

they operate and the last end for which they operate from another. To this grade we ourselves belong; for, while we can acquire for ourselves many intelligible forms, and determine for ourselves many ends, nevertheless, the first principles of the intellect and the last end of the will we must ascribe not to ourselves but to nature. But there is one intellectual agent whose nature is identical with his intellect, and for whom what he naturally possesses is not determined by another. This intellectual agent is God. In God there is found life in its plenitude. "Whence," says St. Thomas, "the Philosopher (Aristotle), in his *Metaphysics*, having shown that God is intelligent, concludes that he possesses the most perfect and eternal life, because his intellect is most perfect and always in act."

THEORIES OF PLEASURE.

By MR. G. E. UNDERHILL.

My feelings after I had chosen this subject for my paper were much what I imagine those of the undergraduate to have been, who, according to an old Oxford story, was told by the Master of his college to write as an essay, "Something New on the Freedom of the Will." The London Aristotelian Society however will not, I hope, make such an exacting demand upon my powers of originality. So I will ask its members to be content, if I do my best to put together what seems to me to be some of the most striking results of modern research upon this difficult and obscure question.

From the title of my paper you might be led to infer that my method of treatment would be purely historical and psychological. But as a matter of fact, philosophers from the time of Aristippus downwards seem first to have invented their ethical theory of the moral value of pleasure, and then looked about for a psychological foundation on which to base it. The reason for this is not far to seek. All moralists, whether Hedonists or the reverse, have been forced by experience of facts to recognize the extreme, if not paramount, importance of pleasure and pain in moral action and moral character. Consequently the two sides of their theories of pleasure—I mean, the moral and psychological—tend to be complementary one of the other. One of the chief aims of this paper, therefore, will be to show how error in the one theory has infallibly led to error in the other—how it is impossible to obtain a satisfactory theory of morals in general without first discovering a true theory of the psychology of pleasure, and how that the best criterion of the truth

of the latter is to be found in its applicability to the facts of moral experience.

Not many years ago we were told that the only hope for English Philosophy was to go *Back to Kant*; and now if we may judge from two of the most recent English writers on Morals, it has been found necessary to go back further still,—to no less an authority than Aristotle, the patron saint, if I may venture so to call him, of our Society. In my own opinion, at any rate, no real advance has ever been made upon Aristotle's psychological analysis of pleasure, which not only anticipates, but states with much greater precision, as it seems to me, whatever is best in the latest utterances of the most recent evolutionist writers on the same subject. But Aristotle arrived at his own theory polemically—by refuting the errors and advancing upon the correct conclusions of his predecessors. As many of the mistakes of modern English Hedonists seem to me to rest on precisely the same errors, I may perhaps be allowed to sketch briefly the history of the doctrine of pleasure in Greek Philosophy as treated by Aristippus the Cyrenaic, Plato, and Aristotle, emphasising at the same time their points of similarity with modern doctrines.

Aristippus believed that pleasure and pain were two positive feelings, neither of which was the negation of the other. Pleasure he called a smooth motion, pain a rough motion. The neutral state, in which a man feels neither pleasure nor pain, he declared to be a really existent state, not in any case to be identified either with one or the other. This psychology is, of course, extremely simple, and is really based upon certain simple bodily processes, like that of satisfying hunger. With it Aristippus coupled a correspondingly simple, but granting the premises, an extremely logical moral theory—pure Hedonism. The desirability of pleasure *per se* he considered to be sufficiently proved by the fact of our love of agreeable feeling from childhood upwards, of our seeking nothing beyond it, when we had once attained it, and of our avoidance of its contrary pain. Granted, therefore, that pleasure was in itself desirable—and since one pleasure *quâ* pleasure does not differ from another—the pleasure of the present moment must be the end of our actions; for the past is already gone from us, and of the future we know nothing. The happy man is thus the man who enjoys most moments of pleasure, and happiness is, therefore, different from the end of life; for pleasure is desirable *per se*, whereas happiness is only desirable as a system or prolonged series of the momentary pleasures which it implies; and for the same reason, wisdom, justice, &c., are desirable simply as means to pleasures.

This moral theory is doubtless as crude as the psychology. I ought, perhaps, to ask your pardon, even for stating it, and I would

do so were it not for the fact that J. S. Mill's theory of pleasure in relation to conduct is precisely the same; and that he only avoids the same moral deductions by committing, as T. H. Green has conclusively proved, a logical suicide. Once admit that "to think of an object as desirable and to think of it as pleasant, are one and the same thing," then the conclusion of Aristippus is the only one logically possible. And, however much we may admire Mill's fine moral feeling, whereby he makes elaborate distinctions in kinds of pleasure, finds the internal sanction of duty in a feeling in our own mind, and declares the *summum bonum* to be the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number, we cannot but see that in doing so he has wholly parted from his premises. To prove this in detail would be to slay the slain. What I have said already, I have said merely to show how in Aristippus an erroneous psychological theory of pleasure—logically followed—has led him into an erroneous moral theory, whereas Mill, with the same psychological theory, has only avoided the same erroneous moral theory by being guilty of the most glaring logical fallacies.

The genius of Plato enabled him to make for himself, and to anticipate almost all the psychological distinctions as to pleasure and pain, which have ever been arrived at. Most of them are to be found fully developed in the dialogue of the Philebus, though some occur in the Republic only. Thus he says that Pleasure is of the nature of the indeterminate (*ἀπειρον*), and that, therefore, it cannot be the Chief Good. This, though of course a very Greek conception, reminds one of the favourite arguments against the Hedonist conception of the *summum bonum* as a sum of pleasures, viz., that pleasures can only occur in an indefinite series which can never be summed.

Then Plato goes on to define pleasure to be a harmony, pain a discord or the breaking up of this harmony in our natural state, or rather both to be the feelings which attend upon, or result from, these two processes going on within us. To show that this is as good a notion of the fundamental conditions of pleasure and pain as we can get, I will quote a sentence or two from Mr. Bradley's recent article in *Mind* (1888): "The two main conditions appear here (i.e., in psychical dispositions) to be *harmony* and *expansion*. . . . (In pain) it seems to me that discord is the one constant feature."

To return to Plato. He goes on to say that Pleasure may be conceived as a motion or process, as the filling up of a want, pain as a want, where, as Aristotle remarks, he has confused bodily processes with the attendant mental feelings—though he probably meant merely that these were conditions on which the feelings of pleasure and pain depended, not the feelings themselves. In other words, it is simply a way of describing the phenomenon of desire: desire is a

felt want, and on the satisfaction of the want pleasure ensues. Then he makes the great distinction of bodily and mental pleasures, or as we should say, pleasures dependent on bodily and pleasures depending on psychical conditions. He also carefully distinguishes the pleasures of anticipation from other pleasures; and he gives a splendid analysis of pure and mixed pleasures, *i.e.*, pleasures not dependent and pleasures dependent upon antecedent pains. This is known in modern psychology as the Relativity of Pleasure and Pain; Plato here distinctly denies that all pleasure is conditioned by pain, or felt only in contrast with pain. In fact, he affirms, with Aristippus, that there is a third or intermediate state of feeling, in which we feel neither the one nor the other, though this intermediate state may chance, in contrast with pain, to appear pleasant, and in contrast with pleasure to appear painful. Again he expressly puts the question—Do pleasures differ in kind, or do they merely admit of degrees of quantity and intensity? And he answers, that pleasures may be good or bad. Finally, he recognises that pleasure is an element in happiness, but only a single element and not the whole; for in the famous simile of mixing a bowl of happiness, he puts in pleasure fifth and last of all the other ingredients.

Plato's moral theory of pleasure need not detain us, for it is practically identical with Aristotle's, and rests on his distinction of pleasures in kind.

Aristotle adopts Plato's theory almost *in toto*, but with one or two distinctions, which seem to me to make all the difference. Like Plato, he believes that pleasure arises when the different elements of our nature are in harmony with each other, pain, when they are discordant; but he draws a firm distinction between the feeling of pleasure as such and the conditions under which it arises. It is wrong, he tells us, to define the feeling as a process or motion, or as the filling up of a want; really it is a simple whole, which admits of no further analysis, which accompanies the unhindered activity of our functions, whether physical or psychical, in their natural or normal state, and at the same time that it accompanies such unhindered activity, increases and perfects it. Pleasure, therefore, must not be confounded with the activity, for it is not any activity, but merely something felt. It is a mere accompaniment, which owing to our natural constitution we cannot help feeling, if once the requisite conditions be present. This then is Aristotle's definition of pleasure, which I maintain is the best that has ever been arrived at, and which modern writers have, with few exceptions, only somewhat imperfectly reproduced. Take, for example, Sir Wm. Hamilton's definition: "Pleasure is a reflex of the spontaneous and unimpeded exertion of a power of whose energy we are conscious. Pain, a

reflex of the overstrained or repressed exertion of such a power": where by reflex Hamilton means, as he himself says, much the same as "concomitant." Or take H. Spencer's:—Pleasure is a state of consciousness accompanying modes of activity which tend to increase the fulness of life of an organism, while pain is a state of consciousness accompanying modes of activity which tend to diminish the fulness of life.

Before I go on, I ought perhaps to say that in one sense I agree with Mr. Leslie Stephen, that pain and pleasure are words which it is impossible to define. They are of course simple feelings, and as such indefinable. Thus the so-called definitions above quoted merely mean a general statement of the conditions under which they arise.

Under this proviso I propose now to test Aristotle's theory by applying it to some of the main problems of Hedonistic psychology and ethics, aiming to show, that though it may not solve them all, at least it explains the source of many Hedonistic errors, and shows how impossible such explanations really are in most cases. The problems with which I shall deal are Desire and its object, the Paradox of Hedonism, the Qualitative distinctions of Pleasure and Pain, the Relativity of Pleasure, and the Criterion and *Summum Bonum* of Morality.

To take Desire first: the theory that pleasure and pain are only concomitant feelings, supervening upon something else, at once makes it impossible to affirm that pleasure is always the object of desire. The object of desire as such is always the realization of some idea within our power: for if it be out of our power the feeling is no longer called desire, but wish. The idea to be realized may be anything: it may be the possession of a picture, the attainment of literary distinction, victory in a battle, the motion of our limbs, &c. Now, though it is true that an idea may by a sort of reflex action produce movement in us, the mere idea by itself does not constitute desire. Pleasure and pain are of its essence: for desire always implies tension, a conflict between a present reality which is felt to be painful, and an idea which is felt to be pleasant. Thus the whole mental state, with its concomitant pain and pleasure, constitutes the object of desire. The motive force is rather the pain than the pleasure, and the concomitant pleasure is not the prospective pleasure of gratification, which, as prospective, is not a feeling at all, but an idea; and which, therefore, not being a feeling, has no motive force. The concomitant pleasure, as distinct from any prospective pleasure, on the other hand is present and felt at the same time as the desire, in which it forms an element. It is of course quite true that all satisfaction of desire—all achievement, produces pleasure; but the

pleasure of achievement is not necessarily the cause (though, of course, it may become so), but the effect of the realization of the desired idea. Thus the policeman may desire to catch a thief, and if he catches him, he may perhaps enjoy as the result of his capture, the pleasure of successful pursuit; but it seems absurd to say that it was necessarily this anticipated pleasure which caused his desire. Evidently it may very well have been something quite different.

The so-called paradox of Hedonism, that a man can best attain to pleasure by not making it consciously his object, finds its solution in this analysis. For if pleasure is only the concomitant or effect of other feelings or actions, evidently the sensible thing to do, if we want to get pleasure, is to concentrate our attention on the actions or feelings which are its cause. We must first catch our fish before we can enjoy the pleasures of successful pursuit, and every fisherman will know that the proposed capture is quite engrossing enough to fill the whole content of his object of desire without any anticipated pleasure of achievement at all.

The Relativity of Pleasure and Pain, if it really implied that the same feeling under different circumstances might appear either pleasant or painful, and that pleasure might be the mere negation or diminishing of pain, and pain the mere negation or diminishing of pleasure, would be a serious argument against the Aristotelian theory, that both are positive feelings accompanying psychical activities and states. But Mr. Bradley, in his article in *Mind*, has ingeniously shown that the facts admit of another explanation. "There are," he says, "three points to be considered. In the first place, the physical conditions may be so altered as to give an opposite result. In the second place, in the result we may have new positive sensations. In the third place we must allow for the influence of ideas." His meaning can best be understood by taking an instance, *e.g.*, the relief of the pain of toothache. (1) Here the physical conditions may be so altered, that the cause of the pain may be removed altogether, *e.g.*, by the extraction of the tooth, so that the patient may completely recover his organic state of well-being, which as such will be accompanied by a positive feeling of pleasure. Or (2) the pain may indeed continue, but may be out-balanced by a pleasure arising from new conditions, *e.g.*, the pleasure of listening to music. Obviously, however, if the disease in the tooth were to be increased, the pain would increase, until it would, in its turn, out-balance the new feeling of pleasure. Or again (3), after the removal of the pain altogether the pleasant feeling of well-being may itself cease to be pleasant, because the contrast ceases to be novel, and is gradually forgotten. This case can only be explained through the

influence of ideas. For the idea of a pleasure is itself pleasant, and the idea of a pain is itself painful. "Though pleasures and pains are not relative," to quote Mr. Bradley's words again, "our ideas of them are largely so." Thus in the first relief from toothache the pain itself is gone; but the memory of it remains, and this present idea of a pain, which is itself painful, emphasizes the present pleasant feeling of organic well-being, and makes it appear greater than it really is; so that, as the memory decays, the feeling of pleasure decays with it, and our consciousness may soon be occupied with some new feeling altogether different. The same influence of ideas may also be seen in the case where the pain still continues but is overmastered by a pleasant feeling. And in both cases the converse is equally true.

There is one other psychological fact about pleasure and pain, which is of importance for my present purpose, and that is their opposite effects. Pleasure (to take Mr. Leslie Stephen's statement) represents equilibrium, a state in which there is a tendency to persist; and pain, tension, a state from which there is a tendency to change. Hence their great importance in ethics.

Having thus done my best to show that the Aristotelian theory is a good working theory on psychological grounds, I shall now endeavour to show that on this theory we can explain the difficulties attending a qualitative distinction in pleasures and the errors of the Hedonistic positions, that pleasure is the Ultimate Criterion and the Ultimate End of Moral Conduct.

To start with the Distinction of different kinds of Pleasure. If pleasure, as mere feeling, be a simple whole, which admits of no further analysis, but is complete at any given moment of time, there can be no different kinds of pleasant feeling. But there can be a very great difference in the conditions under which the feeling arises. Thus the distinction between higher and lower pleasures is not in the feelings themselves, but in the conditions under which they arise. The conditions are not made good because they are pleasant, but, being good, the pleasure arising under them is good. One man sees a prize-fight and feels great pleasure, another man does acts of benevolence and feels great pleasure. But pleasure, we saw, as representing equilibrium, tends to persist. Hence, as Plato long ago observed, one of the chief aims of education, if not the chiefest, is to train a man to feel pleasure and pain at the right objects and not at the wrong objects. The moralist does not want to increase the pleasure of the spectator at a prize-fight; he wishes to persuade him to select different ends of action altogether, which will probably be painful to him; and if he knows what he is about, he will not enlarge upon the pleasantness of these different objects (for that is more or less a personal matter),

but he will maintain that these different objects are right and good, and for that and no other reason ought to be and must be done. If this be true, the higher pleasures are the morally better, the lower pleasures the morally worse. But I hear the indignant Hedonist already protesting, and asking by what criterion do I distinguish between good and bad?

At first I feel very much inclined to ride the high *a priori* horse and to say that for my own part I, and I believe most men, have a very much clearer idea of what is right than of what is pleasant. To descend to particulars. Some two months ago I had a clear idea that, under the given conditions, it was right for me to write an Essay for the Aristotelian Society; but certainly I had not then any clear idea of the pleasure, either as to the process of writing, or yet of the result—either of the pleasures of anticipation or of the pleasures of achievement. Still less clear was my idea as to my essay promoting the pleasures of the Greatest Number. And from this point of view I might go on further to say that I am no more concerned with the origin and analysis of the idea of right, than the Hedonist is concerned with the origin and analysis of the idea of the pleasant. But I will be condescending, and will make a distinct statement, viz., that just as what is pleasant is what seems pleasant to the men capable of pleasure, so what is morally good is what seems morally good to the men capable of moral goodness. Is this a *circulus in definiendo*. Logically, no doubt, it is, but all simple feelings or *summa genera* are logically incapable of definition, and can be only accidentally described in terms which may happen to be clearer to the inquirer than the definiend. As a practical definition, however, I think that it is a good one, because there is no practical difficulty in finding out what seems morally good to the morally good man, and because his assertions or beliefs on the subject can be justified *a posteriori* by their consequences. Thoroughly to justify these statements would, I know, need a volume. I will here try to make my meaning clear by asking one or two simple questions.

First of all, how do I, as an individual, learn to know what is good? Secondly, when I have learnt my lesson, what guarantee have I that the good I know is the real good?

To the first question the only answer is that I learn by education. My parents, pastors, and masters tell me what is the good, and at first, at any rate, I believe them. I start with a natural faculty which is capable of either a good or of a bad development. Supposing that it is lucky enough to get the former, then the result is, that I get a practical knowledge of what is the real good, in other words, of the moral ideal, which is afloat in the society in which I happen to live—which is incorporated in its laws, customs and institutions, and

is exhibited in the lives of the good men of that society. But so far my morality is unconscious, I can give no philosophical or theoretical justification for it. It is, as Plato and Aristotle said, based merely on opinion and habit, and not upon knowledge. Thus then we are brought face to face with my second question—What is the real good?

Moral Good, it has frequently been said, is relative to human society, or, as some moderns prefer to call it, the social organism, though there seems to be no reason why the converse proposition should not be equally, if not more true, that the social organism is relative to moral good. But, at any rate, on either assumption the first proposition has a real meaning. It means that by us, whose knowledge depends upon experience, the real good can only be discovered in relation to the requirements of human society. For example, I can only find out that truth-telling is good, and lying is evil, by discovering that the one tends to hold society together and the other to dissolve it. Good always tends to strengthen a society, evil to weaken it. Hence in the struggle for existence the good nations tend to survive the bad. As time goes on, new discoveries are gradually made as to what is really good; it is thus that polygamy gives way to monogamy, slavery and serfdom to free labour. What in particular is good to be done, is always relative to the circumstances of the case; and thus Kant's aphorism is true, that the only thing absolutely good is the good will—the wish of the individual to do that which the circumstances require.

Of conduct and character, therefore, there can be no other criterion than the good itself. To define good (with Mr. Alexander) as equilibrium, whether of conduct as to its parts, or of society as to its members, is rather to describe it by one of its effects than to make the idea any clearer to us.

But I seem to have strayed far away from pleasure, only, however, in order to put me in a position to answer the question, How far is pleasure a criterion of goodness and badness? Directly it is no test at all. If a man is bad, he takes pleasure in bad things, and the pleasure he feels at them, tends to make him persist in them. Ultimately, of course, bad pursuits may bring pain to their pursuer; still, even though they may lead him to the gallows, in a mental survey the numerous pleasures attending them may far outweigh the momentary pain of instantaneous death. No, pleasure is only an indirect test; as Aristotle pointed out, it marks the completion of a good character; for when we not only do what we know to be good, but are pleased at so doing, then we may be assured that our good character is fully formed. So long as we feel any pain at doing good acts, there is a constant tendency to change, and

here change means a change for the worse; but when we feel pleasure at doing good acts, then there is a strong tendency to persist in the doing of them. Good action may thus according to circumstances be attended by either pleasure or pain; and though we are perfectly aware all the time that it is good, we cannot be at all sure which kind of feeling will attend it. In fact, pleasure and pain, unless we use the terms in some much wider sense than that of the mere feelings which we denote by those names, are much too accidental to be taken as at all reliable guides to right action. I may perhaps be able to make my meaning rather plainer by taking the case of oft-repeated actions, say of a labourer doing his daily work to support himself and his wife and family. He goes on doing the same sort of acts year after year, and he knows all the time that they are right; but from day to day the feelings in which he does those acts may alternate variously between pleasure and pain. If the Hedonist objects to this account, and says that his real motive is to get, not indeed, immediate pleasure, but pleasure more remote, namely, the general pleasure of himself and of his wife and children, or at least to avoid pain in his own person and in theirs, I would reply that the Hedonist is now using pleasure in a wider and unnatural sense, as equivalent to happiness or well-being, and that pleasure, as the name of a feeling, is not synonymous with happiness, but is only an element in happiness, which is itself a compound made up of several elements. And thus I am brought to my last question, What is the relation of pleasure to the End of Conduct, to the *Summum Bonum*?

The most important element in the *summum bonum* is the good *will*, which expresses itself in conduct suitable to the conditions of action, in other words, in virtuous actions. Pleasure is the concomitant of such actions, if they are done entirely for their own sake and not as a means to any ulterior good. Pleasure is thus only a subordinate element among the several elements, such as a good will, virtue, perfection, external prosperity, which together constitute happiness; and as such it cannot be regarded as *the end*. Again, pleasure is a feeling, whereas happiness implies something more than feeling, involving amongst other elements, as we saw, a good will. A good will, which shows itself in doing good acts for their own sakes, is the real end at which all men ought to aim, and *can* aim, because they *ought* to aim. To feel pleasure at doing such good acts is, no doubt, a counsel of perfection, but it may very well be beyond a man's power. The moral imperative is plain in the form, speak the truth, because it is right or good; it is at once open to question in the form, speak the truth, because it is pleasant, or because ultimately it is pleasant. The reason of this is, that over

our feelings we have comparatively little control; whereas over our conscious acts we have very much more, even if not complete, control. Further, if such a command be addressed to a bad man, it will produce within him a state of tension and discord, and therefore of pain, which will make it unlikely that he will carry it out, even if he is told that it is right; but if he be told that speaking the truth is pleasant, and that therefore he ought to speak the truth, he will controvert the statement as inconsistent with the fact that to him it is painful. Indeed, good conduct is only pleasant to the good man, and the reason of this is, that he alone can do such acts without a struggle or conflict, and that pleasure is the result or concomitant of such harmony or unimpeded activity.

I have thus come back to my starting point—Aristotle's psychological theory of pleasure as a feeling. I have tried to show that his theory alone is consistent with the facts, and at all adequate to explain them. Had our English Hedonists and Utilitarians only pondered and realised this, they would have saved themselves and their readers much trouble and error; for the plausibility of their theories rests first of all upon an identification of pleasure and happiness, which is a vulgar error that Aristotle's theory had shown up two thousand odd years ago; and, secondly, upon silently substituting for pleasure, which strictly taken is the name of a feeling, the notion of happiness and all that is implied therein; so that when they said, for example, that truth-speaking is good because it is pleasant, they really meant, because it promoted happiness; in other words, because it tends to promote the well-being of society, or of the social organism. The one statement may or may not be true according to the circumstances; the second statement we know to be true, from our own and other people's experience.

An old Greek poet said *ἐσθλοὶ μὲν γὰρ ἀπλῶς, παντοδαπῶς δὲ κακοί*—we can be good in one way only, but bad in all sorts of ways—and the same is true of pleasure as of evil. Truly pleasure is a good companion, but a bad guide in morality, and well did Aristotle show his wisdom when he said: "In all cases we must be especially on our guard against pleasant things, and against pleasure; for we can scarce judge her impartially. And so, in our behaviour towards her, we should imitate the behaviour of the old counsellors towards Helen, and in all cases repeat their saying, 'If we dismiss her, we shall be less likely to go wrong.'"