

OUR RIGHT TO REGARD EVIL AS A MYSTERY.

It appears to me that Mr. Bradley's remarks on this subject in *MIND* XXX., p. 258 ("Is Self-sacrifice an Enigma?"), pass too lightly over one element of this question. He recognises the conviction that moral agents are bound to struggle against evil, to use all efforts to remove it; but he implies a denial, at least so I read him, that any conviction as to the possibility of success is implied in the state of mind which enables the struggle to be kept up. I am well aware how easy it is to misinterpret an elementary moral belief into a speculative proposition. If I hazard an interpretation and criticism of such a *de facto* persuasion it is in the hope that by comparison of views something reliable may be elicited.

It appears to me that the attitude of a human, *i.e.*, moral and intellectual, agent towards the world implies some ethical conviction regarding the nature and capabilities of the world. I mean more especially in reference to the capacity which the world has of being turned to good ends or freed from evil. Am I wrong in being influenced at this point by the analogy of knowledge? The ethical postulate which appears to me present in all moral action is very like, perhaps fundamentally one with, our ineradicable conviction that knowledge can be extended. I shrink from speaking of "the universe as a whole"; but I think that it was a little joke of Mr. Bradley's to require that we should do so or else be surprised at nothing. Ontology is in bad repute, and, I had always imagined, deservedly. But taking the universe to mean what is accessible to us, and assuming the constancy of our intellectual and moral nature, I do not see my way out of believing that we are bound to deal with the universe, and in so dealing to think of it, as knowable and as indefinitely capable of good.

Then it seems to me that common feeling, finding, as it fancies, this persuasion fulfilled on the whole in knowledge, and unfulfilled on the whole in practice, does well to be puzzled. If it interprets its *de facto* persuasion into the dogma that "the universe is a harmony" (which as I understand the proposition I see no great risk in doing), then it feels a sharp contradiction, unparalleled in other spheres of life, between this dogma and the course of things.

If it does not assume the dogma, but restricts itself to its *de facto* persuasion, then the non-assumption of the dogma is an admission of chaos into the universe as accessible to man, which seems in direct contradiction with the *de facto* persuasion. Is there such a contradiction? This depends on how we interpret the persuasion. It appears to me to say, or rather to postulate (for I am not relying on an innate idea, but on an interpretation of conscious activities), that while we act we must believe that some good can be effected. Virtue in despair is possible for the crew of a sinking ship, and, indeed, the trained consciousness

would, we hope, always maintain its character. But I do not think that action, as apart from the merest momentary endurance, can go on without the conviction I speak of. For it is upon it, in concrete and detailed shapes, that the guidance of action depends.

Is there then in common experience a contradiction to the belief that some good can be effected? I do not think so; but common feeling confuses (if I may say so) the effecting of good with the positive removal of what it is trained to call evil; and then finds that good, though not unprosperous in detail, seems even to be the seed of evil in the world as a whole. There can be little doubt that thus far civilisation has conferred a reproductive power on much that causes suffering and affords occasion for self-sacrifice. No one could venture on a proof that evil diminishes in quantity; and the break-down of many well-meaning short methods with evil leaves the impression of failure strongly on us just now.

If there was a contradiction or conflict for us in the existence of evil, should we be justified in reading it off into "the universe"? I must answer that I can see no hard and fast line between us and the universe. A contradiction which we cannot even begin to get over seems to me to be *ipso facto* a contradiction in the universe; *i.e.*, when we regard it to the very best of our power *ex analogia universi* it is there still. It seems to me simply idle to say that the best of our power does not amount to much. To ask why there should not be a contradiction which we can not get over seems to me to be asking why we should expect a truth to be true. I could only say that *ex vi termini* it is a truth, and that having used my best endeavours I could not get rid of it.

Do I agree with common feeling that undeserved suffering and self-sacrifice are a mystery? *Yes, unless we can see how they are not evil, i.e.*, not antagonistic to good life, which is all that my persuasion demands. I do believe that on this question much may be learnt by looking facts in the face, and by not assuming that our ethical postulate in its first crude form is to govern our whole ideal of life. The moral duty of trying to do away with suffering and with the occasions for self-sacrifice is undoubted, at least as things are now. The moral ideal, that we should expect and desire that everything of the kind should be removed, seems to me less clear. I only said our *de facto* persuasion was that some good could be done. Whether this good must be proportionate to the removal of what is called evil I do not know. But perhaps by wider and less biased consideration something might be done in the way of seeing through the alleged contradiction, not merely carting it away. Can any one construct an ideal of life, destitute of suffering and self-sacrifice, which he does not shudder to contemplate? As a mere illustration, I will say that Mr. Bradley's instances of what we should all desire if we could have it seem to me *in the concrete* most unattractive. I

say in the concrete; of course, features could be taken out of them which if possible would be desirable. I am not saying that no one can imagine a better world than this; I am only saying that the extreme difficulty of doing so shows what unexpected elements seem essential, when we reflect, to make life worth having. I do not know whether it is below the dignity of philosophy to refer to Dickens's *Haunted Man* on this subject; I think it contains an idea that is worth attention. To take one case: must not all great art die if common feeling could realise its ideal of removing "evil"; and must not even the appreciation of the great art of the past die too, when the living experience of suffering is gone? "*Hæc olim meminisse juvabit*" cannot point to a permanent frame of mind, and the frame it does point to is, I think, unhealthy. And granting that civilisation tends to elevate and refine suffering, to make it moral rather than physical, is there any tangible tendency to diminish its amount? *Amount*, indeed, has but little meaning; and yet the comparison thus suggested is wholesome to dwell upon, and can with care be brought to some results. Is not our *actual* ideal, if we look straight at the matter, rather to make everyone we can a moral agent, instead of a brute or a slave, than to make them either good or happy? I see no sign that progress will do the latter, in either term; but there is some little sign of its doing the former, and I believe we are all glad of it by itself. Admission to be actors in the moral drama seems to me to be what we practically expect for mankind from progress. The drama will no doubt become more complicated, we may hope, nobler. I see no reason to suppose that it can go on without suffering and self-sacrifice, nor, as I have said, can I honestly, with my present lights, desire that it should.

But Mr. Bradley may say: 'Well, then, you do accept the conflict, which we feel, as no more mysterious than any other fact'. I can only reply: I cannot deny that it seems to be a fact, but I maintain my right to be puzzled by it even more than if I could not make the sum of the angles of a triangle right in practice; to sympathise with common feeling in its perplexity; and to be sharply on the look-out for anything that may mitigate the contradiction by including more and more of the universe under the head of what is not evil, *i.e.*, of what is contributory or not antagonistic to good life.

B. BOSANQUET.

KANT'S VIEW OF MATHEMATICAL PREMISES AND REASONINGS.

I have read with much interest Mr. Monck's note on "Kant's Theory of Mathematics" in the last number of *MIND*; and so far as his observations are a reply to a portion of my "Criticism of the Critical Philosophy" in the January number, I shall be glad briefly to answer them. And since the only part of Mr. Adam-