he Materialist, Sensationalist, Empiricist, or what not) is likely to admit that he feels any difficulty in distinguishing

* I am not now thinking of writers like Mr. Bradley, who avowedly deny, in an ultimate metaphysical sense, that any part of our knowledge reveals the true nature of Reality. Such views do not either practically or logically affect their attitude towards ordinary human knowledge of matters of fact.

between objective truth and his private ideas. Interpret it how we like, we all of us have to recognise that there is an objective world, and that our ideas are true or false according as they do or do not correspond with that reality. If a man supposes that he can "cloy the hungry edge of appetite with bare imagination of a feast," the refutation of his error is not far to seek. He tries the experiment, and he is hungry still; he persists, and he dies. But it is not so with moral reality. The very heart of our ethical belief is that there is such a thing as moral reality, but such a reality unfortunately can be and is both speculatively denied and practically ignored. But if our moral ideas are to possess any objective validity, there must be such a thing as moral reality. And yet what sort of existence has this moral reality? If a physical law may possibly (though the supposition is by no means free from difficulty) be supposed to reside *in* material things—in things as they are apart from knowledge,—a moral law surely can not. A moral law, dealing wholly with the question what we ought to think, can hardly be supposed to exist except in and for a mind. In what mind then does the moral law reside? Our moral ideals differ, and in no human mind now existing upon the earth can it be supposed that the true moral ideal in all its fulness has taken up its abode. If the moral ideal is not to be reduced to a mere aspiration, a mere creature of the imagination, it must be shown to spring from the same source or have its being in the same ground as all other reality, and that can only be if Reality is ultimately spiritual. No theory of the Universe can give an adequate account of this moral objectivity except one that is idealistic, or, at the least, spiritualistic. Personally I cannot understand a non-materialistic view of the Universe which is not idealistic in the fullest and most thorough-going sense of the word; but I admit that, for ethical purposes, all that we want is that Reality should be present to and willed by a universal Mind, even if we do not go on to say that the part or aspect of the Reality which we call physical is constituted by

its presence to that mind. I must be content with this bare sketch of the old-fashioned arguments which support the old-fashioned position that the existence of God is a postulate of Morality.

It seems, then, that we have as much right to assume that our moral ideas must be valid for God as well as man, as we have for assuming that for God as well as man two and two make four and two straight lines cannot enclose a space. Our moral ideas like our other ideas must be regarded as more or less adequate revelations of the divine standard of values—just as our ideas about Nature are true when, and in proportion as, we see Nature as God sees it. And if so, we must regard them as expressing the ultimate end towards which the whole course of Nature is directed. While the term “moral” is no doubt generally used to express goodness in the form which it assumes for a being in whom there are conflicting impulses at variance with the good, there will be no real objection to describing God as moral. At all events He is good, and when we call Him good we use the word in the same sense in which we use it when we apply the term to a good man. We mean that he wills ends which have value, and wills them in proportion to their value.

IV.

I will now glance, in the utterly inadequate way for which alone I have time, at some of the objections which have been raised to the view which I have taken as to the relation of God to Morality. In some quarters the expression “super-moral” applied to God or the Absolute (for by the writers I have in view God and the Absolute are usually identified) means simply that Morality indicates goodness in the form which it assumes for a being in whom the good will has to struggle with conflicting tendencies such as we cannot reasonably suppose to exist in God. In that sense Kant distinguished between a moral and a holy will, though he never hesitated to

call God a moral being. But in many writers of the present day this phrase means something much more than this. It is used to imply that we are not justified in thinking of God in terms of our highest moral ideals at all; that we cannot call God morally good, or assume that his ends are those which we pronounce good; that what we call evil is merely apparently evil, and that from the point of view of the Absolute—that is to say, the point of view of true and absolute knowledge of the Universe as a whole—it would be seen that qualities of character and kinds of action which we condemn as bad are really in their place (that is to say, in the measure and degree to which they actually exist) conducive to the goodness and perfection of the whole, just as much so as the qualities and actions which we call good, so that a sin or a pain the less would make the world less perfect. I must not now stay to distinguish between the different senses and shades of meaning which are given to this doctrine by different writers. I will only say that in all its forms it seems to me to involve one fatal difficulty. Either we are entitled to trust to our moral judgments, or we are not. If we are, it is meaningless to say that what we condemn as cruelty and baseness are really, if we could only see it, as much contributions to the beauty and perfection of the whole as the love or the truthfulness which we approve as good. If we are not entitled to trust to these judgments, what is the meaning of calling God or the Absolute good? To say that the evil of the world is the necessary means to a greater good, and that there could not be so much good on the whole if the evil were not there, is a proposition which I can understand; but all the same, if we are to trust to our judgments of value, the world would be still better without those evil elements—the pain and the sin and the ugliness which are actually there. To pronounce that cruelty in its place is good is as much a judgment of value as my judgment that the world contains some things which are bad, though they may be means to a greater good. To take the abstract category of good and

declare that this has absolute and objective validity, while all the particular judgments in which the category is employed in our actual thinking are merely subjective, appears to be as unreasonable as it would be to say that the category of Quantity was absolutely valid, but that in the Absolute there are wholes which are not greater than their parts. It is a particular instance of that tendency to make the reality of things consist in an "unearthly ballet of bloodless categories," which in other directions is now for the most part abandoned.

Of course, our conception of the absolute end is inadequate. The Universe may have many ends of which we know nothing. There might be for beings differently organised a form of Art which is neither Music nor Painting nor Sculpture nor Poetry, nor any other form which our present experience can suggest. Our judgments of value are not discredited because we cannot pronounce upon the value of forms of experience which we do not know. Of course, too, our judgments of value must be often wrong in detail. We can no more say to what extent they are inadequate than we can say how far any other judgments of ours fall short of absolute truth. Through ignorance of the means we may judge particular actions to be wrong (*i.e.*, not conducive to the greatest attainable good on the whole), which fuller knowledge would show to be really right. Even as to ends, the ideal of any individual is, no doubt, inadequate; our judgments as to the relative value of ends is probably only an approximation to the truth, as is suggested by the actual differences between the ideals of good and enlightened men. But in proportion as our judgments become more general, more confident, more unanimous, more self-consistent, we have as much right to think them valid for the Absolute as we have to hold that the best established results of Science represent—in spite of the necessary abstraction involved in all scientific thought—truth about the ultimate nature of things. There may be a sense in which the law of universal gravitation can be called abstract and one-sided;

in that sense our moral ideals may be imperfect and abstract ; but to say that in the Absolute our judgment that nothing can possibly make cruelty and pain good must be reversed and contradicted, would be like saying that in the Absolute the denial of Universal Gravitation is as true as its affirmation.

This line of argument seems to me to apply to all forms of the doctrine of a super-moral sphere. I must now briefly notice one or two of the special arguments employed in favour of it by particular writers. And in the first place there comes Mr. Bradley's famous doctrine of the contradiction involved in our actual moral judgments. It requires some courage to say—and yet I do not think my profound respect for Mr. Bradley's brilliant work should prevent my saying it—that to my mind this allegation turns mainly upon the neglect of a very simple distinction. Our moral ideals, we are told, are riddled with contradictions because our moral consciousness pronounces that self-sacrifice and self-realisation are both good, and yet sometimes—no matter how seldom—we cannot pursue one of these ideals without running counter to the other. Now this allegation seems to me to turn upon a neglect of the important distinction between the right and the good. If our Moral Consciousness did, indeed, pronounce that self-realisation and self-sacrifice were both right for the same individual in the same circumstances, it would no doubt be self-contradictory enough. But it involves no contradiction to say that both of them are good—even if we said that *all* self-sacrifice and *all* self-realisation are good, though it is quite clear to me personally that, unless the words are understood in some very artificial sense, some kinds of both are bad. To say that two things are good, though sometimes you cannot have both, involves no contradiction ; for what our practical Reason tells us is not merely to promote good but to promote the greatest good on the whole. If by self-realisation is meant realisation of the good capacities of human nature, a limit to self-realisation is imposed by the value of the good of which other men are

capable, and that limitation both imposes some sacrifice on the individual and limits the extent to which such self-sacrifice is reasonable. To say that it is always right to produce the greatest good on the whole involves, so far as I can discover, no contradiction whatever.

It will be suggested, no doubt, that I am here overlooking that doctrine of degrees of Truth and Reality by which the doctrine of the non-morality of the Absolute is qualified. I will not deny that that doctrine might possibly be stated in such a way as to admit the principle for which I am contending. But I am quite clear that that doctrine, as interpreted by Mr. Bradley, does not remove the objections which I have urged. Mr. Bradley admits that to say that the Absolute was immoral or bad would be more untrue than to say that he is moral or good. And there are many strong assertions of the goodness of the Absolute side by side with the denial of his or "its" morality. I ask on what Mr. Bradley's handsome testimonial to the goodness or perfection of the Absolute is supposed to rest, when the verdict of our own moral consciousness is discredited? To say that our moral judgments fail to some extent to correspond with the moral judgments as they are in the Absolute* is one thing; but to say that we can correct their deficiencies is another. And it is the last that Mr. Bradley attempts to do when he pronounces what we call evil to be really good. To admit the probability that our ideals are defective is one thing; to attempt their correction by directly contradicting them is another. To declare that the judgment cruelty is bad must in the Absolute be transformed into the judgment "cruelty to the exact extent to which it actually exists is good," is not merely to pronounce that our moral

* Mr. Bradley, of course, will not admit there are judgments at all in the Absolute. This is too wide a subject to discuss here; but, at all events, he will admit that we cannot think about the Absolute without talking as though there were.

judgments are inadequate and are "somehow" transcended in the Absolute, but dogmatically to say that they are false and that others, which are admitted not to commend themselves to our actual moral consciousness, are true. Any inadequacy, or doubt, or invalidity that may cleave to the former judgment must cleave surely *a fortiori* to the last.

And on what does the supposed intellectual necessity for this reversal of all our canons of value turn? Upon an ideal of our thought. Why should this intellectual ideal of self-consistency or harmony be regarded as a safer guide to the true nature of things than that ideal of Morality which claims in us to be of absolute and objective validity, and so to represent the true end of a rational will? There can be no real "harmony" or "perfection," or absence of contradiction, in any picture or ideal or system of the Universe in which our highest ideals of value are flatly contradicted.

The only way in which, as it seems to me, Mr. Bradley could escape the force of these objections, would be by absolutely giving up the use of the terms good and evil in thinking of the Absolute, and cancelling all that he has said about the goodness of the Absolute, and, I must add, all that he has said about the intrinsic reasonableness of the Universe; for a reasonable Universe means a Universe which realises ends that are intrinsically good, and it is only from our judgments of value that we know anything about goodness or indeed about ends. And on one side of his thought Mr. Bradley certainly goes very near to an avowed adoption of this position. When Mr. Bradley pronounces the Absolute good, we naturally suppose him to mean something by the assertion; but eventually, in the last paragraph of his book, he comes near to admitting that he means nothing by it. For there he tells us that "the Reality is our criterion of worse and better, of ugliness and beauty, of true and false, of real and unreal. It, in brief, decides between, and gives a general meaning to,

higher and lower."* If, then, the real is our sole criterion of worth, if a thing is good in proportion to the amount of real being in it, the assertion that the Absolute is good means no more than the assertion that the Absolute is real. Now for us it is quite certain that the word good does not mean the same as real, unless Mr. Bradley chooses, by definition, to make the word real include our idea of good. If it be said that in the Absolute this difference is to be transcended, at all events our idea of good must be allowed to represent as important an aspect of the Absolute as our idea of real. It must not be simply cancelled, as is done when it is suggested that in or for the Absolute cruelty is good.

V.

But whatever reply the doctrine of degrees of Truth and Reality may be supposed to contain to such criticisms as I have ventured to make on this doctrine of a super-moral Absolute, that qualification is entirely absent from the treatment of the subject in Professor Taylor's *Problem of Conduct*,† a work of which I desire to speak with sincere respect.

There the contradiction between the human and ethical point of view and the super-moral or absolute point of view is treated as absolute and unmitigated. From the point of view of the Absolute sin and wickedness, pain and wretchedness, are not simply good: they are, it would appear, *as* good as pleasure and goodness. Virtue was never lauded in a pæan of more enthusiastic eloquence than that in which Professor Taylor sings the praises of wickedness.‡ Against such a position the objections on which I have insisted seem to me to tell with their full weight. If our moral judgments are not merely

* *Appearance and Reality*, p. 552.

† I refer here only to *The Problem of Conduct*. In his more recent *Elements of Metaphysic* the doctrine of degrees upon which his whole metaphysical position is based is to some extent brought into connection with ethics.

‡ *The Problem of Conduct*, p. 473.

(as they are to Mr. Bradley) riddled with contradictions, and so very inadequate and untrustworthy presentments of Reality, but purely and unmitigatedly subjective, what reason has Professor Taylor for pronouncing that the Universe as a whole is perfectly good? Mr. Bradley has never denied that moral judgments are rational; he has not even denied them a kind of objectivity; Professor Taylor has reduced them to modes of feeling. This seems to follow from the declaration (p. 104) that our moral judgments are simply "feelings of approval and disapproval," while it is further admitted that "to say that I approve such and such an action or quality is in fact to say that when I imagine its entrance into the course of my future experience my state of mind is a pleasant one" (p. 124). Yet if the idea of value is not a category of thought, what can be meant by the judgment that the world is perfectly good on the whole? What can "good" in such a connection mean? For Professor Taylor it ought only to mean that it excites a particular kind of feeling in the genus homo or some of its members. But Professor Taylor admits that it does not excite this feeling in him, for to him as a man sin and pain appear bad. On what ground then can he pronounce that for the Absolute or in the Absolute they appear good? If goodness be merely a feeling, why should we suppose that the Absolute shares the peculiar mode of human feeling which we style moral; or if we do think that the Absolute shares these human emotions, or something analogous to them, why should we suppose that they are excited in Him by different courses of action to those which excite them in us? To oppose to our deliberate judgments of value an *a priori* construction about the requirements of absolute harmony and the like in a perfect or absolute or "pure" experience, seems to me to put mere intellectual aspirations in place of the rational interpretation of actual experience. Two further criticisms may be made against Professor Taylor's argument which cannot be urged against Mr. Bradley:—

(1) He does not share Mr. Bradley's view that all self-realisation and all self-sacrifice are good. Nobody has criticised this side of Mr. Bradley's doctrine with more acuteness than Professor Taylor himself. He does not deny that in ordinary cases the moral consciousness is quite equal to the task of pronouncing that here self-sacrifice would be right and there wrong. His denial of objectivity to the moral judgment is apparently based solely on the existence of hard cases in which no one will trust very confidently to his own solution of the casuistical problem, or severely condemn those who solve it differently. The existence of such cases no more shows that there is not a solution which would commend itself to a perfectly rational intelligence endowed with perfect knowledge of the facts, than the higher Mathematics are proved to be a purely subjective affair by the existence of mathematical problems which no one could solve but the late Professor Cayley, and of others which await the solution of future Cayleys.

(2) Another difficulty of Professor Taylor's is that the details of human duty—the Seventh Commandment for instance—depend upon the physiological structure of human beings, and could not be supposed to be the same for a being of different constitution. I really think Professor Taylor might have given his opponents credit for having contemplated and dealt with so simple an objection. The objectivity of our moral judgments even in detail is not destroyed by the fact that duties are relative to the constitution of the species, just as they are relative to the circumstances of individual persons. When I say that the Seventh Commandment possesses objective validity, I mean that every intelligence which thinks truly must recognise that it is the right course of action for beings physiologically and psychologically constituted as we are. Moreover, these details of duty must in the last resort be dependent upon general principles of action or canons of value which are valid for all beings and all circumstances. The

proposition that the love of husband for wife in an ideal marriage is one of the noblest things in the Universe is not shaken by the fact that the lower animals are incapable of it, and that superior beings (to say nothing of God himself) may be above it. And this particular judgment depends upon the judgment which asserts the supreme value of love in general—a judgment which, I should contend, is of objective validity and quite independent of the structure of particular individuals or of the societies to which they belong.

I quite recognise, of course, that in taking up the position which I have criticised, Professor Taylor has no intention of practically disparaging morality and moral obligation. Mr. Taylor has, indeed, a practical insight into ethical questions not always found in Moral Philosophers. But after all man is a rational being, and I do not believe that this sharp conflict between what a man believes as a man and what he believes as a philosopher is one which can permanently be kept up. Of course, we have always the assurance to fall back upon that in the Absolute all is perfect harmony and order. The whole of Professor Taylor's system is based upon the necessity of satisfying an intellectual need for harmony: what I submit is that that system conspicuously fails to satisfy one of the most imperative of intellectual needs—the demand for objective validity in our moral judgments, the demand that some sort of harmony shall be established between our ethical judgments and our beliefs about the Universe.

In justice to Mr. Taylor I ought to say that the attitude which he adopts towards morality in his *Elements of Metaphysic* seems to me materially different from that taken up in the *Problem of Conduct*. He is there willing even to accept (doubtless with reserves and apologies) the idea that one side of the Absolute's nature may be expressed by the word Love, and generally appears—not merely in his character as a man, but also as a Philosopher—to interpret the nature of the Absolute

in terms of our moral ideals. How he reconciles these assertions with the position taken up in his earlier work I am at a loss to discern. I will only add (because it has a bearing upon a problem on which we have not yet touched) that the optimism of the former work seems to be much qualified. It would now appear that reality is only "good on the whole," and that it is not better, because that would be impossible. These propositions, with which I for one should not be disposed to quarrel, seem to me quite different from the through and through perfection which, in the *Problem of Conduct*, is ascribed not merely to the world as a whole, but to everything in it.

VI.

I will briefly notice one more form assumed by the doctrine of a super-moral sphere. I do so especially because in this form the doctrine is not merely not identical with the views which we have been examining, but constitutes the best of all possible replies to those views.* Von Hartmann believes in a super-moral sphere, but no one has ever grasped with more clearness or asserted with more vigour the idea of an objectively valid Morality. He sees that the very meaning of "moral" is "conducive to the true ultimate end of the Universe." He recognises, therefore, that, though the acts which we call moral are different, in detail and even in principle, from those willed by the Absolute Will, they do really (in the circumstances of human nature) make for the true end of the Universe. Morality is no deception or delusion, as it practically becomes in the more exaggerated of Professor Taylor's statements, and as (in spite of all his protests to the contrary) it tends to become in some of the many phases of Mr. Bradley's thought. When the Absolute makes us think that a bad act of ours will hinder the attainment of the good, he is not (according to von Hartmann)

* These views are expressed partly, of course, in the *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, but more fully in *Das sittliche Bewusstsein* and the shorter and more recent *Ethische Studien*.

in any sort or sense deceiving us. The Absolute is telling us what is absolutely and strictly the truth. A bad act may, no doubt, in some cases and to some extent, promote the absolute end, but not so much as a good act would have done in the like circumstances. Von Hartmann has thus no difficulty in answering that question to which no consistent Optimist has ever succeeded in providing a satisfactory answer: "If no bad act of mine can in the smallest degree diminish the perfection of the Universe, if that deed, just because it is actually done, is shown to be conducive to that end, why not continue in sin that grace may abound?" The arbitrariness of von Hartmann's position appears only when he assumes that for the Absolute the true end must be something so very different from that which we think it to be. Hedonism has no more vigorous and no more reasonable critic than von Hartmann, so long as he is dealing with the end for man, and the end for man is a means to the ultimate end. And yet the end for the Absolute is merely Well-being hedonistically understood; but, since consciousness necessarily involves pain, Well-being for the Absolute must mean simply the cessation of this pain, and with it of consciousness. How our moral struggles are going to appease the pain of the Absolute, von Hartmann has never (so far as I can find) succeeded in explaining; nor do I see why we should go on toiling and suffering to relieve the sufferings which the Unconscious Absolute caused by that great crime or blunder which it (in von Hartmann's view) committed by the creation of the world, and with it of a consciousness in which pain necessarily predominates over pleasure. But these are the difficulties not of von Hartmann's ethical theory, but of his Pessimism and of his peculiar view of an Absolute who is not merely super-moral, but actually, though only occasionally and at rare intervals, irrational. Von Hartmann professes to admit the objective validity of our moral judgments, and yet he does not consistently carry out his own creed. If our ethical judgments are true, the true end of the Universe must be one

that satisfies our moral ideal. To relieve the sufferings of an immoral Absolute who (it might be contended) suffers no more than he deserves, does not present itself to me as a worthy or rational end of action. If a frank acceptance of that principle of ethical objectivity on which von Hartmann insists cannot be reconciled with his metaphysical system, it is that system, and not the doctrine of ethical objectivity, or, to put it in popular language, absolute moral obligation, which ought to be modified.

I am not a Pessimist, but I have much sympathy with von Hartmann's polemic against the unqualified Optimism which is generally fashionable in philosophical circles. I have already indicated, however briefly and inadequately, the reasons for my belief in a God who wills the same ends which our moral consciousness reveals to us—inadequately, imperfectly, no doubt, but still not in a fundamentally erroneous or misleading manner. Why, then, does human life, as we know it, not come up to those ideals? I see but one answer, which is really the answer of all the Theologies and all the Theodicies, except those which flatly invalidate and contradict our actual moral judgments—and that is lack of power in the Will that wills the Universe to attain the good without some measure of evil. Even to believe that the Universe is good on the whole, that it attains more good on the whole than evil—enough good to justify its existence,—imperatively (to my mind) demands the postulate of a future life in which the ideals of Goodness and Beauty, Knowledge and Happiness, so imperfectly realized here, may be more fully attained. But even that belief will not alter the fact that the Universe is less good than it would have been had the good been attainable without the evil. That no better Universe was possible does not alter that fact. You will say this is limiting God. In a sense it is, but only in a sense in which, avowedly or unavowedly, all Theologies, orthodox and unorthodox, have limited Him, except those by which good is interpreted to mean simply that which a powerful will decrees. It is not

limiting God from the outside. He is limited only by his own nature. He is infinite, if you like, because He is limited by nothing outside Himself except the beings which owe their beginning and their continuance from moment to moment to an act of his own will, and who with him constitute the system which we call Reality, or if you like it, the Absolute. But in one way or another you *must* limit God; either you must limit His goodness or you must limit His power, wholly inadequate as a term like Power may well be to express the full truth of the matter. The hypothesis of a God of limited goodness but unlimited power is refuted, to my mind, by the existence of our Moral Ideals. I admit that the idea of a God who makes the world or his own appearances in order that he may enjoy the fun, or if you please the high æsthetic pleasure, of witnessing our generally blundering and futile efforts to realize ideals which he sees through, hardly admits of speculative refutation. I can only say that it seems to me merely a form of arbitrary and gratuitous scepticism. The natural inference from our actual ideals and our actual experience is the belief in a God who wills the good (as we inadequately and imperfectly know it) but does not wholly attain it. That is the natural inference from the deliverances of our moral consciousness; and, if I am to doubt the evidence of my own moral consciousness, I do not see what ground I have for believing anything else, including the Philosophies which discredit it. And, therefore, to the other postulates of an objective Morality I should like to add this one—the negation of an unqualified Optimism. Morality is a delusion if it is not true that a good act of mine furthers the true end of the Universe, while a bad one really retards it or forwards it less than a good act, if such had been possible, would have done.* In the words of von Hartmann, “ohne Objectivität, keine Moral.”

* Sometimes Mr. Bradley appears to admit this, sometimes to deny it. Doubtless he would say that both statements were aspects of the truth. The question is whether they can intelligibly be held together.

The pages of recent Philosophies are full of the praises of a Religion which transcends, contradicts, proclaims its splendid indifference to "mere Morality." That such kinds of Religion have existed, and do exist, I do not doubt. They existed in the days of Lucretius, and he was not far wrong in the estimate he formed of them. That Religion of this kind has at times really invaded the Christian Church I do not dispute, though more frequently it has merely coloured the rhetoric of devotional writers. It is not the existence but the truth and the value of such Religionism that I dispute. That Theologians as well as Philosophers have sometimes landed themselves in an antimoral Optimism through their fondness for paying empty and unmeaning compliments to God or to the Absolute, I do not deny. But I do maintain that the Philosophers simply travesty the religious consciousness, both in its normal and in its highest forms, when they represent it as proclaiming that evil has already for the religious man no existence, and so on. The heart of the religious faith in all ages, as I understand it, is the belief that "good shall be the final goal of ill." To my mind that is a more stimulating faith than the other as well as a more reasonable one.

VII.

I am quite aware how incomplete such a paper as the present must be in the absence of a metaphysical discussion of that question as to the relation of knowledge to Reality which lies at the root of the whole matter. On that supreme question I will only make one remark. That all our human knowledge is inadequate to express the whole nature of the ultimate Reality will be universally admitted by Metaphysicians of all schools. The only question must lie in the kind and the degree of the inadequacy, and in the answer that is given to the enquiry how far it is possible to arrive at any clearer and more adequate knowledge of Reality by denying and seeking to "transcend," as the phrase is, distinctions which are

admittedly inherent in the very nature and constitution of human thought. Whatever may be the success of such an attempt in other directions, it has been my contention that in the ethical region at least the attempt has conspicuously failed—that the very writers who startle us with their discoveries about the non-moral character of Reality and the absolute or relative beauty of sin and misery, really employ in their thought about the relation of the real to Morality the very conceptions and ideals which they profess to discredit, and that they are arbitrary and inconsistent in using them up to a certain point and no further. The attempt to transcend, as they have made it, really involves actual contradiction, and if our moral judgments express as much of the true nature of Reality as any human judgments can do, we shall not get nearer to that nature by such contradiction.

There is one particular source of imperfection in our knowledge to which a momentary reference must be made. It will, doubtless, be contended that my argument has assumed the absolute validity of our ideas of Time. Here, too, the real problem is as to the amount and kind of inadequacy which is involved in this particular condition of human thought. What I should contend, if I had the opportunity, would be that our time-distinctions must express, however inadequately, the true nature of Reality, and that the attempt to think of Reality as out of time or timeless is certain to lead us further astray from the truth than the assertion that time-distinctions are valid, though we cannot tell in what way they present themselves to God or how far they express the full truth about Reality as a whole. If the position that Reality is out of time makes it impossible to ascribe objective validity to our judgments of value, compels us to distort and virtually contradict the ethical part of our thought, and forbids us to give its proper weight to that side of our nature in our speculative construction of ultimate Reality, that is one further objection to such theories. The doctrine of a timeless Reality makes the world's history

unmeaning and all human effort vain. The Buddhists, to whose Creed our modern believers in a timeless Absolute so often appeal, at least have the merit of admitting that corollary of their system, however much inconsistency and contradiction there may be in the anti-social ascetic's effort to escape from effort. The Western who uses this language about the vanity of all that is temporal neither believes it nor acts as if he believed it. Time and its distinctions, as we know them, may not express the whole truth about the Universe and the ultimate spiritual ground of it, but at least they must express more of it than a to us meaningless negation like timelessness. If there be any meaning in the idea of transcending time-distinctions, that meaning must be something other than that of merely negating and abolishing them, and it is only on the assumption that from the point of view of absolute knowledge time-distinctions are simply negated and abolished that the temporal character of our moral thinking can be used as an argument for denying its objective validity and the postulates which that objective validity carries with it.
