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THE CONCEPT OF RATIONAL ACTION WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE PROBLEM OF
MORAL OBLIGATION

by

John Laird M.A.

Thesis submitted to the University of Glasgow for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts.

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Abstract of Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D. in the
University of Glasgow by John Laird M.A.

Title: The Concept of Rational Action with Special Reference
to the Problem of Moral Obligation.

The main aim of the thesis is to clarify what we mean when we talk of someone "acting rationally". This task is undertaken by means of a critical examination of certain principles used by common sense as criteria of rational action.

Chap. I. A preliminary chapter: the term "action" defined, and actions proper distinguished from behaviour. The use of the concept of "deliberateness" as the criterion of actions proper criticised.

Chap. II. The principle of the Natural, as a criterion of rationality, criticised. The radical ambiguity of the term "natural" discussed at some length.

Chap. III. The principle of accordance with the facts accepted as a very common criterion of rational action, and the application of the principle discussed in some detail. The point is made that the common sense assumption that it is always in our interests to conform to the facts is not valid. The question is raised whether, however, we can be said to have an obligation to try to conform our actions to the facts - further comments on this point left over until a later chapter.

Chap. IV. The criterion of consistency discussed, and its importance as a rational principle emphasised. A clear distinction is drawn between situations in which the principle of accordance with the facts is the relevant criterion, and those in which the principle of consistency is relevant. It is pointed out that it is not necessarily for our happiness to conform to the principle of consistency, but that we may think we have an obligation to conform.

Chap. V. The principle of the greatest good, interpreted here in terms of the satisfaction of desires, discussed as a criterion of rationality. The idea of happiness as a rational end of action analysed, and the question whether it is ever sensible to "aim at happiness directly" discussed. In connection with this latter point, some criticisms are made of the "paradox of hedonism" argument.

Chap. VI. The function of the faculty of reason in our conception of rational action discussed. The question raised whether reason is just a "slave of the passions", or whether it

can move to action of its own accord. An attempt made to link the "desire for system" with the faculty of reason.

Chap.VII. In this second part of thesis we deal specifically with the relation of the concept of moral action to the concept of rational action.

First we discuss whether duty really is a "good reason" for action. Various attempts to explain away the idea of duty are criticised; also criticised is the view that the authority of duty is imposed on us from "without". It is argued that the motive of duty is as much a voluntary "expression of the personality" as any motive of desire.

Chap.VIII. In this chapter we discuss whether the assumptions underlying the notion of duty are based on the facts.

The first assumption is that we have freewill: here we argue that the idea of duty can itself be used as an argument in favour of freewill.

The second is that there are certain fundamental moral principles accepted by all men. In respect to this point it is suggested that, on the whole, the evidence seems to be against this assumption. On the other hand we can say with some confidence that all normal men are able to appreciate the idea of moral obligation. It is further suggested that all men, "having reason" will appreciate the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency, and this principle may be used by reflective men to iron out differences in moral standards arising from subjective factors.

Chap.IX. We discuss here the question whether we have an obligation to act rationally. First, it is suggested that we might sometimes have an obligation to pursue our own happiness. Second, we try to show that in all cases in which we say that we have an obligation to conform to the facts, the operative principle is really the principle of consistency.

The view that we have an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is defended.

Chap.X. The use of the principle of the greatest good as a criterion of "rightness" is defended with critical reference to the view that we cannot come to know our obligation by any process of general thinking, but simply by placing ourselves in the moral obligation situation.

Chap.XI. In regard to the problem of a possible clash between duty and happiness we defend the view that the rational thing to do is to follow the course of duty.

It is argued that the treatment of this problem is often confused because we tend to deal with it as though the real point at issue is whether the concept of duty "makes sense" in a world which seems indifferent to moral values. This however, is quite a distinct issue.

P R E F A C E.

What I have tried to do in this thesis is to analyse what we mean when we talk of someone "acting rationally or irrationally". My main aim, in other words, has been to clarify the concept of rational action. I have taken as a starting point for discussion certain principles which common sense uses as criteria of rational action, and subjected each in turn to critical analysis. In doing this I have not been primarily concerned to discover whether any one of these principles is more fundamental than another; nor have I attempted to establish a set of definitive rules for judging what constitutes a rational action in this or that situation. My main task has been to try to remove ambiguities in the common sense use of these principles, and to discuss problems of philosophic interest arising out of the employment of these principles as criteria of rationality.

This may not seem a very exciting programme, but in so far as much confusion is caused by the loose use of the cognate terms "rational" and "reason" in ordinary speech, our task, though perhaps somewhat pedestrian, nevertheless seems worthwhile.

Though I have not attempted to arrive at a set of neat, and possibly "original" conclusions, I have been led to take up certain

positions which are highly controversial, and which I cannot hope to have defended satisfactorily. A necessary brevity of treatment of these points of view has sometimes resulted in statements being made more dogmatically and confidently than is, I think, warranted; it might, therefore, be in order to summarise now the particular problems which fall into this category, and which, had I the time, I should like to have examined more thoroughly.

(1). In defending both the autonomy of morality and the rationality of the duty motive I have, perhaps, tended to blur the distinction between desire and duty, and to have fallen into the error of interpreting duty as a "special kind of desire".

This has not been intentional - I have emphasised several times that duty and desire are distinct motives of action - but difficulty in giving precise expression to my own interpretation of duty may well have resulted in my giving the impression that I regard duty as a special kind of desire.

(2). In emphasising the practical value of the principle of the greatest good, both in pursuing our own happiness and in the discovery of what is morally right, I have undoubtedly underestimated the very great practical difficulties that are involved in any attempt to employ this principle. On the other hand, it is also true that philosophers have sometimes used the fact of these difficulties to dismiss the principle altogether as being quite useless, and it was this point of view that I was chiefly concerned to dispute.

(3) In my discussion of the problem of an "absolute conflict" between the claims of duty and the claims of happiness I may seem to have evaded the real issue by asserting that, since the motive of duty by its very nature claims precedence over any motive of desire, therefore we have no option but to choose the course of duty. But I have viewed the problem as a problem of competing motives, each of which is, in itself, intrinsically reasonable; I have not interpreted the problem, as is so often the case, as the problem of whether the concept of duty "makes sense" in a world which seems to be indifferent to moral values. That is a separate problem, which I have dealt with elsewhere. In discussing the conflict of duty and happiness I have taken it for granted that the concept of duty does "make sense", and I have thus interpreted the problem in that context.

(4) In this essay I have constantly stressed the key position of the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency. I have also tried to show how this obligation may be said to have its source in reason. But whether I have been successful or not in showing the relation between this obligation and reason, I should hope that my emphasis on the importance of the principle of consistency will commend itself to the reader.

(5). The most controversial part of the thesis is possibly the chapter in which I discuss the possibility of reason's being an original motive of action. (chapter VI). I am not hopeful that I have been able to put forward a really convincing

case for the linking of the "desire for system" with the faculty of reason; but I am sure that there is a need for a much more detailed and precise analysis of the term "reason" than was possible in this thesis. Hume did some important pioneering work in this field, but his analysis does not take us far enough. One is constantly amazed at the loose employment of this term even by philosophers who are noted for the precision and accuracy of their writing.

In writing the thesis I have received constant mental stimulation from a study of those parts of Hume's Treatise most relevant to my theme (Bk. II. Part III - chapters, 3, 10; Bk. III, Part I and Part II). Where I have disagreed with Hume, I have discovered that he has nearly always anticipated my objections, and though I have not always been satisfied with his answers I have found it extremely difficult to demolish them to my own satisfaction.

I should like to mention also the help I have received from Mrs. Kydd's scholarly work on Hume - Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise - the more so as my only references to her in the thesis are all critical.

Of the other philosophical writers whom I have studied in connection with the thesis I owe most to Sidgwick and to H.A. Prichard. My debt to the former will be obvious, but I have also received much help from the latter notwithstanding the fact that I disagree with his general emphasis in ethics.

It remains for me to thank Professor W.G. MacLagan for his acute criticisms and ready encouragement. I should also like to thank Dr.D.D. Raphael for his willingness to discuss many difficult points in the argument.

J.L.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

The main aim of the present study being to clarify what we mean when we talk of a "rational action" or of someone "acting rationally", it will be necessary for us to examine critically the various ways in which we employ the term "rational", (and the cognate term "reason") when these terms are used to describe actions. I therefore propose to begin our enquiry by summarising briefly the criteria used (explicitly or implicitly) by common sense in describing actions as rational or irrational. I shall also note what seem to be the more important of the assumptions underlying the common sense position. In the chapters which follow I shall be concerned to explicate what is outlined below.

I.

1. The minimum requirement of an action which claims to be rational is that it should have a "motive" -that it should be done for "some reason". This seems, however, so obvious -it is taken for granted that any action, however irrational it may be in other respects, at least has a motive -that it would scarcely appear to be worth considering as a criterion of any practical importance. Nevertheless, as we shall see later, certain assumptions implicit in the common sense use of this criterion require careful attention; in particular, the assumption that non-deliberative actions are necessarily irrational. Moreover, in so far as the question of motive, or rather "lack of motive", is often relevant to the problem of distinguishing between sane and insane acts, it is important that we should be clear as to what we mean when we say that an action is "without motive", the more so as

common sense often tends to confuse a "motiveless action" with an "unnatural action".

2. If we examine any action we find that the motive of the action can be classified under one of two general heads, namely, under the heading of desire or of duty; in other words, when we act we do so either because we are moved by the thought of some satisfaction or else because we are moved by the thought of some moral obligation.^{1.} Prima facie these two kinds of motive seem to be quite distinct from each other, each in its own way providing a "good reason" for action, but of course, as we all know, such a point of view is strongly criticised by some philosophers. This criticism takes the form of an attack on the notion of "duty"; (so far as I know no one has attempted to explain away the notion of "desire") in which we try to show either that the concept of duty itself is meaningless, or, and this is perhaps the same thing, that "duty" is merely the product of conditioning or the name we give to a certain kind of desire.

The philosophic suspicion of the notion of duty is reflected in a certain ambiguity in the common sense attitude to the idea of moral obligation; for, though we accept duty as a "good reason" for action, and, moreover, hold as a matter of principle that duty ought to have precedence over desire if the two clash, yet in practice we tend to question the rationality of

1. It is not denied of course that the two fields of duty and desire may sometimes overlap: e.g. that we may sometimes desire to do the action which we are morally obliged to do.

7.

the duty motive in a way in which we should never think of questioning the motive of desire. Not only do we sometimes ask the question, "why ought I to do my duty",¹ but, more significantly perhaps, we do not describe an action as irrational if it is the product of a preference for self-interest as against duty -we say it is selfish or wicked, but not irrational -and this, even though we believe in principle that duty has a prior claim on us.

The issues involved here will be the first with which we shall have to deal when we come to consider the relation between moral action and rational action.

3. The assertion that actions, to be rational, must have a motive does no more than give us a very obvious criterion of rationality with a very limited application. More positive criteria are required if we are to be able to make, not only the broad distinction between sane and insane actions, but also, within the general class of sane actions, to distinguish the various kinds of rational and irrational conduct. And it is with these more positive criteria that we shall in the main be concerned in this thesis.

The first of these criteria we may describe as the criterion of the Natural, or, since it is usually applied in the negative form, it might be more accurate to name it the criterion of the Unnatural. Its use is exemplified most clearly, perhaps, when we describe an action as irrational because its motive is such that we think no "normal" person would have been

1. Whether this is a proper question or not is a matter which will be discussed later. (see ps. 203ff.).

moved by it, or at least not moved by it in these particular circumstances. An unnatural action (i.e. an action whose motive is "abnormal") is *prima facie* an irrational action. The criterion of the "natural" is also very often used to defend actions which, on other grounds, might seem to be irrational. We say, "it was only natural that so and so should have acted in the way he did, given his temperament and the tenseness of the situation etc."

It is not to be expected that such ambiguous terms as "natural" and "unnatural" would be used with any consistency by common sense, and indeed, as we shall see, the unsatisfactoriness of this criterion arises mainly from the radical ambiguity of the term, "natural". We can, I think, distinguish at least four senses of "natural", as used by common sense, which are relevant to our main theme. The most usual of these is to be found in the idea of what is "common" or "normal". An action is "natural" if it is what all men, or the great majority of men would do in the same circumstances. A second meaning of "natural" refers to what is original or innate as opposed to what is artificial and conditioned, and this sense of "natural" is sometimes used, indirectly, as a criterion of rational action: e.g. when we extol the virtues of "simple living", of living "according to nature", or when we argue that the right way to live is to give "free expression" to one's original propensities.

A third meaning of "natural" which is of some relevance is, "so constituted by nature". This is the meaning which is employed when we defend abnormal actions on the ground that the agent could not really help doing what he did.

Fourthly, there is the definition of "natural" which is particularly important in respect to the moral problem, viz., "that which is based on an innate moral sense". Thus, quoting St. Paul, we often talk of the "natural law written in the heart of man".

Common sense, of course, does not always distinguish clearly between these different senses when it uses the term "natural". In consequence arguments about what is natural or unnatural always tend to become confused; it is not always appreciated that what may be natural on one definition of the term may be unnatural on another.

4. The second of our criteria is, I think, the most widely accepted of all the criteria of rational action. We may describe it as the criterion of "accordance with the facts". Whenever, for instance, we use expressions such as "based on reason" or "acting according to reason" we usually mean "acting in accordance with the facts".

It is to be noted that common sense does not consider an action to be necessarily irrational if it proves to have been based on a false judgment, for mistaken judgments about the facts are often reasonable or "natural", i.e. mistakes which all or most men would have made in similar circumstances. From the common sense point of view this criterion is violated most obviously in the following cases: (a) Where we refuse to examine the facts before coming to a decision, or to "face up to facts" which we do not wish to accept; (b) where we allow obviously subjective factors to influence us in our judgments of the facts; and (c) where, having

admitted that certain things are the case, we deliberately act as though they were not the case.

5. Another criterion of rational action which is frequently used is the principle of "consistency". If a person "acts inconsistently" then there is a *prima facie* case for saying that he acts irrationally.

When, in ordinary speech, we talk of people "acting inconsistently" we usually mean, either that there is a discrepancy between belief and practice, (especially between moral precept and moral practice) or that there is a lack of consistency in the way we act at different times in situations which seem to be of the same type. This statement of the application of the principle of consistency is, however, neither satisfactory in itself nor does it cover all the cases in which the criterion of consistency is involved. We cannot enter into a detailed discussion of these points now, but must content ourselves with a summary of the main criticisms. These are: first, that the above account of "inconsistent actions" does not clearly distinguish between the situation where the operative criterion is the principle of "accordance with the facts", and the situation where the operative criterion is the principle of consistency; second, that the expression, "inconsistent action" is, strictly speaking, improper since it is only propositions which can be self-contradictory or inconsistent with one another; third, that in using the expression, "so and so acted inconsistently" we do not distinguish clearly enough between those cases where we do not realise that we are being inconsistent, and those cases where we knowingly refuse to conform

to the principle of consistency. It is only in the latter case that we can properly say that the person has acted irrationally; fourth, the common sense emphasis on inconsistencies between belief and practice tends to obscure the fact that the criterion of consistency is applicable to what is known as the theoretical field as well as to the field of practical action. Thus a person would be said to act irrationally in the sense of not conforming to the principle of consistency if, being confronted with an inconsistency between two beliefs each of which he holds to be true, he refuses to do anything to try to remove the inconsistency and maintains the beliefs as before.

In our examination of this criterion we shall try to deal with these criticisms; we shall also try to show that the principle of consistency is of much greater practical importance than is usually realised by common sense.

6. The last of these criteria is the principle of the "greatest good". This is most evident as a criterion of rational action in those cases where we praise a person for choosing, as between various alternative courses of action, that course which will give him the greatest pleasure or which will help him to obtain happiness. In particular we tend to praise a person for acting rationally if he foregoes some present pleasure for the sake ^{of} a greater pleasure "in the long run".

The application of the principle of the greatest good to the field of moral actions is not so obvious or clear-cut, for though it is in general true to say that reflective common sense tends to adopt some form of the utilitarian principle as a

criterion, perhaps one should say as "the criterion", of the rightness of actions,¹ yet, nevertheless, in actual practice we rarely use the principle of the greatest good as a means of discovering what our duty is; moreover we do sometimes justify actions which would appear in the circumstances to produce more evil than good on the ground that we intuitively know them to be the right actions. (e.g. we may defend our telling the truth where it seems wiser not to do so by using this argument). One of our main problems then in respect to this criterion will be to discover whether, and to what degree, it is applicable to the field of moral decisions.

To a lesser degree the same problem confronts us when we are concerned only with the pursuit of our own happiness. We do not doubt that it is rational for a person to choose the course of action which will give him the greatest pleasure; nor do we doubt that happiness, considered as our "greatest good" is an intrinsically desirable end - but it is questioned whether we can attain happiness by a policy of deliberately pursuing it, and to that extent it is claimed that the principle of the greatest good has severe limitations as an instrument of practical value.

7. The above, then, seem to me to be the main criteria which we use in determining the rationality of actions. The question may be asked, however, why we have omitted from the list what seems to be the most obvious criterion of all, viz., "what is

1. Cf. C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, p. 156. "It seems fair to conclude that common sense has always been implicitly and unconsciously utilitarian, and that it tends to become more and more explicitly so as intelligence, sympathy, and experience grow."

in accordance with reason" or "what is based on reason". It is clear enough that these expressions, or equivalent expressions, are often used when we are describing the rationality of an action, but it is not so clear that they are useful as precise criteria. Besides, it is, I think, possible to show that when the term "reason" is used in any proposition stating a criterion of rational action it is always analysable into one or other of the terms used in the criteria given above. When we talk of a "good reason" for action we often refer to a motive approved of by all normal men, or approved by an innate moral sense; when we say that someone "based his action on reason" we usually mean that he based his action on the facts or on sound, consistent reasoning; when we say that someone was "moved by reason" we very often mean, as Hume in a famous passage pointed out, that he was moved by the thought of what was conducive to his "greatest good".

Mention of the term "reason", however, does bring to mind a problem which is of some importance, viz., what role reason, in the strict sense of the term as referring to the faculty of reason, plays in the "rational life", and in particular what the relation is between reason and what Hume called the "passions". It is when we consider a problem of this nature that we realise the confusion which is caused by the fact that the term "reason" is used very loosely in ordinary speech. Thus when we say that a man acts rationally if he is "moved by reason" we tend to give the impression that it is only when reason itself, in some sense, is the original and sole motive of action that we can call the action rational. And this view of the matter is

further encouraged by the loose way in which we talk of the rational man as one who keeps his passions under the control of reason or as one whose life is controlled by reason. Thus reason and desire seem to be placed in opposing camps as if they were inevitable enemies.

Yet such a view is misleading even as an interpretation of the essential common sense position. Desire and reason are not competing motives of action in the sense that we can claim to be acting rationally when we are moved by reason, but not so when we are moved by some desire. The argument has only to be stated baldly like this for its falseness to become apparent. There is nothing, per se, irrational about being motivated by a desire (indeed there are some who would assert that we can only be moved by a desire); it is only when our desire is based on false judgments as to the facts that we can introduce the question of irrationality.

The fact of the matter is that the general bias of the common sense view is towards the Humean position that the proper role of reason is to be a "servant", or perhaps, more accurately, a guide and adviser of the passions; it is the instrument by means of which we are able to discover ways and means of satisfying our desires. The main difference between Hume's view and that of common sense is that whereas Hume held that reason "is and ought only to be a slave of the passions" common sense sometimes seems to modify this by claiming that reason can be an original motive of action on its own account. The "particular passion" which is linked with reason is usually thought to be the desire for knowledge, or "intellectual curiosity", but it is necessary to add

that common sense is by no means consistent in respect to this matter; for sometimes it is assumed that there is such a thing as the desire for knowledge for its own sake, and at other times it is assumed that we seek knowledge only as a means to the satisfaction of other desires. If the latter be the case then, of course, reason only operates, here as elsewhere, as the servant of the passions.

It is with this question of reason as an "original" motive of action that we shall be primarily concerned when we come to deal with the general problem of the relation between reason and desire.

II.

8. In the chapters which follow I propose, first of all, to consider the criteria listed above only within the context of actions whose motive is some desire. In other words I intend to exclude, so far as it is possible to do so, those problems which are raised by the fact that we appear to be moral beings capable of being moved to action by the thought of a moral obligation. Such a sharp division is bound to be somewhat artificial, but for the purposes of our discussion it is convenient to keep the two kinds of action distinct, and this for two reasons: first, that the question of the relation of moral actions to the concept of rational action raises special problems of its own which are best dealt with separately; and secondly, that these problems can be discussed most profitably in the light of what has already been said in explication of the criteria of rationality, in so far as they are applied to actions motivated by desire.

9. In the first section we shall follow closely the outline of the programme suggested by the summary of the common sense view given above. In Chapter I we shall consider the preliminary question of what we mean by the term "action", and then go on to discuss very briefly certain problems that arise out of this question of definition - in particular, the assumption that it is only deliberate actions which can be described as actions proper or to which the term "rational" could be ascribed.

In Chapter II we shall criticise the value of the notion of the "natural" as a criterion of rational action, and in Chapters III and IV respectively we shall analyse in detail the criteria of "accordance with the facts" and of "consistency". In Chapter V we shall discuss the criterion of the "greatest good" in so far as it is applied to actions whose motive is some desire - which means, in effect, a discussion of happiness as a rational end of conduct.

Then, in the next chapter we shall conclude the first section by considering the relation between desire and reason. Under this heading we shall criticise the adequacy of Hume's viewpoint on the question, and try to clarify the suggestion, implicit in ordinary language, that reason, as well as being a "servant of the passions", sometimes operates as an originator of action in its own right - as a particular kind of "passion".

10. In the second section, where we consider specifically the relation between moral action and rational action, we shall not follow quite so closely the programme outlined above. For one thing this would result in a certain amount of repetition; but, more

importantly, some of the special problems which we have to examine in this section can be more adequately dealt with if we discuss them in the order which naturally suggests itself without worrying too much whether this order parallels the order of criteria given in the introduction.

The first problem to be considered in this section is one which did not arise in the first: it is the problem of the rationality of the "duty motive" itself. As we have already noted we do not see any point in asking why it is rational to be moved to action by the thought of something we desire, but we do sometimes "rebel" against the authority of the duty motive, especially when the course of duty requires a sacrifice of our own happiness. We wonder whether the authority of duty might not be "illusory", to be explained away as a produce of social conditioning etc., and we seek for some naturalistic theory of moral obligation which will account satisfactorily for its main characteristics, and at the same time give us a good reason for taking a rather more relaxed and moderate view of the demands of duty.

The rationality of the idea of moral obligation is further attacked, indirectly, by questioning the assumptions which underlie, or seem to underlie our common sense reasoning about and discussion of moral questions. Thus when we argue about moral problems, or censure somebody for doing what is morally wrong we seem to assume at least two things: first, that we cannot be said to be under a moral obligation to do something unless we

are free, in every sense of that term, to do the action required of us; and secondly, that there are objective standards of moral rightness. This latter assumption is especially relevant when we argue with others about moral questions, for such discussion would seem to be pointless unless there is some objective standard of reference.

Now it is very often asserted that neither of these assumptions is justified in that they are not founded on the facts; and if this is so then, of course, much of our conduct in respect to moral questions would seem to be irrational, judged by the criterion of "accordance with the facts". It is with this, and related questions, that we shall deal in Chapter VIII.

11. Having dealt first with these basic problems we shall next consider some specific questions that arise in connection with the relation between moral and rational action. In Chapter IX we shall examine the question whether we can be said to have an "obligation to try to act rationally". Under this heading we shall deal mainly with the criteria of "accordance with the facts" and of "consistency", but we shall also consider briefly whether we can be said to have an obligation to seek our own happiness.

Then next, in Chapter X, we shall discuss the use of the criterion of the "greatest good" as a criterion of "rightness". We have already mentioned some of the difficulties inherent in this problem, but there is one further related problem which we should note here since we deal with it in this chapter. The problem is whether, as is suggested by some philosophers, it is only

possible to know what is our duty by an intuitive act of moral appreciation made at the time when we are actually involved in a moral obligation situation. The argument is that we cannot come to know what is our duty by applying some formula such as the utilitarian principle, or by any process of argument and reasoning. In its more extreme forms this doctrine would seem to leave the way open for the dominance of conventional morality and quasi-moral feelings, and it will be part of our task to try to show that the intuitional and to some extent non-intellectual approach to moral problems is only satisfactory if it is combined with the careful employment of general principles of morality.

Finally, in Chapter XI we shall discuss the problem that arises by virtue of the possibility of there being an absolute conflict between the claims of duty and the claims of personal happiness. We shall ask, first, whether, and in what sense, we can talk of an "absolute conflict"; and secondly, what we mean by the term, "rational" when we say that, in the event of such a conflict, it is more rational to choose one course rather than the other.

C H A P T E R I.

S O M E P R E L I M I N A R Y Q U E S T I O N S.

I.

1. I propose to begin our enquiry by considering briefly what we mean by the term "action".

First, it is necessary to make an important, though perhaps obvious distinction between the use of the term "action" where it means simply "the thing done", and its use where it means "the decision to do something". Thus when we talk of a "rational action" we may mean only that "the thing done" proved to be the right action in the circumstances, or we may mean that the person acting made a rational decision - that he acted "according to the facts", for the "right reasons", and so on. In other words, in the latter case we consider not only the completed action but also the motives "behind" the action, the way it was done etc.

Now though in ordinary speech we use the term "rational" to describe actions in the first sense given above it seems clear enough that, strictly speaking, it should only be used to qualify the term "action" where it means "a decision to do something", for it is only by considering the decision as distinct from what was actually done that we can know what the person intended to do, on what grounds he based his decision and so on. This is not a merely academic point for what might be considered a rational action if we take into account only the completed act, the "thing done", might well prove to be an irrational action if we consider what the person decided to do, and why. Thus a batsman makes the stroke

which wins the match and we congratulate him on having had the skill and presence of mind to make the right stroke. He then confesses that the stroke was really an accidental product of an intended stroke which in the circumstances it was the height of foolishness to attempt. In other words, though the batsman acted irrationally, the actual stroke made, "the thing done" was quite correct. In contrast to this we may make a rational decision and yet, through no fault of our own, fail to achieve the result intended. The fact of the matter is that an action in the sense of "the thing done" can be no more reasonable or unreasonable, rational or irrational than the behaviour of a volcano or the action of an acid; it can be described as useful or useless, dangerous or safe, important or unimportant, even as right or wrong, but not as rational or irrational. If we wish to avoid misunderstanding, then, we should probably never say "so and so was the rational action in the circumstances", but rather, "he acted rationally in doing so and so", or "his decision to do so and so was a rational one".

2. The second point which it is necessary to make is that we include within the class of actions not only decisions to do something but also decisions to believe something, and even sometimes decisions to be something. Common sense is inclined to restrict the use of the term "action" to those cases in which we intend to do something, to "get something going", possibly because, in ordinary speech, the term "action" very often refers to the exertion of energy in some physical movement or series of

1. movements. But if we allow, say, that the Chancellor's decision to devalue the pound is an action, even though the decision, qua decision, is not an action in the more physical sense of the term, then there seems to be no reason for denying that, say, the decision to accept the reality of ghosts, or the decision to try to be more holy should be regarded as actions too. Even if the decisions have no practical import - that is, are not intended to lead to action in the more popular sense of the term - they are still actions nonetheless.

In some cases, of course, it is essential for purposes of clear exposition to distinguish between action, in the sense of the decision to do something or the actual doing of something, and action as meaning the decision to believe something or to be something - e.g. where we are discussing an inconsistency between a person's beliefs and his actual practice - but this in no way affects the principle given above.

II.

3. The distinctions made above do not, however, remove all possibility of ambiguity in our use of the term "action". It seems important, for instance, that we should be able to differentiate clearly between actions proper and merely mechanical or automatic behaviour, though we often use the term "action" to cover both. We say that the ants acted in a peculiar way when we disturbed their

1. Thus the expression "man of action" refers either to the person who has led a life of physical adventure (e.g. the explorer), or, and this is more common, to the person who has the power of firm decision, who "gets things done".

ness, though in fact we do not rank these "actions" above the level of instinctive behaviour and certainly would not think it proper to apply the terms "rational" or "irrational" to them. Similarly we often use the term "action" when referring to something done by a human being where the term "behaviour" or "reflex action" would be more accurate. This looseness in the employment of the term "action" reflects a certain vagueness in the common sense attitude to the question of the distinction between action proper and behaviour, and it is therefore necessary for us to discuss the problem of the criterion to use to make the distinction clear.

4. Perhaps the most common criterion employed is that of ^{1.} "deliberateness". An action is something which implies a deliberate decision; when we behave, on the other hand, we merely react to the strongest stimuli. This criterion, however, is itself ambiguous, for "deliberate" can mean either of two things. In the first, and more common sense of the term, it means the opposite of impulsive. We act deliberately when we consider the issues carefully before deciding what to do. In the second, and wider sense of the term, we act deliberately when the action is explicitly or implicitly intentional in character: when we do something or decide to do something for a reason or with some purpose in view. Now if we take the first of these definitions as the correct one, then we cannot regard "deliberateness" as a good criterion of actions proper, for

1. Thus see H.A. Prichard: "If we fail to scrutinise the meaning of the terms "end" and "purpose" we are apt to assume uncritically that all deliberate action, i.e. action proper must have a purpose.

there are many non-considered acts which we should hesitate to classify as mere behaviour. I am thinking here in particular of those actions which are immediate and spontaneous responses to situations and which, though not in any sense planned or considered, could hardly be classified as reflexive or mechanical reactions to stimuli. Some of these spontaneous responses may have a basis in training: thus the trained tennis player "instinctively" produces the right stroke, the well bred young man immediately responds to the awkward silence with a tactful question. In a sense they are reacting automatically to a situation, but they are reacting intelligently, and could undoubtedly give a satisfactory reason for their action if questioned later. Other actions of the "immediate response" type seem to have a more instinctive basis - e.g. a mother jumping into the sea to save her child from drowning - but we do not regard them as belonging to a lower order merely because they are impulsive. Indeed in the case of the mother saving her child we should be inclined to regard her behaviour as irrational if she carefully weighed up the pros and cons before acting.

5. Perhaps, then, if we cannot exclude non-considered actions from the class of actions proper we should say that the criterion is that we should be able to give a reason for what we do. We need not be consciously aware of the reason at the time of acting but it must be implicit in the action. The difficulty with this criterion is that we can give reasons for what are really behaviouristic responses as well as for responses which we usually take to be actions proper. I am not thinking here of the

reasons we give for physiological reflexes such as sneezing or blinking (e.g. "the reason I sneezed was that a feather tickled my nose") where we use the term "reason" as a loose synonym for "efficient cause", but rather of those cases in which we explain our actions by reference to some motive which prompts us to do something, as we say, "against our will". Thus, when the lion leaps out of the screen in a three-dimensional film we involuntarily hide behind the seat in front, and though this is really a conditioned reflex reaction we might possibly give as a reason for our behaviour the fact that we "felt frightened".

6. The only criterion which is capable, I think, of doing the job of distinguishing between action and behaviour is the criterion of "responsibility", and even this criterion is far from being completely satisfactory since it is difficult to give precision to the term, and in any case it can only be employed with complete effectiveness when we are dealing with our own actions. We can never really be certain whether another person is responsible for a particular action or not, though we can often infer the degree of responsibility with a high degree of probability.

What is being contended here is that it is only those actions for which we accept responsibility which can properly be called actions. If we are unable to accept "something done" as being "our action", if we claim that it happened "against our will", then it must be classified as behaviour. (Sometimes, of course, we are prepared to take responsibility for actions done "against our will" if we think that we could have avoided their

occurring).

The important thing to note in respect to this criterion is that we are often quite prepared to accept full responsibility for actions which are impulsive or unplanned. It is because we include these "immediate response" actions under the heading of actions proper that it is better to use the criterion of "responsibility" rather than the criterion of "will"; for though it is true enough that responsible actions are actions which we voluntarily will to do, an emphasis on the fact of "willing" may tend to give the misleading impression that the only actions which are actions proper are those which are deliberate, in which we consciously will to do one thing rather than another.

It seems possible to use this criterion of "responsibility" without becoming involved in the philosophical issue of freewill. From a common sense point of view we usually have no difficulty in deciding what decisions we are responsible for. No doubt, in theory, the convinced determinist would have to say that he is not really responsible for anything he does - that he never acts but merely reacts. But in practice, certainly in judging his own actions, and usually in judging the actions of others, he adopts the common sense attitude. He does not always feel it to be relevant to introduce problematical considerations about the influence of heredity and environment whenever he does something about which he feels ashamed.

In saying that the criterion of "responsibility" can be used at a common sense level without introducing the question of "freewill", we are not, however, implying that this question is

not of some relevance to our general discussion of rational action. We shall consider this point later.

III.

7. It is with the above considerations in mind that we must consider the truth of the assumption, which tends to be made by common sense, that the main difference between rational and irrational actions lies in the fact that rational acts are deliberate, planned, considered, whereas irrational acts are non-considered, impulsive.

First, we must note that there are many "unplanned" acts which we would call neither impulsive nor irrational - e.g. the perfectly timed stroke of a batsman, the swift repartee of the wit; or, for that matter, intuitive acts of appreciation or of¹ knowledge.

Secondly, even those actions which we describe as "impulsive" may not necessarily be irrational. The term "impulsive" is itself somewhat ambiguous: when we refer to an action as "impulsive" we may mean either, (a) that it was done, literally, without thought, without any particular purpose in mind, or (b) that

1. This is a point forcibly made by Professor Ryle in "The Concept of Mind" as part of his general attack on the theory that - as he puts it - "a performance of any sort inherits all its title to intelligence from some anterior, internal operation of planning what to do". Professor Ryle is, however, inclined to overstate his case. In particular he tends to underestimate the extent to which all "knowing-how" activities involve - if only by implication - a "knowing-that" element.

it was done spontaneously, without prior deliberation. In this latter case reflective thought is present but it is contemporaneous with the "outward" action. Indeed, in some cases, it is not implausible to say that the action is the thought.

Now, as we have already noted, impulsive actions of this latter kind (e.g. the mother jumping into the water to save her child) are often considered quite rational. They may in fact be rational in two different ways. They may be the appropriate actions in the circumstances - the action which "meets" the facts of the case - and they may be performed in the manner which we approve of as being "rational" in the circumstances. Thus the mother not only does what she ought to do, but she does it as she ought. And one can think of many occasions in which it would be considered rational to act impulsively in this second sense of the term.

3. There are several reasons why we tend to think that it is only planned, considered actions which have any claim to the title of rationality. In the first place there is the ambiguousness of the terms "deliberate" and "impulsive", which we have already noted. Secondly, it is easy to become confused between rationality as a dispositional quality and rationality as a quality of a particular action or series of actions. It is true that when we describe someone as "a particularly rational sort of person" we usually have in mind, among other things, his tendency to deliberate, to weigh up the pros and cons before acting, and we thus contrast him with the impulsive, reckless person. But this can be admitted without in any way controverting our previous statement that some non-considered actions may yet be rational.

Thirdly, the use of the idea of "deliberateness" as the criterion of actions proper seems satisfactory because we think that the main difference between human actions and animal behaviour lies in the fact that whereas human beings are able to deliberate between various courses of action before deciding what to do, animals are determined in their behaviour either by instinct or by conditioned reflexes. But even if it were true that this provided a clear differentia between animal behaviour and human behaviour, it would not in itself show that the only human actions which can claim to be rational are those which are "deliberate".¹

9. Reference to impulsive acts, especially impulsive acts in the first sense noted above - i.e. those done without any particular thought in mind - does raise the important question of "motiveless actions"; whether there are any such, and if so how they are to be described. We have already observed that this question plays a prominent part in disputes as to the sanity of a person committing certain kinds of criminal acts.

The answer we give to this question will obviously depend, to some extent, on our definition of the term "motive". If we mean by "motive", that which causes movement or that which impels to action then it seems fairly clear that all actions have

1. It is doubtful whether there is any criterion which will give us a precise distinction between animal and human behaviour, but the criterion of "deliberateness" seems particularly unsatisfactory in this respect. The behaviour of many animals shows all the usual overt signs of "planned action", and it only begs the question to explain away such actions by reference to "instinct".

1. a "motive". If, on the other hand, we mean by "motive", the thought of a possible satisfaction or the thought of a moral obligation^{2.} then it might be argued that we sometimes act without being moved by either desire or duty. This view, however, I am inclined to think, can only be made plausible if we include in the class of actions that which would be more accurately described as behaviour.

It is interesting to note that when we talk of a motiveless action we usually refer to the actions of others - in particular, to the actions of criminals - and very rarely to our own actions. What we mean when we say that someone acted without motive is either:

(a) That we cannot see any reason for their action; that it seemed to be without purpose.

This, of course, might be merely a confession of ignorance, and need not necessarily imply that, in fact, the action had no motive; but very often it is really an assertion that we are unable to understand how any human being could do the particular action under discussion, or that we cannot understand how any human being could be moved by any of the motives which have been put

1. I am accepting here the common sense assumption that "everything has a cause", and that this applies to actions as well as events. I am aware that some defenders of freewill would deny this, but it seems to me that provided one defines "cause" widely enough (i.e. does not limit its meaning to "efficient cause"), then the above statement is more or less a tautology.

2. In ordinary speech the term "motive" tends to be synonymous with desire. See p. 205 for discussion of this point.

forward as explaining the action. In other words, what we tend to do is to confuse the idea of a motiveless action with the idea of an abnormal action or with the idea of a normal action done for an abnormal reason. An action which is irrational on the grounds of being abnormal or unnatural is thought to be irrational on the grounds of being without a motive. But in fact many so called "motiveless actions" can be shown to have been¹ done for a very definite reason.

(b) That they acted on "blind impulse" -that they were "carried along" by irresistible emotional drives.

This interpretation of a "motiveless action" is itself ambiguous. We may mean that the person was the victim of an uncontrollable desire, but was nevertheless, in some measure aware of what he was doing and why -i.e. that he had a definite purpose in mind. In this case, of course, the action does have a motive, though in so far as the person was unable to control his desire and was therefore not responsible for his action, we should say that he "behaved" rather than that he "acted".

On the other hand we may mean that the emotional drive was not only uncontrollable but also that it produced a state of frenzy in which the person was quite unaware of what he was doing or why he was acting in the way he did. He acted, or rather behaved

1. Thus in a recent murder case the judge refused to accept the evidence of the defendant that another man, X, had killed his wife on the grounds that X could have had no possible reason for wanting to kill her. Later it was proved that X really had killed the defendant's wife as a means of sexual gratification, a motive which was hardly likely to occur to the learned judge.

"blindly". It is probably this interpretation which most people have in mind when they talk of a "motiveless action". Whether it is true that a person in such a state of mind really has no "motive" is, of course, difficult to determine. It is quite possible that he does not know that what he is doing is wrong at law, and it is even more probable that the real reasons for his actions are to be found in what we call "unconscious motives". But people who act "blindly" in some situation usually do give some reason, however bizarre, for their behaviour, when questioned afterwards - e.g. they might talk of being moved by the thought of something which they "must do".¹

The difficulty in accepting the view that there can be "motiveless" actions becomes more apparent when we try to discover whether we ourselves have ever acted (in the strict sense of that term) without a motive. Looking at the question from this point of view we find that what we call motiveless actions fall into one or other of these categories:

(a) Unaccountable "slips" of the tongue, failures in tact, and so on.

(b) Certain actions done under the stress of emotion. Thus we say, "I didn't have any reason for doing that; I was just in a bad temper".

(c). Actions done during a "day-dreaming" mood - that is, we are not aware at the time of having done them.

1. One of the limitations of the McNaghten Rules, apart from the fact that they do not make provision for "uncontrollable impulse", is that it is almost impossible to find a person who did not have some idea of what he was doing and why at the time he committed his crime. As one judge has said, "Nobody is really mad enough to be within the definition of madness laid down in the rules".

In the first of these categories we are really only saying that we do not know what caused us to do this or that. The suggestion is that what was done happened "against our will" -we were influenced by factors beyond our control, by physiological factors or unconscious motives.¹ In other words we were not acting but merely reacting.

In the second example we mean either that we were the victims of an uncontrollable emotion, or else that we do not want anyone to take seriously what we said or did while in a temper. In this latter case we cannot, properly, say that we had no motive. What we should say is that we "disown" the motive.

So far as "day dreaming" actions are concerned I think it is true to say that, on analysis, we find that there is some motive at work -that our apparently random actions are controlled by some "master" desire. It is only in drugged or semi-hypnotic states of "day-dreaming" that we could possibly claim that the behaviour is motiveless, though no doubt the psychologists would dispute that.

The upshot of this discussion then seems to be that it is not accurate to talk of "motiveless" actions. What we mean by this expression is covered by the idea of behaviouristic actions outside the control of the agent, and/or by the idea of "unnatural actions"; and for that reason it is better to deal with the question of sanity and insanity in these terms rather than by bringing in the confused notion of a "motiveless action".

1. It might seem better to use the term "motive" for actions influenced by conscious desires and duties, and to use the term "cause" to describe unconscious influences. On the other hand the expression, "unconscious motive" does emphasise that the cause of our behaviour is mental rather than physiological or chemical.

IV.

10. There remains one more preliminary question, viz. the relevance of the freewill problem to our discussion of rational action.

Obviously it is not possible here to examine the freewill problem per se; we cannot, that is, attempt to examine the arguments for and against the proposition that we "have" freewill. Our concern here is simply with the question whether the assumption of freewill is necessarily implied in the common sense use of the term "rational" as descriptive of actions; and, for the purposes of the discussion we shall accept the interpretation of freewill which is, I think, the common sense one: i.e. "a person acts of his own freewill if his decision is not caused, or not wholly caused by antecedent conditions, including the conditions of his own nature considered as a product of environmental and hereditary influences."

11. Prima facie it seems clear enough that when, in ordinary speech, we describe a person as acting rationally or irrationally, we do imply that the person concerned had some freedom of choice. If, later, we find that he had had no choice but to act in the way he did then we substitute some other descriptive term for the terms "rational" and "irrational". Furthermore, it seems to be the case that our employment of these terms usually has "moral overtones" - we do not use them in the merely descriptive sense in which, say, we would use terms like "intelligent", "quick", "cautious" etc.

12. Mention of "moral overtones" brings to the fore an objection which might be raised against the common sense point of view, viz. that it is only if we do introduce the terms "rational" and "irrational" as terms of praise or blame that the freewill question becomes relevant; if, however, we use these terms as "neutrally" descriptive terms, then we can by-pass the freewill issue. We can simply say that a person acts rationally when his action fulfills certain criteria.

Yet, even if we allow that these terms can be used neutrally, or claim that they often are used neutrally, does this enable us to avoid the assumption of freewill? Is not this assumption inevitably involved whenever we use these terms to qualify "actions"?

In answer to these questions we should note, first, that if we mean by "action" only "the thing done" then, obviously, we can describe it as rational or irrational without implying anything about freewill. The freewill issue is irrelevant because we are not discussing the how and the why of a person's action; we are discussing only whether the "thing done" was effective or ineffective, right or wrong in the circumstances.

Secondly, the freewill issue need not be involved if we use the terms "rational" and "irrational" to describe a dispositional quality rather than an action. In describing a person as a "particularly rational kind of person" we may be doing no more than describing a natural characteristic which we think he is lucky to "have" in the same way in which we may think a person lucky to have a "cheerful temperament".

However when we are describing, not a dispositional quality or the "thing done" but, the actual doing of something by a person then it seems to me that we necessarily assume that the person concerned had some freedom of choice, and this holds good even though we use the terms "rational" and "irrational" as descriptive terms only, free of any moral connotations. It may seem at first sight as if this contention is not true, for not only do we sometimes describe a person as acting irrationally when there is a strong *prima facie* case for arguing that his decision was completely determined (e.g. when an habitual drunkard wrecks his life through his inability to control his desire for drink), but, also, we still say that a person made a rational decision even though we are sure that for a person of his "nature" any other decision would have been almost impossible in the circumstances. Yet when we reflect further on the common sense use of the terms "rational" and "irrational" in cases like those we always find, I think, a tacit assumption that the person concerned had the possibility, even though a bare possibility, of choice - it was conceivable that they might have done other than they did. In other words, whenever we are, in fact, completely convinced that the person had no choice then we cease to describe his action as rational or irrational. We say, of the drunkard, for example, that "there's no point in telling him that he's acting irrationally - he's no longer able to control his appetites".

13. In actual fact, however, it is rare for us to use the terms "rational" and "irrational" to describe actions without in some sense implying that the action is morally praiseworthy or

or blameworthy as the case may be, and it is of some interest to note why these terms should have these moral connotations. There are at least three reasons which come to mind: First, the consequences of irrational conduct are often pernicious. Secondly, the ability to act rationally often depends on a degree of control over the emotions and appetites which we find morally admirable. Thus we praise someone for acting rationally in that he resisted an immediate pleasure for the sake of his future happiness.

Thirdly, and most importantly, there is implied in the common sense position the belief that we have an obligation to try to act rationally. This being so we are really failing in a moral obligation whenever we knowingly act in an irrational way - e.g. knowingly act "against the facts", or refuse to modify an argument which we know to be self-contradictory etc. The case for the use of these terms as terms of praise and blame really rests, in the main, on this third point. We shall discuss later, in Chapter IX, the whole question of what we mean when we talk of "an obligation to act rationally".

Note. In the above section we have argued that the freewill assumption is still involved even though we use the terms "rational" and "irrational" as descriptive terms only. It might be said, however, that the freewill question is only relevant in the context of the moral problem and is quite irrelevant outside this.

I think it is in fact true that we usually only discuss the problem of freewill within the context of moral issues, but I cannot see any logical reason why we should deny the relevance of the freewill issue to matters which are, as it were, "morally neutral". When we describe an action as "shrewd" for instance, we do not necessarily imply that the person is to be morally praised or blamed for acting shrewdly, but we do imply that he had some choice of action in the circumstances, and that he chose wisely.

The only way in which we could prove the above criticism to be sound would be to show that it is only when we

(see over)

are under a moral obligation to do something that we have, in fact, any freedom of will. It would, in the very nature of the case be impossible to prove this one way or the other, though I suppose it is a common experience that we are most consciously aware of freedom of choice when we are confronted with a duty, especially with a duty which we do not want to fulfill. One of the defects of emphasising this aspect of the problem, however, is that it tends to obscure the religious nature of the freewill problem. The desire of the ordinary man to believe in freewill arises not only from the urge to make sense of our moral attitudes, but also from the urge to find significance and meaning for his life. What he is asking for is the assurance that he is not simply a plaything of impersonal forces but is a creature, created for a definite purpose, and with some freedom of choice in determining his own destiny.

C H A P T E R I I .

T H E C R I T E R I O N O F T H E N A T U R A L

I .

1. It is not so immediately obvious, as it is in the case of the other criteria, that we do use the concept of the "natural" as a criterion of rational action. If we were to ask the ordinary man what he means when he talks of someone "acting rationally" he is much more likely to refer to the principle of "accordance with the facts" or the principle of the "greatest good" than to the criterion of the "natural"; yet it does not require much reflection to show that this latter criterion is used both directly and indirectly as a standard by which we determine what is rational and what is irrational.

The most obvious example of the employment of this criterion is in those cases where we dismiss a person's action as being completely irrational because it was done for reasons which we regard as completely "unnatural" - reasons which no normal man would feel moved by in the same circumstances. As we saw in the last chapter, what we call "motiveless crimes" are¹ very often crimes whose motive is unnatural or abnormal.

1. In general it is true to say that the connection between the idea of the "unnatural" and the idea of the "irrational" is much more marked than the connection between the "natural" and the "rational". There is a very obvious reason for this, which to some extent applies in the case of the other criteria as well, viz., that whereas if an action does not fulfill one of the fundamental criteria of rationality it can safely be described as irrational, it does not necessarily follow that when it does fulfill one of these criteria it also fulfills the others. Thus a person may be moved by a "natural" motive, and to that extent

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The motives in question need not necessarily be of the kind which we regard as being grossly immoral -though, as we shall see, the "unnatural" and the "immoral" are often used as synonymous terms -but in so far as they are the kind of motives which we can neither understand a person's being influenced by at all, or, at least, not influenced by in a particular set of circumstances, then we tend to assert that the actions which result from the influence of such motives must be irrational. Thus we cannot understand a person's being moved by the desire to inflict pain on himself, or a mother's being influenced by some very abstract notions of justice to give information which will bring harm to her own children; similarly the average man finds it difficult to accept the rationality of the religious vocation if it leads a person to seek martyrdom or to live the life of a hermit.

Sometimes what we consider unnatural is not so much the nature of the desire per se as the degree of strength which it exerts over a person. Thus it is not unnatural for a woman to feel affection for her dog, but we think there is something wrong if she devotes to it as much attention as a mother would to her child. Again, when we refer to an action as unnatural we may be

be acting rationally, and yet, in trying to satisfy the desire which has moved him to action, completely ignore the relevant facts of the situation. From that point of view his action has to be considered irrational.

In the case of the criterion of the "natural" there is a further reason why the connection between the "natural" and the "rational" is not particularly strong, and that is that in some cases it is actually more rational to act "against the natural motive" than to allow oneself to be influenced by it. For discussion of this point see below.

commenting on not so much the motive of the action as the way it was done. There are situations in which it is natural, and therefore rational to act spontaneously, without deliberation; there are other situations in which it is natural to act with extreme caution.

2. Another use of the idea of the "natural" as a criterion of rational action is found in those cases where we excuse or defend a person against the charge of having acted irrationally by saying that "it was only natural for him to have acted in the way he did". Thus we may defend a person against the charge of irrational conduct if we discover that the motive of his action, though incomprehensible to us, was an accepted motive in the community in which he lived; in other words we think it natural for a person to be influenced in his behaviour by the moral standards and customs of the society in which he has been reared. Then, again, we may excuse a person from the charge of irrational behaviour by pointing out that though his action was a foolish one in the circumstances, yet the "instinctive" pull to act in the way he did was so strong that his action was really a quite natural one.

3. A more indirect use of the criterion of the natural is illustrated in those cases where we argue that if a person wants to be happy then he ought to live "naturally" or "according to nature". Similarly we sometimes argue, especially since the advent of modern psychology, that the proper way to bring up children is to allow their "natural" instincts free expression.

In arguments of this kind the actual criterion of rationality is the principle of the "greatest good", but the concept of the natural is introduced as a subsidiary criterion inasmuch as the means to the achievement of the greatest good is calculated, in part anyway, by reference to the concept of the natural. What we mean by the term "natural" when used in this context, and also in the other cases noted above, is the question to which we must now turn our attention.

II.

4. The unsatisfactoriness of the concept of the "natural" - whatever the context in which it is employed - has been commented on by many writers¹ so that it may seem somewhat superfluous to labour the point any further. The only reasons for doing so are, first, that notwithstanding these criticisms the terms "natural" and "unnatural" are still used very frequently in ordinary speech in defence or in criticism of various kinds of actions; and secondly that a somewhat more detailed analysis of these concepts yields a number of questions that are in themselves of considerable interest.

1. Butler, Hume and Sidgwick have all made detailed criticisms of, or analyses of these concepts, each from a slightly different point of view. Thus Butler (Sermon 2) is concerned with the problem of what we mean by "natural" when we claim a "natural" supremacy for the conscience; Hume, on the other hand (Bk3 of Treatise, "Moral Distinctions Derived from a Moral Sense") deals with the difficulties of the concept of the "natural" in trying to answer the question whether moral principles have their source in nature; then, again, Sidgwick (Chapter VI, Methods of Ethics) criticises the attempt to find in the notion of the "natural" an ultimate ground for ethical principles. Both the latter writers, though dealing with a somewhat different problem, follow much the same line in their criticisms - Sidgwick's being the more detailed and cogent argument of the two.

5. The most frequent criticism of the concept of the "natural" is of course that the term is radically ambiguous.^{1.} Not only can it be defined in a number of different ways,^{2.} some of which seem to be opposed to each other, but these definitions themselves, and especially the ones in current use, suffer from a lack of precision and clarity. In consequence arguments which are based on the concept of the "natural" are always exposed to the dangers of a *petitio principii*; or else suffer from the fact that the term "natural" is used in one sense in one part of the argument, and in another sense in a later stage of the argument. We commence, say, by arguing that it is natural (in sense of normal) for certain natives to be promiscuous in their sexual relations, and, perhaps, conclude by arguing that it is natural (in sense of "according to original nature of man") for the natives to be promiscuous, and yet not realise that the meaning we give to the term "natural" has shifted.

6. Now, in relation to the particular problem we are discussing here, viz the employment of the concept of the "natural" as a criterion of rational action, it is possible to note at least four senses of the term "natural" which are relevant; and this observation is itself an apt commentary on the ambiguousness of the term. Leaving aside, however, this general criticism of the concept, and coming to more specific criticisms of the ways in

1. Cf. Hume, p474: "----- our answer to this question depends upon the definition of the word, Nature, than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal."

2. The Concise Oxford Dictionary lists fourteen senses in which the term "natural" is used.

which the various senses of the term "natural" are employed, we first of all enumerate and define the four senses which are relevant to our general theme:

(a). The most frequent meaning of "natural", when used as a criterion of rational action, is "normal" (in sense of "what is usual") or "common" (as opposed to what is rare and exceptional), and we shall find, I think, that this sense of the term is implied in many instances where other criteria of "the natural" are also

operative.¹ An action, then, is natural if it is the kind of action which all men, or the great majority of men would have done in the same circumstances. An unnatural action, on this definition of the term, is one which we could not imagine the "normal" man (i.e. the vast majority of people whom we know) doing at all, or, at least, doing in these particular circumstances.

(b) A second, and much less common, definition of "natural" is, "that which is based on an innate moral sense" - a definition which is, of course, particularly relevant to the problem of the relation between moral action and rational action.

The use of this meaning of the "natural" as a criterion of rational action is not always so obvious as in the above definition of the term, and in many cases is only indirectly used as a criterion. Its most obvious employment is in those cases where someone commits a crime which shocks our moral sensibilities, and

1. Thus, Hume, op.cit., p. 474, "But nature may also be opposed to rare and unusual; and in this sense of the word, which is the common one, there may often arise disputes concerning what is natural or unnatural".

we say, "It isn't natural for him to do a thing like that -he cannot have any moral sense". Of course the field of actions covered by this sense of "natural" over-laps a good deal with the field covered by the criterion of what is "normal" or "common", a point which is seized on by critics of the moral sense theory who seek to show that what "shocks" our so-called moral sense is merely that which we have been "conditioned" to regard as wrong by the community in which we have been brought up.

Sometimes this sense of "natural" is expressed in terms of the "natural law" rather than in terms of the "innate moral sense". The two ideas always go together; those who believe in the theory of "natural law" always in fact accept the notion that this "natural law" is written in the "heart of man" or is recognised by the untainted conscience. This conception of "natural law", with its implications that the universe itself is established on justice and law, is often used, indirectly, as a criterion of rational action, as for example when we are told that a man can only fulfill himself, or realise himself, or gain true happiness if he obeys the "natural law within him", or if he allows his "true nature" to express itself, or if he obeys the "natural authority"¹ of conscience. We shall see that this view sometimes gets confused with another view, viz., that a man best realises himself if he allows his natural (in the sense of "original") emotions and passions to be expressed without hindrance. Actually the two views are diametrically opposed: in the

1. This is more or less the point of view of Butler, as expressed in the second and third sermons. It is, in other words, part of the natural constitution of man that conscience should rule over the passions and appetites.

former the passions and appetites (the "natural man") are subjected to the discipline of the moral law; in the latter these passions are allowed complete freedom. It is only because of the radical ambiguity of the term "natural" that such opposing views could be confused.

(c) The third meaning of "natural" is hard to express precisely. The suggested definition, viz., "that which is so constituted or determined by nature" indicates the element of "determinism" which is the essential aspect of this definition of the natural, but it excludes those actions which are natural in the sense that they are the necessary product of a certain process of conditioning. We wish to include actions determined by the environment as well as by nature. To get round this difficulty it might be possible to define the sense of natural employed here as "that which is to be surely expected"¹. In other words, when we understand the nature of a person and/or the conditions under which he has been brought up then we are not surprised that he tends to act in certain ways - we say it is natural for him to do this or to refrain from doing that.

This sense of the term "natural" is used in the main to defend persons against the charge of having acted irrationally. Thus when someone does something which seems to us morally wrong, or foolish, or unnatural (in sense of unusual) we may defend him by saying that it was natural for him to act in the way he did - we say, "well, that's his nature"; or, "when you think of his early environment it is to be expected that he would act in that way." We may not, in

1. This is a slightly stronger version of a definition given by the Concise Oxford: "not surprising, to be expected".

cases like these, argue that because the person did what was natural for him therefore his action was rational, especially if what he did was unnatural in the sense of "abnormal", but we may nevertheless use this third sense of "natural" to defend him, at least, against the charge of irrational behaviour. Occasionally, however, we do use this sense of "natural" as a direct criterion of rational action. Thus if a person gets pleasure from some activity which, though abnormal, does not do harm to anyone else, we might defend him by saying that "since he is so constituted by nature that he does obtain pleasure from this activity, therefore, so long as he is not harming anyone else, it is rational enough for him to want to satisfy his natural desires."¹

As we shall see, the main difficulty about accepting this sense of "natural" as a criterion of rational action is that it seems to imply a deterministic view of human actions, and, to that extent, makes it difficult to talk of rational or irrational actions at all.

(d). The fourth sense of "natural" which is relevant in this context is "that which is original, untouched by man, as opposed to that which is artificial".

This definition of "natural" is as common, I think, as the first given above, and may, perhaps, be regarded as the basic definition. Certainly, the idea of "original" is involved in the other definitions we have listed. Thus many of the actions

1. Thus, homo-sexual activities between consenting adults are often defended along these lines. The propensity is abnormal, yet natural to the persons concerned; and their attempts to satisfy their desire can be defended as being both natural and rational.

which we regard as most normal are those whose motive force is to be found in some original propensity; more obviously still the concept of "original" is implied in the notions of an "innate moral sense" and of "that which is so constituted by nature". Nevertheless the idea of what is "original", considered by itself, is only indirectly employed as a criterion of rational conduct. As we have already noted it is the basic concept employed in the various philosophies of a popular nature which recommend "simple living", return to "nature", "free-expression" as a cure for man's ills and as therefore the rational course of action. And it is because these popular "philosophies" continue to have a considerable vogue that it is worthwhile summarising once again the difficulties involved in arguments based on the idea of what is "original".

We shall now deal with each of the above definitions of the "natural" in turn.

III.

7. The first criticism to be noted against the idea of what is "normal" or "common" considered as a criterion of rational action is not, perhaps, very important. It is made by Hume: "But nature may also be opposed to rare and unusual, and in this sense of the word, which is the common one, there may often arise disputes concerning what is natural or unnatural; and one may in general affirm, that we are not possess'd of any very precise standard, by which these disputes can be decided. Frequent and rare depend upon the number of examples we have observed; and as this number may gradually encrease or diminish, 'twill be impossible to fix any exact boundaries betwixt them. 1.

1. Op.cit., p.474.

It may seem as if a precise standard of measurement is not really required since, for most practical purposes, we know well enough what constitutes normal conduct and what does not. Certainly in the all important field of moral conduct there is usually a unanimity of opinion concerning actions which we describe as "unnatural". We may differ about all kinds of moral issues, but we agree in listing certain kinds of criminal acts or immoral acts as being abnormal or unnatural.

On the other hand there is some cogency in Hume's argument for it is true that we often take for granted that what is common to our own tribe or class or nation is common to all mankind, only to find on investigation that the habits of men may vary even in respect to matters which we regarded as fundamental. We cannot therefore assume that because a person does something which seems unnatural, that "shocks" our sensibilities, he is, in consequence to be regarded as insane, or as having acted, in this particular situation, in a thoroughly irrational fashion. It is possible that his action is based, say, on the same rational calculation of consequences which, at other times, and for other peoples, has established such an action as a social obligation.¹

While this point should not be pushed too far, it has to be kept always in mind. The emphasis on the "normal" in the sense of what is "statistically common or average" too easily leads to the substitution of merely conventional conduct as an ideal, and to the persecution of those who have tried to base

1. Two obvious examples are the practice of infanticide among the ancient Greeks, and the killing of the aged and infirm by the Esquimaux. Some kind of rational justification could be put forward ~~by~~ for both these practices.

their actions on principles derived from a thoughtful and objective study of human experience.

8. A more important criticism, mentioned briefly by both Hume and Sidgwick, is that we often praise the person who acts in an uncommon way. Thus we praise the person who "keeps his head" in a crisis when all the others have panicked - we say that he was the only one to act in a rational manner. And in general it might be asserted that there are many occasions on which it is only by doing the uncommon thing that we are able to achieve some end we desire or fulfill some obligation. Moreover, if we include beliefs under the heading of actions then again it is true to say that it is often the "uncommon" belief which happens to be the right one. Indeed this is so frequent an occurrence that we sometimes say, admittedly only half seriously, that the "majority are always wrong".

In answer to this criticism it might be said that in using the idea of the "normal" as a criterion of rational action we do not intend to imply that it is always rational to do what the majority of men would do in the same circumstances, or irrational to do what is uncommon, but rather that we intend to imply that a person acts irrationally when his action is motivated by a motive which the majority of men would not feel, either at all, or in the particular circumstances concerned. In other words the criterion refers to the reasons for the action rather than to what is done. From this point of view we can list three different kinds of unnatural or irrational actions:

(1).Where we are not moved by an emotion which would be felt by all normal men in the particular circumstances involved -particularly if the emotion in question is regarded as "instinctive", i.e. an innate feeling common to all men. Thus we regard it as unnatural or irrational for a soldier not to feel some fear on the eve of battle, or for a mother not to feel the emotion of love to her new-born child, and if this lack of the appropriate emotion affects the outward action then we say that the person has acted irrationally.

(2).Where we are moved by a desire which, though not immoral, is yet so bizarre that we find it difficult to believe that the person so moved is sane. We could also include in this category actions motivated by desires whose influence seems out of all proportion to the true worth of the end desired -where, in other words, we expend a disproportionate amount of time and energy on trivial objects.

(3).Where we are moved by motives which offend the moral sense of the majority of the community. These motives need not be desires; sometimes it is the nature of the moral obligations which people claim to be motivated by which "shock" our moral feelings.

9. When, however, we analyse the types of situation outlined above we find that the notion of what is "normal" again proves ineffective as a criterion of rationality, and that in reality the actual criteria used are to be found in some of the other principles which we are to discuss later. To take each of the three

classes in turn:

(1). Here we note first that there are some "instinctive" feelings (e.g. jealousy, anger) which are felt by all men but which in some circumstances we feel ashamed of being moved by, even though we excuse ourselves by saying that it is only "natural" to experience them. Jealousy and envy are universal feelings that most of us would rather not experience, and we think a man to be particularly noble if he either does not experience such emotions or else struggles to avoid their affecting his actions. And in general we think it rational to try to defend ourselves against the influence of such feelings.

Secondly, in some cases where we do not seem to experience the natural emotion (i.e. that felt by the majority of men) the reason is to be found, not in the fact that we have unnatural feelings but rather that we have not judged the facts of the situation rightly. Thus a man may not experience fear simply because he does not realise that there is anything to fear, and in so far as his conduct is to be considered irrational on this score then the operative criterion is the "principle of accordance with the facts."

Thirdly, in so far as we do really seem to lack some natural feeling (e.g. the feeling of mother-love) then this point is not relevant to the question of rational action, for the experiencing or not experiencing of a particular feeling is something which is beyond our control and therefore can only be regarded as behaviour and not as action proper. The question of rationality only enters in if we allow our actions to be influenced by the feeling or absence of feeling, and of course it is by

no means inevitable that we would allow our actions to be so influenced. If we do, however, the test of the rationality or otherwise of our conduct would in fact be judged, not by reference to what is normal - though this might be the criterion used at a first, superficial level - but by the criterion of happiness; or, if moral issues are involved, by whatever criterion it is that we use for determining "rightness". Thus a person may be abnormal in that he has no sexual feelings but we would scarcely say that he was acting irrationally if he took no interest in members of the opposite sex. Indeed, using the criterion of happiness, we should criticise him for acting irrationally if, in spite of his abnormality, he decided to get married. If, on the other hand, the absence of the appropriate feeling resulted in conduct which we regarded as blameworthy (e.g. if a mother neglected her children) it is doubtful whether we would use the criterion of the "normal" in judging the wrongness of her actions. Certainly we would say that the mother's actions were unnatural, but if we were asked to say why we regarded her actions as wrong we should either appeal to the idea of the "natural", defined as "what is based on innate moral sense" or else refer to some such principle as the obligation to protect the helpless. We shall return to this point shortly, when we deal with the third class of unnatural actions.

(2) We do not need to say very much about this class of actions. There is first of all the difficulty of deciding what kind of desires really do come into the category of eccentric and

bizarre. Secondly, it is difficult to argue that a person is acting irrationally if he obtains pleasure from some activity, however strange, that is not in any sense morally vicious. We might of course argue that he would get more pleasure if he pursued some more normal interest, but even if this were true, the criterion used here would not be that of normality but rather of "the greatest good". What, one imagines, is the source of much of the criticism of eccentric activities is the moral conviction that people should not indulge in them when there are more "noble" pleasures available. Thus we feel that the American business man who spends all his spare time with toy trains ought to be reading Shakespeare instead, or attending concerts of classical music.

(3). In respect to those actions which, as well as being abnormal, are grossly wrong from a moral point of view it does seem clear enough that, overtly at least, the criterion of what is normal or common is not used either as a method of discovering what is right or as a criterion of rightness. When we say that it is wrong for a person to kill children for pleasure we do not mean by the term "wrong", "that which the vast majority morally disapprove of" - though in fact this would be the case - we mean that it is self-evidently wrong, that we intuitively know it to be wrong. Even when we use the term "unnatural" to describe the action it is doubtful whether this term is used in the sense of "uncommon" - or, at least, this would not be its primary meaning. We are more likely to mean by it "that which offends our moral sense".

That the notion of what is common does not play a direct part in determining what we consider to be right or wrong is shown by the fact that we do not give up our moral beliefs simply because we discover that a majority of people disagree with us. Conversely, the fact that a very large number of people hold some moral belief is not considered to be, in itself, a sufficient reason for our accepting it as true.

10. It seems then that the concept of what is common or normal cannot be used directly as a criterion of rational action. This is not to say, however, that these notions do not play an important part, albeit an indirect part, in determining what we consider to be rational conduct. For one thing it is obvious enough that we are very greatly influenced, especially on questions of taste and morals, by the prevailing opinions of the society in which we live, so that our ideas of what is rational or irrational will usually follow closely the trend of majority opinion.

More importantly, in considering the question of our own happiness it is often relevant to take into account what is the normal in customs, beliefs, manners etc. Being "out of step" is never very pleasant, and except where moral considerations make

(it necessary for one

to nonconform, it is usually considered to be rational for one to try to conform to the customs of whatever community one happens to be living in.

Then, too, it is often essential for the purposes of formulating policies to find out what the majority opinion is, or what the average capabilities of a certain section of the community is, and so on. Politicians, psychologists, economists etc., all need reliable statistical evidence as to what is "normal" if their theories and policies are to be rationally based; and though, in such cases, the true criterion of rationality is the principle of "accordance with the facts", yet the principle of what is common¹ plays an indirect part in the determination of what is rational.

Finally, in those fields where there is claimed to be objective standards of valuation, the fact of our differing from the majority, or the fact of there being considerable differences of opinion among those most qualified to know is bound to seem of considerable importance. Thus it is assumed by common sense that² there are objective standards of right and wrong, and whatever else this may be taken to mean, it at least means that all normal men would agree on moral questions provided all questions of fact and definition were settled and the influence of self-interest, prejudice

1. In this connection we should note that psychologists and sociologists often confuse what is statistically normal with what is morally normal (i.e. according to moral standards). They make "what is" synonymous with "what ought to be." Thus the famous Kinsey report, having proved statistically that the majority of Americans did not "live up to" the official code of sexual morality, drew the conclusion that this official code must therefore be wrong.

2. See later (ps. 239 ff.) for discussion of this point.

and non-moral feelings known and countered. This being so it is bound to be a matter of some concern if we find that our moral views in some matter are not shared by those whom we have reason to respect as being sound guides in the field of morals, and awareness of such disagreements is often a main factor in prompting us to re-examine our own position. In the same way, evidence as to important differences in moral beliefs between peoples of different races and creeds forces us to examine the foundations of our own moral code, and to try to find some way in which these apparent differences in moral sensibilities can be explained and reconciled. To say this is not, however, to argue that majority opinion or even complete unanimity is the criterion by which we decide questions of valuation. We recognise the fact that it is possible for everybody to be wrong. What we do assert however is that it ought to be possible to obtain agreement on questions of morals, and that where there is considerable agreement on any moral question there is a strong *prima facie* case for thinking that this is the right view.

Whether, of course, there are objective standards in matters of valuation, and why we should think it necessary to presuppose that there are - these are questions which we cannot discuss here. We are only concerned at this point to emphasise the fact that, given this presupposition, the concept of the natural, in the sense of "what is normal," is bound to play a part in our judgment as to what constitutes rational action.

IV.

11. The second of our definitions of "natural", viz, that which is based on an innate moral sense" is applicable, as a criterion of rationality, only to a very small class of actions - those which are so terrible, so "unnatural", that they "shock" our moral sensibilities. We do not say that a person acts "unnaturally" or irrationally when he breaks the moral code or does something which we think of as particularly blameworthy - indeed we regard moral failure as only too natural, and sometimes are tempted to defend wrong-doing as rational on the grounds that our own interests are served by this or that act of wrong-doing - it is only when he does something or acts from a motive which we cannot imagine any normal person being influenced by that we say his act is irrational. We say of such a person that he must lack a normal "moral sense".

12. The assumption underlying this use of the term "natural" is that all normal human beings possess some kind of moral faculty by means of which they intuitively grasp the truth of certain fundamental moral axioms.^{1.} Thus we might say that it is self-evident to all normal human beings that it is wrong to inflict pain for the mere pleasure of doing so. And if a person could not "see" the truth of this axiom we should regard it as futile to argue with him about moral questions, just as we should not waste time trying to teach a child mathematics if he could not grasp that $1 + 1 = 2$.

1. I think it is true to say that the ordinary man thinks of this faculty as a moral "sense", though he does sometimes describe it as "reason". See later (p245ff.) for discussion of this point.

13. In criticising this use of the concept of "natural" as a criterion of rational action we should note, first, that it is easy to confuse two propositions: (a) that a person is irrational or insane if he does these unnatural actions; (b) that a person acts irrationally if he does these unnatural actions. Only the first of these propositions is, I think, properly implied when we talk of a person committing, say, an "unnatural" crime, for it does seem to be the case that where a person does some "unnatural" action we usually describe the action in such terms that the question of his responsibility for the action is left very much in doubt. Either we imply that the person "lacks" a normal moral sense, or is without any moral sense at all; or else we argue that though he knew the action was wrong, he was unable to control his desires. What we find difficult to accept is the contention that he knew he was doing wrong, was able to control his emotions, and yet still decided deliberately to do the action; yet it is only on this latter assumption that we can properly talk of his acting irrationally (using the concept of the "unnatural" as the criterion).

14. But even if we could accept the feasibility of this latter state of affairs arising, this criterion of rationality could be criticised on the further ground of "vagueness". We have already noted that we tend to include in the class of "unnatural" actions not only actions which are considered to be right by "normal" men of other races and creeds, but also actions which, on more thorough inspection, we might come to accept as being right when judged, say, on some such criterion as the utilitarian

principle. In other words, however we describe and interpret the moral faculty, one thing at least is clear about it, and that is that its judgments can be easily influenced by all kinds of non-moral factors. Indeed, as we all know, one of the strongest arguments against the assumption that there is such a faculty is based on this observation; it is argued that what we call the "moral sense" is simply a convenient name for the feelings we experience as a result of the impact of the combined forces of social pressures and inherent temperamental and emotional factors. However that may be, it is not to be doubted that the ordinary man assumes too easily that any person doing an action which shocks his moral sense must necessarily be abnormal or warped in his moral sensibilities.¹

15. It is within the context of some kind of religious interpretation of reality that the strongest case for the existence of a "moral sense" can be made. Similarly it is more easy to defend the various "natural law" theories, or to defend the proposition that a man best serves his own interests by obeying the judgments of "natural law", if we first accept the proposition that this law and the moral sense which intuit it is the creation of a God whose concern it is that the righteous should be rewarded and the wicked punished. Even outside this context, however,

1. For example, people in the West have been shocked to hear reports that in Communist countries young people have been encouraged to inform against even their parents for anti-communist activities. Yet, unless we are prepared to argue that family loyalties take precedence over all others, we cannot condemn such conduct out of hand. Christians, in particular, who have been instructed that they must "hate" their parents for the sake of the kingdom of God, should have some appreciation of the issues involved, even though deploring the aims of the Communists and their deliberate fostering of an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred.

we could argue, on empirical grounds, that all men have a moral sense in that they are capable of the experience which we call "being under an obligation". We are probably justified, moreover, in stating that if a person seems to be incapable of understanding what is meant by terms like "right", "wrong", "moral obligation" then he is insane.¹ What is much more difficult to prove is that this moral faculty gives us certain knowledge of the content of morality. But it is this proposition which requires to be granted if we are to have any success in defending the use of the "natural" ("that which is based on the moral sense"). If a person lacks a moral sense then we cannot properly describe his actions as rational or irrational since he cannot be held to be responsible for anything he does. If, however, he does have some appreciation of what it means to be under a moral obligation to do something then we cannot take it for granted that he is acting "unnaturally" in the sense of "contrary to the moral sense" if he does something which shocks us. It is always possible that what he is doing has the approval of his conscience.

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1. When we describe a person as insane because he does something which indicates that he is lacking in any appreciation of moral concepts we tend to use the expressions, "he lacks a moral sense" and, "he lacks reason" more or less interchangeably. One possible justification for this rather loose use of the term "reason" is that it appears to be the case that those who seem to lack a moral sense are usually found to be of very low intelligence. Of course persons of good intelligence may have "abnormal" desires which they are unable to control; it is also possible for a person of good intelligence to have what seems to others to be very odd notions of right and wrong. Common sense often assumes that people who come into these latter categories are lacking in a moral sense.

V.

16. The use of the concept of "natural" in the sense of "that which is so constituted by nature"(or by the environment), as a criterion of rational action is open to such obvious objections that we can consider it very briefly.

As we have stated before it is applied in those situations where we seek to defend someone against the charge of immoral or foolish conduct by emphasising not so much what he has done or his reasons for so acting but rather the relationship between what was done and the constitutional and environmental factors which influenced the decision. Now if we imply, in using such a criterion, that the decision was the inevitable product of those influences (i.e. that the action was natural in the same sense as the falling of the ripe apple to the ground is natural) then we can assert that it is used improperly, for in a case like this the question of rational or irrational conduct would be irrelevant. The person could not be held responsible for his action. On the other hand what we might be implying is that these factors made it difficult for him to act other^{wise} than he did, and that this ought to be taken into account in our judgment as to the rationality or otherwise of his action. The reference, in this case, however, is not so much to the rationality of the person's action, but rather to the rationality of our judgment as to ^{the} status of that action; what is being asserted is that we cannot make a proper judgment until we know the full facts of the person's hereditary "make-up" and his general social background. So far as the person himself is concerned, only he could possibly know whether he

could have acted other than he did. If, in his opinion, he could have overcome the constitutional and environmental handicaps, then his action, being a responsible one, would have to be judged according to some other criterion than the one we are discussing here, for the question of the influence of these factors would then be irrelevant, though they would not be irrelevant if we were concerned not with the rationality of the action but with the question of the attribution of praise and blame. We might, for instance, praise someone for making a great effort to overcome great odds even though his action was in fact an irrational one.

17. Sometimes, when we use the term "natural" in the sense in which we are discussing it here, we seem to be referring not so much to the fact that the action is determined by prior conditions but rather to the fact that it is natural for a person to want to try to satisfy desires which he cannot help feeling. This kind of defence is often used in reference to actions which, though regarded as unnatural by a large section of the population, yet do not obviously cause harm to those who voluntarily participate in them - e.g. the sexual activities of a homo-sexual.

In this matter however two propositions tend to be confused. On the one hand we may mean that it is natural, in the sense of inevitable, for a person to want to satisfy any desire which happens to move him, and on the other we may mean that the desire is of such a nature that the person who experiences it will naturally (i.e. inevitably) try to satisfy it - that his actions, in other words, will be completely determined by the

desire. On the latter interpretation we would be dealing with
 behaviour and not with action so that the question of rationality
 does not arise; on the former interpretation it would be relevant
 to ask whether it is rational for the person to seek to satisfy
 the desire which he cannot help feeling, but the criterion employed
 would not in this case be the criterion of the "natural", as
 defined in this section. We might say that it is rational for him
 to try to satisfy his desire because it will help him to achieve
 happiness, or we might say that it is not rational because it will
 do him spiritual harm "in the long run", or will spoil the
 happiness of others; or again we might argue that it is rational
 for him to try to satisfy the desire because it is always harmful
 to repress a natural (i.e. original) propensity. But it would not
 make sense to say that it is rational to attempt to satisfy the
 desire because it is natural (i.e. inevitable, in view of his
 constitutional "make-up") for him to want to satisfy it. This seems
 so obvious as to be not worth mentioning, but it is characteristic
 of the confusions which arise whenever the concept of the "natural"
 is employed that simple logical errors of this kind are often
 overlooked. Thus when apologists of the "no repression" school of
 thought defend their theories by invoking the authority of the
 "natural" it is not always clear whether they are asserting that
 there is something intrinsically valuable in what is "original"
 which we ignore to our cost, or whether they are asserting that
 it is impossible to rebel against natural instincts and emotions
 - that they will inevitably determine our behaviour, either consciously
 or unconsciously.

VI.

18. This last point brings us to our last definition of "natural", viz., "that which is original and uncultivated as distinct from that which is artificial". This sense of the "natural" is employed, as we have already noted, as an indirect criterion of rationality inasmuch as it is claimed that if we live "according to nature" or if we allow our "original" nature to express itself, unhindered by the conventions and restrictions which have been artificially built up round us, then our chances of happiness will be considerably increased.

This belief in the therapeutic value of the "natural" is very widespread and has taken shape in a variety of popular "philosophies". Though the advocates of the "natural way of life" are often sceptics in religion one suspects that one of the main influences behind the current "naturalisms" has been the Christian belief in the world as God's creation.¹ "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good". It is only by assuming some such influence, albeit an unconscious influence in many cases, that one can explain the very common belief that what is "original", untouched by man is, qua original, good. Of course, the defenders of theories of the "natural way of life" also try to prove on empirical grounds that theirs is the true way to health, or vitality, or happiness as the case may be, but I think it is true to say that it is very rare for these theories to be founded on carefully sifted evidence.

19. The criticisms which can be brought against this

1. See Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics, p68.

criterion of "the original" are well known and need only be summarised here. First, there is the difficulty of distinguishing between what is original and what is non-original. Not only has man's whole way of life been built up by means of his ability to "interfere" with the processes of nature, but the development of man himself has undoubtedly been affected by his capacity for reflection and for conscious control of his behaviour. Thus the instinctive apparatus which characterises the lower animals has degenerated in man as the power of reason has increased, and it is now doubted by some psychologists whether man now has any instincts in the strict sense of the term. And just as it is now difficult to tell what is original and what is the product of "interference" so far as the nature of man is concerned, so, in respect to almost all the products which are of the greatest importance to man, it is impossible to separate the original from the artificial. What, for instance, is a "natural" food? All the food products we eat today - or almost all - are the result of thousands of years of "artificial" cultivation.

Secondly, if it is right that we should be allowed to express our natural desires without let or hindrance, then are we to allow a person whose original nature is abnormal to express his own nature freely? And if we introduce the qualification that we should be allowed to express our natures freely so long as we do not interfere with the rights of others, does not this in effect destroy the whole case of the naturalists?

Thirdly, if the theories of the naturalists are carried

to their logical conclusion they lead to absurd consequences. Thus the educationalist who argues that the young child should be allowed to express his "natural instincts freely" should, if he is consistent, allow parents to express their "natural instincts" freely when their children are thoroughly exasperating. It is as natural for parents to want to train their children in the way of life they think desirable, as it is for children to resent any restriction on their freedom to do as they please. But to admit this point would be to reduce the more extreme forms of "new education" theory to absurdity.

Fourth, it would be very difficult, even if we could discriminate between the original and the artificial with some precision, to prove that "the natural way of life" is the best way for all men. No doubt a very good case could be made for the proposition that we would all be happier and more virtuous if we led a quieter, more simple and physically vigorous life than the conditions of modern city life permit. But it would be difficult to prove that all men would benefit from the kind of life advocated by Thoreau, or that in general the more "natural" life of the country produces a finer type of man than the "artificial" life of the city.

Fifth, even for those who base their faith in the "natural" on a religious faith, there are many difficulties to overcome. Thus the Christian has to explain why, if God created all things good, so many things about the universe, over which man has no control, seem to be evil - earthquakes, strife among animals etc. Moreover, if he accepts the doctrine of original sin, then he would have to

take the view that the "natural man" was inherently evil, and that the only way to "save one's soul" was by curbing the natural appetites and by destroying the influence of man's natural pride.

30. What all this amounts to then is that the idea of what is "original" is in itself of no use either in determining what we ought to do or what is for our own happiness. It may, of course, be sometimes true, as a matter of fact, that our happiness lies in being guided by the idea of the "original" (e.g. we may find that we can only maintain our health by concentrating on the so-called more "natural" foods) but each case would have to be decided on its own merits, and the criteria employed would have nothing to do with the concept of the natural in any sense of the term.

VII.

To sum up:-The criterion of the "natural", though used by common sense as a criterion of rational action, is not adequate for that purpose. Apart from the general defect of its ambiguity, we found that, on any of the specific interpretations of the concept, we were unable to get a criterion which proved effective in distinguishing between rational and irrational conduct. In many cases where the criterion was used it was found that it was applied to behaviouristic responses rather than to actions proper, and in those instances where it was employed in describing actions, properly so called, it seemed very often to be the case that one of the other criteria of rationality would have been more effective.

C H A P T E R I I I .T H E C R I T E R I O N o f A C C O R D A N C E
W I T H T H E F A C T S .I .

1. In ordinary speech we often say that a person is acting irrationally if he doesn't base his decisions on the facts or doesn't act according to the facts. It is with this interpretation of rational action that we are concerned here, and for convenience we have named the criterion used in this connection the principle of "accordance with the facts".

What do we mean when we say that it is rational to act in "accordance with the facts"? Or, to put it in the more common negative form: what do we mean when we say that a person acts irrationally if he does not act in "accordance with the facts"? The first point to note is that we do not mean that our action is necessarily irrational if it proves to have been founded on a false judgment as to the facts. Mistakes as to the facts can be, as we say, reasonable mistakes, due to unavoidable ignorance, chance errors etc., and no charge of irrational conduct is levelled at us unless it is thought that we could have avoided the mistakes. In other words we only use the principle of "accordance with the facts" in those cases where we think that the person concerned has ignored the facts, or in some way acted "against them".

2. A second point to note is that this principle should not be interpreted to mean that we act irrationally if we

refuse to accept the facts "passively" but try to modify them to suit our own convenience. Sometimes, of course, it is necessary to accept facts "passively" and it is certainly a characteristic of a mature, rational person that he is quick to appreciate and accept brute facts¹ which cannot be altered, or which could only be modified at too great a cost. But it is equally characteristic of man, as a rational being, that he tries, wherever possible, to modify and control the facts so that he may the better achieve his ends. There is, however, no inconsistency in saying, on the one hand, that in order to act rationally we must act in accordance with the facts and on the other, that it is often rational (i.e. practicable, and in our interests) to try to modify them; for, of course, it is obvious enough that the possibility of our controlling or modifying facts is dependent on our first accepting and understanding them as they are in the complex of their relationships with other facts.

3. It is not possible, I think, to give a concise and explicit definition of the expression "accordance with the facts" when we use it as a criterion of rational action; we can only summarise the types of situation in which it is so employed. Thus we say a person is acting irrationally:

(a) When he does not examine the relevant facts carefully before coming to a decision; or does not re-examine them when he

¹We may define a "brute fact" as one which we cannot see any possibility of modifying. This is not, however, to suggest that it cannot be modified. Many so-called brute facts have proved to be vulnerable to man's attacks. One of the most difficult practical problems concerning rational conduct is the problem of knowing how much time and energy should be spent in trying to modify facts which seem completely "invulnerable."

has reason to suspect that he has based his action on a false judgment as to the facts.

Thus sometimes we make "spot" decisions without having made any real attempt to examine the relevant factors. All of us seem to be capable of sudden, irresponsible decisions of this kind, and often in connection with very important matters. When the decision happens to have been the right one we usually dignify it by the name of "intuition". Then, again, we sometimes try to avoid re-examining the facts because, having made up our minds as to what we ought to do or believe, we do not want this first decision upset. We have formed a vested interest in it.

(b) When he allows subjective factors to influence him in his judgments of the facts.

By the expression "subjective factors" we refer to the influence of desires and prejudices (i.e. beliefs which we have accepted on hearsay or by indoctrination, the evidence for which we have not ourselves attempted to evaluate or even ascertain¹).

Thus it would not be considered a sufficient reason for accepting the proposition "God exists" that we find such a belief comforting; nor would we consider it good enough to act on the assumption that all black men are inferior in intelligence to white men if the only grounds for the belief were that it was held to be true by the majority of white people in the community.

1. It is extraordinarily difficult to get a satisfactory definition of "prejudice". The dictionary definition is a very bad one ("pre-conceived notion") inasmuch as preconceived notions play an important part in all knowledge. Moreover, as we shall see later, there is a sense in which it is often rational to allow desires to influence us in our judgments of the facts.

This particular interpretation of the principle of "accordance with the facts" gives rise to certain difficulties which we shall discuss later. The difficulties arise from the fact that though common sense thinks of the "factual" as something existing quite independently of the observer it is a common place of philosophical thought that our experience of the world of the factual is relative not only to the kind of sense organs we possess but also to certain presuppositions by means of which we order and interpret the data of sense. Some of these presuppositions seem to be common to all men -we cannot but think in terms of them -but others again, though apparently universal, seem, as it were, to have a history, and to be the product of a complex of conditions which may pass away. It may even be possible to show that some of these "presuppositions of thought" are pragmatic instruments only, which have been fashioned so that we might the more easily control the world in the interests of our desires.

If this be so then it is obvious that the question of the irrationality of allowing subjective factors to influence our judgments of the facts is a very complicated one in which we might find it very difficult to draw a clear distinction between subjective factors which are justified and those which are not.

(c). When he admits that certain things are the case, and then proceeds to act as though they were not the case. He says one thing and does another. In theory he accepts X to be true, but in practice acts as though Y were true.

I suppose it is true to say that when we talk of someone not acting in accordance with the facts we have in mind some such situation as this where a person knows what the facts are but ignores them or deliberately acts contrary to them when it comes to a practical decision. Thus the student knows that he cannot pass his examination unless ^{he} does a certain amount of study, yet he continues to waste time in various amusements. Sometimes we express such a conflict as a conflict between theory and practice or between belief and practice, but this manner of describing it, and indeed the actual statement of the principle given above under (c), tends to confuse two kinds of irrational conduct: those in which the criterion applied is that of "accordance with the facts" and those in which the relevant criterion is that of "consistency". It is therefore necessary for us to be more precise in our statement of what we mean when we talk of someone acting "against the facts".

The principle of consistency is relevant only in those cases where our acting "irrationally" in some sense involves the acceptance of propositions as being true which are really contrary. In the practical field, or rather in that aspect of the practical sphere in which we are concerned with the relation between theory and practice, precept and example, the application of the principle of consistency can be illustrated by examples of this type:

(a) A person accepts as true the proposition that human actions are completely determined; in some of his actions, however,

(say, when dealing with the misdemeanours of his older children) it is clear that there is an implied belief in freewill -i.e. he does not adopt the freewill position for pragmatic reasons; at the time of action he really accepts it as true.

(b). A person accepts a certain rule of action (e.g. never to treat negroes as "equal"). But in circumstances where the rule is applicable he acts towards a negro in a way that clearly implies a belief in his "equality"¹.

Where, however, we act against the facts or ignore them it is not a case of accepting as true propositions which are contrary, or of believing one thing to be true in theory and another thing to be true when we act. The position is that we know perfectly well what the facts of the case are, but we refuse to be "bound" by them. We say, "I know that X is the case, but for this or that reason I intend to act as though it were not the case."

It might be said here that in so far as we do not act on the belief that X is the case we must of necessity act on the assumption that some other belief contrary to X is true, and that therefore we are being inconsistent. This criticism however confuses two things: an action based on a belief or which implies a belief which is accepted as being indeed true; and an action which is based on a proposition which is accepted as true for pragmatic reasons only, which has, in other words, an "as if" status only.

In a case like this it would only be possible to bring

1. For a more detailed description of the application of the principle of consistency, see later. (p. 109 ff.).

the charge of inconsistency if, in making the statement that the proposition X gave a true description of the facts, we added, as a rule of action, the proposition that one ought always to be bound by the facts -and then proceeded to ignore this rule when it came to the point. So long as we do not make or imply this further statement then we cannot be charged with being inconsistent if we deliberately decide to act as if the facts are different from what we know them to be -though, of course, we can be criticised for acting irrationally in that we have not acted "in accordance with the facts".

4. This distinction between irrational actions in which the principle of consistency is the operative criterion and those in which the principle of "accordance with the facts" is the criterion is not always easy to draw in practice. Several factors tend to confuse the issue. In the first place, the two criteria tend to support each other, the one prompting the other into action. Thus it is often as a result of our noticing an inconsistency between two propositions that we come to realise that one of the propositions is false; on the other hand, the realisation that some proposition is false may force us to break up a whole system of theory which we had been building up. In the theoretical field in particular the two principles really dovetail into each other.

Secondly, what confuses the issue still further is that there are some cases in which our practice is at variance with what we profess to believe but in which neither of these two

principles can be applied. Thus in some cases we might find it impossible to act according to the facts or according to the principle of action we have formulated because of external or psychological difficulties which we cannot overcome. In other cases, again, our failure to act in accordance with the facts or to conform to the principle of consistency might be due to some weakness of character. We do not assert that it was impossible for us to conform to these principles; nor do we assert that we were deliberately flouting them - we merely say that we lacked the "will power" to do as we knew we ought to do. In such cases we might well say that we acted irrationally, but in so far as we were not trying to act deliberately against these principles then it might be better to use some other descriptive term.

5. The difficulty which we have in distinguishing between the situations in which the principle of consistency is the proper criterion of rationality, and those in which the principle of accordance with the facts is the proper criterion can be illustrated by taking several examples of apparently irrational actions where it would seem that either principle would be relevant. These examples, moreover, have the merit of being of some interest in themselves.

(1). Sometimes we are moved to action by feelings which we know to be irrational in that we do not believe that the

object or objects of the feelings are "real". Nevertheless we cannot seem to avoid being influenced by the feelings. Thus, for example, we may not believe in ghosts, yet when we are left alone in a house reputed to be haunted we begin to feel frightened and find ourselves taking precautions and in general acting as though ghosts were "real".

In a case like this can we be said to act irrationally, and if so what is the criterion used?

We could argue that the actions are involuntary; that we are completely determined by "feelings" which we cannot help experiencing. In this case the question of rational or irrational conduct would not be relevant.

Or, again, we might describe the position by saying that whereas the feeling of "fear" is involuntarily experienced, yet it is possible for us to overcome this feeling and to refuse to allow it to influence our actions. In giving in to the feeling of fear we are acting irrationally in that we are not acting in accordance with the facts as we understand them.

Thirdly, we may accept the analysis given immediately above, but assert that nevertheless we cannot really be said to act irrationally. We are not deliberately refusing to conform our actions to the facts; we are simply unable to do as we ought because of cowardice or lack of will power and so on..

Fourth, the argument may be that the feeling it self is accompanied by or prompted by a judgment, namely, that there are ghosts, and that therefore the irrationality consists in our

being inconsistent -in our holding one thing to be true at one time, and the contradictory to be true at another time.

Which of these is the correct interpretation would depend partly on how we analyse the difficult psychological questions involved, partly on the particular angle from which we view the person's behaviour. If we emphasise the emotional tension then we may decide to call the action an involuntary one; if we view the action in the whole context of the person's beliefs then we might argue that he was being inconsistent; if we think only of the belief, or "half-belief" which forms under the influence of the surroundings then we could argue that the irrationality consisted in accepting something as true on very slender evidence. It would, however, be difficult to defend the view that ^{we} acted against the facts in the sense of deliberately acting as though what we believed to be true was not true.

(2). The above illustration may be regarded, perhaps, as a particular example of the kind of situation in which, as we put it, we are intellectually convinced that something is, or is not the case, but not convinced "at heart". In the above case, the bias was in favour of the intellect -or, rather, there was no general predisposition to suspect the findings of reason -but particular circumstances brought to the surface an emotional fear that ghosts might really exist after all. There are other cases, however, in which we find it very difficult really to accept and to act on propositions which we know, intellectually, to be true

Against the evidence we go on half hoping, half believing that the facts are otherwise. We do not actually refuse to accept the facts, nor do we deliberately refuse to act upon them; nor are we carried away by strong emotions to act on contrary assumptions as in the case described above. What happens is that we tend to act from time to time on assumptions which could only be valid if the belief or beliefs which we have accepted as true intellectually were really false; or else we conveniently overlook¹ obvious implications of these beliefs.

In cases like these we could argue either that we are being inconsistent, in that we accept one proposition as true in theory and a contrary proposition as true in practice; or else we could claim that we are really, by implication, refusing to accept as true what we know to be true. However, as we noted in the example given above, we could not strictly say that we are deliberately acting against the facts.

1. Thus the existentialists (of the non-religious school) make a point of emphasising that modern man has not really faced up to the implications of believing that God does not exist. He still tends to live on assumptions carried over from the Christian era, and has not tackled the problem of living in a universe without meaning.

In this connection it is interesting to note that one other form which irrational conduct of the kind described above takes is: the enjoyment of emotions which, intellectually, we know to be inappropriate in that we do not think they have any object. Thus the republican finds himself enjoying the Coronation, not merely because of the colour and general spectacle but also because, for a moment, he shares the sense of awe and of spiritual unity which, in a cooler moment, he might despise as meaningless or assert to belong to the worship of God alone.

It is sometimes contended by defenders of religion that we cannot experience an emotion which has no object; and that, therefore, since all men have at some time experienced a sense of the "holy" there must be some object to which the emotion is

6. Discussion of these rather complex cases raises a point, dealt with by Hume in the section on the "Influencing motives of the will" (Bk. II, Treatise) viz., whether we can properly talk of irrational or unreasonable feelings (or passions, as he called them). As we know, Hume's point here is that truth and falsity, self consistency and self contradiction can be predicated of propositions only; that passions, being "original existents" can neither be true nor false, reasonable or unreasonable. It is only in so far as they are accompanied by judgments that we can call them reasonable or unreasonable, and then, as Hume points out, it is the judgment, properly speaking, which is reasonable or unreasonable.

In general Hume's point seems to be clear enough but, as the above discussion shows, there do seem to be cases in which it is the feelings and emotions which are irrational rather than the accompanying judgments. We find that we experience feelings or are moved to action by feelings which we know to be inappropriate in that they "imply" a state of affairs which we know does not exist. Our intellectual judgments are overthrown by our feelings.

This seems to be a common enough experience; the point is whether, in situations of this kind, we really can speak of "irrational feelings". Various interpretations and explanations can be put forward, none of which, I think justify us in thinking that we have here an exception to Hume's rule, though they do

referred. This argument, however, rests on a very simple confusion, viz., between the proposition that every emotion has an object, and the proposition that it is always clear what the object of an emotion is. Thus it is true that most of us experience at times, say, in the presence of grand scenery, an emotion of awe and majesty, but it is by no means clear that this is a religious emotion, though it may feel the same as the experience of the mystic.

indicate that the psychological problems involved are more complex than Hume thought.

First, we may argue that these irrational feelings are always caused by irrational judgments: that, for instance, our fear of ghosts in the reputedly haunted house is caused by the fact that (perhaps subconsciously) we really do believe that there are such beings. This belief is brought to the surface by the particular circumstances.

Second, we may argue that certain emotional states of mind can cause us to form an irrational belief or cause us to "see" the facts differently so that a false judgment results. The emotional state of mind may itself be the effect of a true judgment, but once it is experienced it upsets us so that we become incapable of making further correct judgments. Thus, when placed in a lonely house we may experience a reasonable enough fear of burglars, but this fear gets a "hold" on us and we find ourselves beginning to think of ghosts. In a case like this we should not really say that the feeling is irrational, but rather that it causes us to make an irrational judgment.

Finally - and this may seem to come nearest to the position that there are, in fact, irrational feelings - it might be said that in some cases the feeling and the judgment are contemporaneous - that, in a sense, the feeling is the judgment. We think with or through our emotions.

This interpretation of the situation does not, however, affect Hume's general point, viz. that the terms rational and irrational can, strictly speaking, be applied only to propositions

for it states quite definitely that a judgment is implied in the feeling. The only point at issue would be the psychological one whether the judgment must always precede the emotion or whether we can, in some sense, talk of the emotion being the judgment.

The main point which Hume seemed to overlook -and this is mentioned in the second interpretation above -is that, though feelings may not in themselves be irrational, they can be the cause of or give rise to irrational judgments. And, psychologically, the two may be so contemporaneous -i.e. the feeling and the following judgment -that, for all practical purposes we may talk of the feeling being irrational.

7. We have now summarised briefly the main ways in which the principle of "accordance with the facts" is used as a criterion of rational action, and we can reiterate our main points by saying that there is a *prima facie* case for contending that a person has acted irrationally if he, (a) does not examine the relevant facts before coming to a decision, (b) is influenced in his judgments of the facts by subjective factors, (c) acts as if certain judgments which he knows to be true are not true.

It is now necessary to say something about the term "facts". The point I wish to make here is that in ordinary speech the term "facts" tends to be used as a synonym for "truth", so that

when we make statements such as "one's actions ought to be based on the facts" we tend to mean by "fact" something more than what is often implied by the expression, "matters of fact"; in other words we refer not only to propositions about sensory facts, but to any proposition at all stating that something is or is not the case. This being so we find that the number of ways in which we can act irrationally, judged by this criterion, is greater than is suggested, say, by Hume, when, in a well known passage he writes:

"---tis only in two senses that any affection can be called unreasonable. First, when a passion such as hope or fear, grief or joy despair or security is founded on the supposition of the existence of objects which really do not exist. Secondly, when in exerting any passion in action, we choose means insufficient for the designed end, and deceive ourselves in our judgment of causes and effects.¹

In saying, then, that our actions are not based on the facts we may mean any one of the following things:

(1) That they are based on false propositions as to the existence of some object or objects.

(2) That they are based on false propositions as to the existence of certain qualities in an object, or as to the lack of certain qualities in an object.

It is important to note here that, from a common sense point of view, this would include statements about the existence of certain aesthetic or moral qualities in an object or in a state of affairs. Thus the statement, "Salzburgh is the most beautiful town in Austria" would be regarded as stating a fact about

Salzburgh which may or may not be true. Similarly, if we acted in a certain situation on the assumption that Jones was a good man, and then discovered that we had been mistaken, we might easily say we had been mistaken as to the facts.^{1.}

(3) That they are based on false propositions as to the occurrence of events.

It is odd that Hume did not mention specifically propositions of this kind for, *prima facie*, there does seem to be a clear distinction between propositions about the nature and existence of objects and propositions about the occurrence of events. Certainly, for practical purposes it is important to distinguish between the two as many actions are based, not on the supposed existence of an object, but rather on the supposed occurrence of an event (e.g. a Christian might base his faith on the supposed resurrection of Jesus from the grave).

(4). That they are based on false propositions as to the relations between objects.

The most important of these relations is, of course, the causal relation, but false propositions as to other relations may lead to irrational actions too.

Under this heading can be included the relationship of means-ends, a relation which is of great importance in any

1. This is not to say, of course, that "value-facts" are just the same as other facts. But though, for example, beauty is not a property of an object in the same sense as "redness" is, we can say, I think, of any object that it has some properties such that, when we observe the object, the experience of beauty is aroused in us. The difficulty, of course, is to state what these properties are.

discussion of rational action.

(5). That they are based on false propositions as to the names and definitions of things.

It is usual to differentiate between propositions stating matters of fact and propositions stating definitions.² Here, however we are not concerned with the question of how something should be named or defined, but with the question as to what, in fact, is the accepted name or definition of a thing - the kind of question, in other words, which could be settled by looking up a dictionary or encyclopaedia.

Under this heading we could also include propositions which state what the accepted rules are for this or that situation.

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1. Probability relations are of great importance too. Many of our factual mistakes concern questions of the probability of this or that happening, the probable reliability of a witness and so on. It is to be noted here that when we are discussing the dispositional qualities of a person we are really discussing the degree of probability with which we can forecast whether he will do so and so in certain kinds of situation. Thus a person of equable temperament is one who "keeps his temper" more easily than most in situations where a loss of temper might be expected.
 2. We usually think of a "fact" as something which impinges on us from "outside" - a datum of experience. Definitions, on the other hand we tend to regard, either as being arbitrary, or else as being merely interpretative. It is difficult, however, to maintain a clear-cut distinction between the two. Our decisions as to the facts are always in part determined by the way in which we define what we mean by the "real"; while, of course, our definitions of things are usually based on what we conceive to be the "real" nature of the things. Even when we are concerned only with the meaning of words it is often necessary for us to discuss the nature of the thing for which the word stands. Thus if we try to say what we mean by "intelligence" or by "intelligent actions" we are soon involved in questions about real things. This is not to say that every word necessarily stands for a thing, or that definitions cannot be arbitrary; it is merely to emphasise what is obvious enough, namely, that when we are concerned with definitions we are not necessarily playing a game only, in which words are simply counters.

II.

8. We shall now discuss the value of the criterion of "accordance with the facts" as a criterion of rational action. And the first question to ask here is why it should be taken for granted that it is a criterion of rationality. Can we define more precisely what we mean by "rational" when we say that it is rational to act in accordance with the facts?

In answer to the above question two possible lines of approach suggest themselves. First, it might be said that the principle of "accordance with the facts" is only indirectly used as a criterion of rationality; that the basic meaning of "rational" in this context is "what is conducive to one's happiness". In other words it is obviously rational to act in accordance with the facts because it is only by so doing that one can satisfy one's desires and obtain the greatest happiness.

Secondly, it might be said that we cannot analyse any further the statement "it is rational to act in accordance with the facts". Either we see it to be self-evidently true, or we do not. In other words, part of what we necessarily mean when we talk of rational action is that it is action "in accordance with the facts". Moreover it would still be rational to act in accordance with the facts even if it could be shown that it was not in our interests to do so.

In the discussion which follows, we shall deal with each of these interpretations in turn.

9. In respect to the first of these interpretations it certainly does seem obvious enough that it is in our interests to conform our actions to the facts. Whatever else, then, we may mean by the term "rational" in this particular context, it seems safe to say that it at least means "what is conducive to happiness".

But is it, in fact, so obvious, that it is always in our interests to act in "accordance with the facts". In this connection we have perhaps been influenced too much by the two kinds of situations which Hume had in mind when he wrote that there were only two senses in which a passion could be called unreasonable: that is, we have tended to confine our attention either (a) to the situation where, having discovered that our desire was based on a false judgment as to the nature or existence of an object, we give up the desire as being a hopeless one; or (b) we discover that the means we have been employing for the purpose of satisfying some desire are inadequate, and either adopt new means or else give up the desire as being impracticable. Certainly in these cases it would seem but plain common sense to act in accordance with the facts, just as, similarly, it would seem platitudinous to say that it is in one's interests to examine all the relevant facts carefully before setting about the task of satisfying some desire. Indeed it might be said to be self contradictory to say that we desire an end X and at the same time desire to pursue a course which we know will not achieve the end desired; or, to say that we desire an end X and at the same time refuse to adopt means Y¹ which we know would enable us to achieve X.

1. Thus, R. M. Kydd, "Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise", p92. "It is

10. When, however, we are concerned, not with the specific problem of satisfying a particular desire, but with the more general

commonly assumed that he who desires the end must desire the means also (or else cease to desire the end), and this, it is thought, is true a priori ---- now I do indeed think that such a conclusion follows analytically from its premises".

I am inclined to think that Mrs. Kydd has here fallen into the fallacy which she exposes earlier in the same chapter: viz., the fallacy of supposing that existential propositions can be necessary or self-contradictory. She seems to confuse two arguments: (i) If x is the only means to y, and I desire y, then to achieve y I must do x; (ii). If I desire y and discover that x is the only means to y, then I must desire x or desire to do x.

The first of these arguments is necessarily true, the second is not necessarily true.

The fact of the matter is that we often knowingly take the wrong means or refuse to take the right means to some end we desire, and one of the stock situations in which we describe a person as having acted irrationally is where he seems deliberately to have done the wrong thing from the point of view of achieving some end he desires. These situations fall into two types. In the first, we know what is the right means to the desired end, but have no desire to adopt the means. There may be moral reasons for this: (e.g. we might be faced with a situation in which we know that the only way of defending Western Civilisation against barbarism is to use the atomic bomb), or we may find the means unpleasant on hedonist grounds (e.g. an athlete has no desire to give up smoking while in training); but whatever the reason there can be no doubt that it is possible to desire an end without desiring the means necessary for the achieving of the end. It might be said that in a case like this we really do not desire to achieve the end, or at least do not desire it as much as we desire something else. But while it is true that in some cases the immediate desire (say, to smoke) may be the stronger desire this would not mean that the desire for the end was not still present. Moreover, it is sometimes the case that though the desire to achieve the end is the strongest desire it nevertheless cannot overcome a habit or some impulse which conflicts with it.

In the second type of situations we continue to use the wrong means after we have discovered that they are the wrong means. There may be several reasons for this. First, the means may now have become an end in itself, competing with the original end; second we may think we will lose too much prestige if we acknowledge our mistake; third, the taking of the wrong means may have become habitual so that we find it very difficult to change our course of action.

problem of achieving happiness, it is by no means obvious that it is always in our interests to conform to the facts.

We can make three general points first: (1) There are many "facts" which bear so little relation to our everyday needs that we can safely ignore them or believe the opposite to be true without harm. Thus though for a long time people believed the earth was flat, it is doubtful whether many of them were inconvenienced by this mistake.

(2) It is safe to believe some things against the run of the evidence because, even if our belief is most certainly false, it can never be proved beyond doubt that it is so, and in any case no obviously bad consequences result from our acting on a false belief of this kind. Thus if we find it comforting to believe in spiritualism, reincarnation, life after death etc., then we are safe in the assurance that it is extremely unlikely that our belief can ever be shattered.^{1.}

(3) All matter of fact judgments being probable only, and therefore liable to error, it may sometimes happen that we can go against the weight of evidence and yet chance, by luck, on some exception not allowed for by the experts, or on some fact overlooked by them. This is not to say, of course, that such conduct is justified

1. One notes here the well known complaint of the sceptic, namely, that if the believer is right about the existence of life after death then he can say, "I told you so"; but if the atheist is right then he cannot do the same to the believer.

The believer, indeed, is to be envied in this case. He enjoys the prospect of heaven while living on earth, but he will not suffer in any way in the next life, or rather after death, if his belief is wrong.

by the fact that, in the event, we turned out to be right. But it is necessary to remind ourselves, in stressing the value of acting in accordance with the facts, that even the most apparently certain of our matter of fact judgments may actually be false. And, as we shall see, there are occasions when it may be "in our interests" to gamble on the chance of such an error.

11. We have stated briefly why it is not necessarily to our disadvantage if we act against the facts; we now come to the more positive reasons why it may actually be to our advantage to ignore the principle of accordance with the facts.

(1) We can obtain enjoyment from living in a world of "make-believe", hence we sometimes act as though the facts were different from what they really are. It is true that in order to be successful we must, while day-dreaming, have the ability to forget that we are only pretending; the illusion must seem the reality. This being so, it could be argued that we are not, at the actual moment of day dreaming, acting against the facts - we are simply living in another kind of "world". But, in so far as we deliberately encourage these day-dreaming moods, we are, of course, deliberately ignoring the real facts. Moreover a sharp distinction cannot always be drawn between periods of day-dreaming and periods of "realism". The habit of "make-believe" spills over from the moments of day-dreaming to affect everything we do.

It may seem somewhat trivial to instance day-dreaming as an example of acting against the facts, yet it would be

difficult to overestimate the importance which our capacity for "make-believe" has as a factor in the pursuit of happiness. It is not merely a question of our being able to "escape" for brief periods into a "world" that is nearer to our heart's desire; it is also a matter of being able to render the ordinary dull routine tolerable by the use of the imagination and, negatively, by the ability to forget or ignore the "harsher realities". Few of us could bear to be presented with a completely realistic view of life; fundamental psychological needs prompt us, indeed, to seek for ways of interpreting reality that will make the world seem a friendlier place. No doubt a good deal of this takes place at a sub-conscious level, but we all, at times, deliberately gloss over the "harder" facts and lose ourselves in a world of "make-belief". Art, itself, in all its forms could be interpreted from this point of view.¹

It might be argued of course that while escaping into a world of "make-believe" provides a temporary satisfaction it cannot in the long run make for happiness. Sooner or later we shall be "tripped up" by the facts, and our only chance of happiness will then depend on our ability to adapt ourselves to the facts as they are.

In answer to this we can say, first, that it is not ~~not~~ suggested that a capacity for living in a world of imagination is, by itself, a guarantee of happiness; it is merely suggested that

1. One reason for denying the title of "art" to photographic realism in all its forms is that it does not in any sense re-create the world either in content or in form. It merely presents a photograph of the world in miniature.

"make-believe" plays an essential role in the pursuit of happiness, and in some circumstances may be our only means of obtaining happiness, or at least of alleviating our lot. The practical problem is to know when it is safe, and to what extent it is safe to indulge in pretence of this kind. Obviously if our "day-dreaming" activities incapacitate us in respect to our handling of everyday affairs then they cannot be justified on rational grounds, but if they do not, then it would be difficult to prove that, even in the long run, it is against our interests to "waste time" pretending that the facts are other than they are.

(2). One aspect of this capacity for "make believe" which deserves to be mentioned separately is the use of some form of "pretence" as a therapeutic measure. This is best explained by means of an example. A person is told that he is suffering from an incurable disease, and that his only chance of prolonging his life is to take very stringent precautions. The person accepts the diagnosis, but decides he would rather shorten the term of his life and live reasonably well than prolong life at a mere existence level. So far he has not acted against the facts, nor in any way acted in what would be considered an irrational way. But then he becomes interested in the possibility of "faith-healing" or perhaps in some form of healing by non-physical means, and he decides to act as though he did not have the disease at all. He tries to banish all thought of the disease from his mind, and in general to act in a way that would be appropriate only on the assumption that he was a well man. Now, in a case like this, are we to hold that the person concerned is acting irrationally? From one point

of view he certainly does seem to be, for he is not only, as we say, refusing to face the facts, but he is endangering his chance of even a brief prolongation of life by adopting measures which the experts would agree to be futile. On the other hand we might argue that he is acting rationally in that, since orthodox medicine holds out no hope for him, he might as well try unorthodox measures.

What makes cases of this kind difficult to analyse is that we have reason to believe that mental attitudes, under some circumstances, can affect physical changes. It is therefore plausible to argue that we may sometimes be justified in experimenting with unorthodox methods such as is instanced above. In any case it is doubtful whether we could classify such actions as rational or irrational by reference to the criterion of accordance with the facts by itself. It is only in the full context of the person's circumstances, and by using the criterion of happiness also, that we can justly estimate the rationality or otherwise of the action.

(3). The most usual reason, however, for acting in defiance of the principle of accordance with the facts is that we have formed a vested interest in certain beliefs which prove to be false. In other words our happiness has become so bound up with the acceptance of certain things as being true that we cannot face the possibility of their being untrue. Either therefore we refuse to re-examine the facts if we suspect they cannot be supported, or else, if we are forced to face up to the weaknesses in our position we look round for every possible excuse for maintaining it, in all essentials, as before.

In cases like these it is not a question of saying, "yes, I admit that my former beliefs were wrong, but I nevertheless intend to act as if they were right"; nor is it a question of pretending that the facts are different from what they really are. It is rather that our desire to maintain a certain belief is so strong that the "true facts" do not get a chance to make their weight felt. Very often the struggle takes place at a sub-conscious level, but sometimes the participant is aware of what is going on, and there may take place "within him" a conscious struggle between his desire to be intellectually honest and his desire to maintain his beliefs. Victory may go to one side or the other, or an accomodation may be reached by means of a clever "rationalisation",¹ but the point to emphasise is that the person realises that the "facts" are a threat to his happiness and that it is in his² interests to "get round" them if possible.

1. See Note at end of chapter for brief discussion of the term, "rationalisation".

2. It is odd that Hume should not have been aware of the possibility of this kind of conflict, the more so as he did recognise the fact that conflicts could take place between "calm" and "violent" passions. He seemed to think that we would yield to reason as soon as we realised that we had been basing our actions on false judgments: "tis impossible that reason and passion can ever oppose each other ---- the moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition -- our passion yields to our reason without any opposition". Hume is here assuming, without doubt, that it is always in our interests to obey reason. In this respect he seemed to share the general view of the 18th C. in respect to the beneficial role of reason. Indeed his famous statement that "reason is and ought only to be a slave of the passions" is a quite misleading expression of his own position. As Laird puts it, "Hume regarded reason as an astute family solicitor, rather than as an ordinary sort of slave" (J. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, p. 204). It has taken the work of the 20thC psychologists to show us to what extent reason is, in fact, the slave of the passions.

Thus to take a topical example, namely, the conduct of the intellectual who has been a supporter of Russian communism, and has begun to have doubts about the value of the Russian experiment:

At first he rejects all criticisms of Russia as mere propaganda; then, perhaps, he is reluctantly forced to admit that one particular criticism is just. For a time he regards this as an exceptional case, but the breach in the wall of faith has been made, other criticisms are accepted as true, and finally he is almost prepared to admit, privately, that his belief in Russia has been based on false judgments as to the facts. At this point, however the desire to believe in the Revolution reasserts itself, reinforced by other emotive factors. It is bad enough to have to admit that one has been the victim of a political illusion for so long, and that one's political enemies have been right after all. But when he contemplates the loneliness of scepticism, the loss of old friends and old loyalties, the sense of meaninglessness that follows the breakdown of a central belief - he may then feel that the price of intellectual honesty is too great, and that his whole well being depends on finding some plausible explanation of the apparent weaknesses in the Russian system. He then starts looking for possible loopholes in the criticisms, for possible rationalisations. And of course, if he is clever enough, he will always find them; for, in the realm of matter of fact, nothing can ever be certain and the so-called "objective facts" can be given many very different interpretations.

12. In considering the influence of "vested interests" over our attitude to the facts, two motives in particular are of great importance: the motive of pride (or, "desire for prestige" - concern with one's reputation)¹, and the motive which we may describe as "the desire for emotional security".

The influence of pride as a factor in causing us both to cling to unjustified and irrational doctrines and also to make irrational judgments has been insufficiently commented upon by

1. This is not, perhaps, the most common definition of "pride", which is usually thought of as a feeling of arrogance and conceit. But in so far as we think of pride as a motive then the above definition seems to stress the essential core of the desire.

moral philosophers, this omission being particularly noticeable in political theorists, who, one would have thought, would have been quick to appreciate the importance of pride in the determining of political decisions. In general it seems to have been left to the theologians and anthropologists to emphasise the role of pride in human life.^{1.}

In particular it is odd that Hume did not appreciate the relevance of this question of the influence of Pride to the more general question of² rational action, for he begins Bk. II of the Treatise with a long dissertation on Pride and Humility and undoubtedly regarded it as one of the more important of the passions. His psychological analysis of pride, however, is rather shallow, perhaps because he tried to fit it too neatly into his general schemata of the passions with its two main principles, the principle of association of ideas and the principle of pleasure and pain. From our point of view, though, his main mistake was in thinking that pride can only be aroused by some external cause, and, moreover, by a cause of a particular kind, viz. the awareness of some "excellency" attached to oneself. The truth of the matter is, however, that pride, like bodily appetites such as hunger or sexual desire, can "arise internally, without the concurrence of any external object". It differs from these bodily

1. Only Hobbes of the classical political theorists has made pride (or, as he calls it, "the striving after honour and fame") central in his political theory. Hobbes, however, does not make it completely clear in what way he considers pride to be central. Sometimes he places the "lust for power" for its own sake at the heart of political life, at other times he seems to argue that men lust for power only for the sake of honour and glory. An interesting analysis of Hobbes' political philosophy from this point of view is to be found in, L. Strauss, "The Political Philosophy of Hobbes."

appetites, however, in two respects: first, in that it tends to be insatiable; and secondly, in that it is not associated with any particular object of satisfaction, but can attach itself to anything at all - thwarted in one direction it is never at a loss to find means of satisfaction in another direction. Hume noted the second of these characteristics - "to begin with the causes of pride and humility; we may note that their most obvious and remarkable quality is the vast variety of subjects on which they may be placed" - but denied the possibility of the first.¹ It is in part because of the insatiable nature of pride, however, that it tends to be the cause of irrational conduct. Not only does it keep us restlessly on the move, seeking fresh honours, greater prestige, when a more sober calculation of our interests would encourage us to remain content with what we had achieved or what we possessed, but also it often leads us to engage in activities which, as the objective observer can see, are almost bound to lead to personal disaster.

More specifically - and with the principle of "accordance with the facts" in mind - pride is, either directly or indirectly, the cause of irrational conduct in the following ways:

(1) Our fear of losing prestige will often make us cling to beliefs which we have once supported and now know to be false; or to defend actions which we now know to be wrong. One

1. Hume did realise that if pride were aroused by some internal movement then it would be insatiable: he writes, "tis evident pride would be perpetual, if it arose immediately from nature; since the object is the same, and there is no disposition of body peculiar to pride, as there is to thirst and hunger". Obviously he regards this as an argument against pride's being aroused internally, but he does not state why it is impossible

of the more interesting examples of this kind of influence is where the means to a certain end becomes an end in itself because our prestige has become completely involved in the advocacy of this particular means-policy. The more this means-policy is threatened by hostile criticism, the more dogmatic our assertion of its necessity until, indeed, the ultimate aim is lost sight of in our concern not to "lose face" over our "means-policy".¹

Though, from the point of view of the principle of "accordance with the facts", such actions are irrational, it is possible to defend them, if not from a moral standpoint, at least from the standpoint of one's interests by arguing that in some cases the loss of prestige would be so great if one admitted having been mistaken that it is the lesser of two evils to cling to the suspect belief and hope that nothing will happen thereafter to make it absolutely impossible to maintain it. And, of course, over a wide area of beliefs about matters of fact one can be reasonably confident that no such coup de grace can be delivered. The faithful communist has an answer ready for each new devastating turn of events in Moscow; the fundamentalist has always a text on hand to counter the latest onslaught of science on the sacred text.

For a passion to be insatiable.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Hobbes emphasises that man differs from the animals not merely in the fact that he has reason at the service of his passions, but also in the fact that some of his desires, and particularly the desire for honour and glory, are insatiable: "So that, in the first place I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death".

1. One suspects that something of this kind has happened in the case of the Labour party's advocacy of "nationalisation" as a means to the "good society".

(2).Pride tends to cause us to place a false valuation on objects -we give undue importance to those things which are closely connected with us,or in which we have some interest,and tend to underrate the value of those things which we ourselves do not possess or in which we have no interest.One's country is better than any other country simply because it is one's country; one's children cleverer than other children simply because they are one's own children.

Again,though from one point of view it seems obviously irrational to allow our pride to influence our judgments in this way,it can be argued that in so far as we obtain a great deal of pleasure from"taking pride" in those things which are most closely attached to us then it does not really matter a great deal whether our judgments are according to the facts or not.Thus we say that it is "natural" for Mrs.Jones to think that her children are cleverer than other children ,even though it is obvious,on any objective standard ,that they are,in fact, rather dull.Indeed,in respect to those matters in which we think it is "natural" for us to be influenced by "pride" we might argue that it is irrational to try to counter this influence by trying to look at the facts "cold-bloodedly".Irrational,that is,on two counts:first,in that it is unnatural;and secondly,in that it does not make for happiness,or does not often make for happiness,when we subordinate such "natural pride" to the discipline of "objective facts".It may seem rather ridiculous to the onlooker that Mrs.Jones should think her children to be clever,but in so far as it obviously makes her happy to think so we do not usually consider

it is our duty to force her to "face the facts". Moreover -and this complicates the question still further -it can be argued that in many cases the emotion of pride, by its influence, so alters the "nature" of the object to which it is directed that it is really no longer the same object observed by those for whom it is not a matter of pride. Hence the excessive value -or what seems to others the excessive value -placed on the object by the "owner" is seen to be justified when one realises that it means something to the owner which it cannot mean for anyone else. Thus a person may seem to be foolishly wasting money and energy in trying to save some trivial object from being destroyed; but when we realise that it is a souvenir of some "famous victory" of his in the past we understand his conduct more easily. In the same way we appreciate that a person of meagre accomplishments will tend to "play up" any achievements which are to his credit: that, for instance, the winning of the local club tennis championship will seem to Bill Smith an event of some national importance.

In general, then, while emphasising the fact that pride often leads us to place a false valuation on objects, we have to remember that in some cases the factor of pride has to be taken into account -and rightly taken into account -in¹ assessing the value of a particular object.

1. When we think of pride as an emotion rather than as an active desire (i.e. when we contrast the "being proud of something" with "the active seeking after prestige") the question raises itself whether, and in what circumstances, it can be considered an rational feeling at all. It might be generally accepted that we are justified in feeling pride only about those accomplishments which have been achieved by sheer effort of will: that, for

13. The vested interest which we have termed "the desire for emotional security" is more commonly accepted as an influencing factor than is pride -perhaps because of the work of the psychologists. This desire can cause us to maintain beliefs which are false in the following kinds of situation:

(i) When the belief is concerned with something which we find comforting to believe: e.g. where a person who has lost a child comes to accept spiritualist doctrines as true.

(ii) When the belief is one which has been so much part of the "accepted order of things", so much taken for granted, that the discovery of its falsity would result in a painful feeling of "unease". We feel unable to cope with the new situation which has arisen. Thus, no doubt, the resistance to the new views put forward by Copernicus was prompted not only by the fear that the foundations of religion had been sapped, but also by the more general fear of what is unknown and strange.

example, it is rational enough to feel proud of having overcome some physical disability. But, in theory anyway, it is doubtful whether we should regard it as proper to feel pride about those things which we possess or which have been achieved as a result of luck, or of the efforts of others. Yet the odd thing is that we more often feel the emotion of pride in respect to the latter class of things than in respect to the first. We feel proud of our intelligence, good looks, the country we are born in etc; but we tend to feel humbled when we have achieved something by sheer hard work.

What complicates the position still more is that while, from the ordinary point of view, we may think it justifiable to feel pride at something achieved by effort of will, the moralist, and certainly the theologian, condemns as "sinful" the pride felt in one's own achievements. The saint who blames himself for his sins but gives God the credit for his virtuous actions is held up as an example. And even on the common sense level, while accepting the view that a person should only feel proud of what he has achieved by his own effort, we do, in practice, tend to view with disfavour the pride of the "self-made" man.

(iii) When the belief is one which has played a "key role" in our religion or in our "philosophy of life". For example, the anti-evolutionary views held by religious believers in the last century; or the belief in the beneficial effects of "free enterprise" held by many Americans. Beliefs of this kind need not be in themselves of a "comforting nature", but in so far as we have accepted them as true and have built up a philosophy of action on them then we tend to resist any arguments which purport¹ to show that the beliefs in question are false.

When, then, any beliefs which fall into one or other of the categories mentioned above are threatened, the desire for emotional security moves us to seek for ways of countering the threat. We feel that our happiness itself is at stake. In a situation like this we may adopt any one of the following tactics:

(a) We avoid "facing the facts"; we refuse to listen to the opposing arguments.

(b) We seize on any minor flaw in the argument, or any slight deficiency in the evidence and magnify its importance. (e.g. the anti-evolutionists have always over-estimated the importance of the so-called "missing links")

(c) We rationalise our own position by bringing forward, as it were, ex post facto, some plausible theory which will make our own position more tenable, or which will explain away

1. It is not always appreciated that people may derive considerable pleasure from holding beliefs which in themselves are rather frightening. In part this is because they pride themselves on being tough, on being able to face the brute facts. I am not

the facts produced by the rival theory.

This last tactic is the most fruitful as it is nearly always possible to find some ingenious theory with which to defend one's own position. And even though it may convince no one else, it serves its purpose if it enables one to maintain one's cherished beliefs without too uneasy an intellectual conscience.

III.

14. We have now said sufficient to show that it is not always in our interests to conform to the facts. Not only is it true that we can ignore the facts or act against them without, in every case, having to suffer any disastrous consequences, but also, in some cases it may actually be to our advantage to refuse to conform to the principle of "accordance with the facts". This is not to say, of course, that we can ignore this principle at pleasure. In general it is obviously in our interests to base our actions on the facts, and if we ignore this principle indiscriminately then we are bound, in the end, to suffer for it. But in so far as we must admit that there are situations where it is not necessarily to our disadvantage to ignore this principle then we cannot analyse the sentence "it is rational to act in accordance with the facts" to mean "it is always in our interests to act in accordance with the facts"

15. And this brings us to our second interpretation, namely, that the proposition, "X is acting in accordance with the facts" is necessarily implied by the proposition, "X is acting rationally". In other words, since acting in accordance with the facts is part

of what we mean by "acting rationally" it is therefore tautologous to say that "it is rational to act in accordance with the facts".

What this interpretation seems to be saying is that, while as a matter of experience we find it to be generally the case that it is in our interests to conform to the facts, nevertheless the thought of our happiness is not in our mind when we say that it is rational to act in accordance with the facts. In this context anyway we do not mean by the term "rational", "what is in our interests or for our happiness". Moreover, in support of this we can point to the fact that we sometimes differentiate between what is rational in conduct and what is for our happiness. The sceptic, expressing his opinion of a friend who has become a spiritualist, may say, "the whole thing's a tissue of falsehoods, but it seems to make X happy to believe in it, so I don't see much point in trying to prove to him how irrationally he's acting".

16. The difficulty with the above interpretation is that, if it is true, then it must sometimes be the case that it is rational to act against our own happiness, for we have seen that there are situations where, if we obey the principle of "accordance with the facts" faithfully our own interests are likely to be jeopardised.

Now there may seem to be nothing particularly troublesome about this point because we are accustomed, in thinking about moral questions, to the idea that our moral obligations may sometimes conflict with our own happiness; and while it is true that, neither as a theoretical principle nor as a matter of practical living, do we take easily to the notion that our moral obligations ought to

have precedence over our plans for our happiness, it is rarely suggested, at the common sense level, that it is irrational for a person to perform his moral obligations when they do conflict with his happiness.

In this particular case, however, where we are concerned with the principle of "accordance with the facts" as a criterion of rational action, we do tend to balk at the idea that there really can be a conflict between the principle of "accordance with the facts" and the principle of "happiness". In other words, though the thought of happiness may not be in our mind when we say that it is rational to act in accordance with the facts, we do tend to take it for granted that, if not in the immediate future, at least in the long run, it will always be in our interests to act in conformity to the facts. We tend to think that a person is bound to be "caught out" in the long run if he acts contrary to the facts.

It is true that, as we have just mentioned above, we do sometimes seem to make a distinction between rational action, in the sense of "acting in accordance with the facts", and "what is conducive to our happiness", but this distinction is always made in situations where certain exceptional conditions apply. In the first place, it is usually when we are referring to other people's conduct rather than to our own that we differentiate between the principle of happiness and the principle of "accordance with the facts". Secondly, it is only when we think that there is little possibility of the person concerned being able to adjust himself to the new situation which would arise if his beliefs were shown to be false that we think it might be better to allow

him to continue acting on the false beliefs. In other words we take the risk that he will not suffer for his irrational action. Or rather we argue that since he is going to suffer anyway from the discovery that his actions were based on falsehoods, it might be the lesser of two evils to allow him to carry on as before in the hope that he will not be found out. It is reasoning of this kind, for example, which might lead a clergyman to refuse to try to enlighten the minds of older members of the congregation¹ in respect to certain of their false religious views.

17. Common sense does then, perhaps, assume too easily that it is always in our interests to conform to the facts, and that therefore, in this matter anyway, there cannot be a conflict between the principle of happiness and the principle of "accordance with the facts". We have seen that there can in fact be such a conflict, and in so far as we are to regard both of these principles as criteria of rational action, i.e. (a) it is rational to act in accordance with the facts; (b) it is rational to do that which will bring one happiness, and as criteria which are quite distinct in meaning, then we have to face the problem of what we should do when these two criteria clash. Has one of them a prior claim over the other; or does it depend on circumstances whether it is more

1. In respect to these situations where we say that "so and so's beliefs are quite irrational but he's happy in holding them, so why disillusion him", we have to be careful to distinguish between the problem of what it is rational for us to do (i.e. in respect to our friend's situation) and the problem of whether our friend is himself acting irrationally or not. Our decision not to disillusion our friend may be based on the "principle of happiness" which we think, in this case, to be more important than the truth or falsity of our friend's beliefs; but our friend

rational to act on one rather than on the other.

In respect to these questions; one answer immediately suggests itself: namely, that the principle of "accordance with the facts" has, in such cases, the prior claim because the statement, "it is rational to act in accordance with the facts" conceals the assumption that we have a moral obligation to act in accordance with the facts. In other words, in stating that it is not "happiness" which we are thinking about when we say that "it is rational to act in accordance with the facts" we are really only emphasising in a negative form the proposition that we have a self evident obligation to try to conform our actions to the facts, an obligation which is binding on us whatever the effect on our happiness may be.

Now the question whether we have, in fact, such an obligation, and if so, how it is to be interpreted, is one which we shall discuss fully in Chapter IX where we deal with the more general problem whether we can be said to have an obligation to try to act rationally, but here it can be said that, *prima facie*, it would seem to be the case that common sense does accept the notion that we have an obligation to try to conform our actions to the facts. We say that so and so ought to "face up to the facts", or that someone else is a person of high intellectual integrity who is never guilty

though acting on the basis of false beliefs may nevertheless be acting rationally in so far as he has, so far as he is able, made a sincere attempt to establish the truth of those beliefs before acting on them. Indeed, even if he know that the beliefs were false, we still could not assume that he was acting irrationally, for he may have decided that in his situation the principle of happiness was a better criterion of action than the principle of accordance with the facts.

of twisting the facts to suit his own purposes, and these 104.
statements certainly seem to imply some kind of obligation to
conform to the facts.

On the other hand, when we examine a little more closely
the common sense statements in which such an obligation seems to
be assumed we cannot be quite so certain that the notion of an
obligation to the facts qua facts is actually accepted. Very often
the "ought" in these statements is hypothetical rather than
categorical; in effect we are warning someone that if he does not
face up to the facts, or examine them carefully before acting then
he is liable to suffer for it. And in other cases where there does
seem to be an implied categorical demand we find that the obligation
which is being asserted is not the obligation to conform to the
facts as such, but some other obligation the fulfillment of which
demands that we be obedient to the principle of accordance with
the facts. Thus the obligation might be to keep a promise (e.g.
when the judge reminds a jury that they are under an oath to
base their decision on the facts alone); or to prevent our actions
being influenced by a false pride (e.g. "its only pride which
keeps you from admitting that the facts are otherwise"); or to
be consistent in our use of the criteria determining the factual.
(e.g., if you use the same criterion here as you did there then you
must admit that the facts are so and so).

The position, then, so far as the common sense attitude is
concerned, is somewhat more complicated than first appears, and later
we shall be concerned to clarify it. What is clear, however, is that
if there is no such obligation as the "obligation to conform to the

facts" then this problem of a clash between two criteria of rationality becomes a meaningless one. If, in other words, we are not morally obliged to act in accordance with the facts then the rational course of action is, obviously, to conform to the facts when it is in our interests to do so or when some other obligation makes it obligatory for us to do so, and to refuse to conform when neither of these conditions is fulfilled. The idea that it would be rational to conform to the facts whether it is in our interests to do so or not does not make sense unless we accept the notion that we have an obligation to try to act in accordance with the facts.

Note on the term "rationalize".

When we say that someone is trying to rationalize an impossible position, or that someone is very clever at "rationalizing", we are usually employing the term in the popular sense which it has come to have since the psychologists used it in referring to certain (usually sub-conscious) processes of the mind. On this definition of the term we rationalize whenever we try to defend some belief or action which we suspect to be false or to be morally wrong by finding some plausible explanation which will make the belief seem true or the action right. The term has thus come to be used in a rather derogatory manner. In this connection it is pertinent to point out, however, that the tendency to indulge in this kind of rationalizing is more prevalent among highly moral persons than among those who are little concerned with moral principles. It is often said that a moral man is one who confesses his weaknesses and sins openly whereas the "sinner" tries to make excuses. Actually the opposite is very often the case. The shame with which the moral man contemplates his failings exposes him to the temptations of this kind of rationalizing. The non-moral man makes excuses so that he will not be found out; the moral man makes excuses because he cannot bear to face his own faults.

In the same way it is the man of intellectual integrity who is often tempted to find plausible reasons for defending beliefs which he suspects to be false. If he did not feel under an obligation to conform to the facts he would not worry unduly about "inconclusive evidence", "small discrepancies" and so on. But because he is aware of this obligation he feels bound to try to find a good argument in defence of his belief - so that his "mind may approve of what his heart desires"

In the older sense of the term "rationalize" we refer to the intellectual process by which we try to systematize a number of propositions about particular phenomena, or else to the procedure by which we try to find valid reasons for accepting what we already believe, intuitively, to be true. It is easy to confuse this latter process with the one described above. The difference between them is that whereas in the above case we really suspect that our belief is false, in this case we are convinced that our belief is true but have difficulty in finding a good intellectual explanation of its truth.

The ironical thing is, of course, that whereas we can often find extremely plausible reasons for believing what we think to be false, we are not so skilful at providing good reasons for believing what we know to be true (as the history of philosophy shows). It is possible that the explanation for this is, simply, that it is silly to ask questions concerning those things which we know, "instinctively" to be true. Or, if we do ask questions, they should be about questions of terminology only.

CHAPTER IV.THE PRINCIPLE of CONSISTENCY.I.

1. A principle which is sometimes used as a criterion of rational action, though not so frequently as the principle of "accordance with the facts", is the principle of consistency. Thus if we say that "so and so is acting inconsistently" this is often taken to be more or less equivalent to saying that "he is acting irrationally". Likewise, when we praise someone for "doing the consistent thing" in a certain situation we go on to add some such comment as "of course, as a rational being you really had no option".

2. The common sense way of using this criterion is, however, unsatisfactory inasmuch as expressions like "acting consistently", or "acting inconsistently" are ambiguous, and, if not interpreted carefully, can lead us quite astray in our judgments of what constitutes rational or irrational conduct.

In the first place -and this is a point which we have noted before -these expressions tend to give the impression that actions in themselves can be self-consistent or self-contradictory, or that one action can be consistent with, or inconsistent with another action; whereas, of course, it is only the propositions which accompany the actions that can properly be called consistent or inconsistent. Nor is this point academic only, for in some cases where a person is said to have acted inconsistently -say, where a

teacher has punished a child on one day and not punished him for the same offence on the next day -we cannot really tell whether he has really flouted the principle of consistency or not until we know all the circumstances of the case, what criterion of punishment he adopts and so on. There is no contradiction in itself between the act of punishing the child one day, and the act of refraining from punishment the next day.

In this connection it is to be noted that mere unpredictability of conduct is not in itself a necessary sign that a person is being inconsistent. Thus it may be the case that our principle of action is to act in an unpredictable fashion, and we may be very consistent in carrying out this principle. For example a general may decide that the best tactics in a certain situation are to act quite unpredictably, even to the point of acting occasionally in a really foolish way.

Secondly, and again we are repeating a point noted before, there are many cases in which we use the expression "acting inconsistently", where it would be more accurate to say that the person is "not acting in accordance with the facts". The vagueness of the expression "acting inconsistently" tends to make us overlook this distinction.

Thirdly, though we do in general tend to equate the idea of inconsistency with the idea of irrational conduct, there are situations in which we would describe a person as "acting inconsistently" and yet not assert that there was even a prima

facie case for arguing that he was acting irrationally. Thus, if a person does not "live up to" his moral principles in a situation in which he would have stood to suffer a great deal if he had, we might say that he acted inconsistently, but we should hardly say that he acted irrationally. Even if the sacrifice demanded of him was not very great, and we were inclined to charge him with selfishness or cowardice or some other moral fault, it is doubtful whether we should also charge him with having acted irrationally.

3. For the above reasons, then, it seems unsatisfactory to assert that a person acts irrationally if he acts inconsistently. We need to state the position more precisely if we are to make clear just how the principle of consistency can be properly used as a criterion of rational action. This may be done as follows:

Using the principle of consistency as the criterion we may say that there is a *prima facie* case for asserting that a person acts irrationally if:

(1) He, knowing that a proposition which he holds to be true is self-contradictory, does not give up accepting the proposition as true, or try in any way to remove the self-contradiction.

(2) He, knowing that there is an inconsistency between two or more propositions which he regards as true, does not withhold his assent from any of these propositions or try to remove the inconsistency.

(3) He, knowing that some proposition is a necessary implication of some other proposition which he accepts as true,

nevertheless refuses to accept this new proposition as true.

As expressed in this way, the principle of consistency is applicable, as a criterion of rational action, both in the theoretical field and in the practical. Taking each of these in turn we may note the following observations:

(1). It is often very difficult to make a person accept the fact that a certain proposition is self-contradictory because, since, in such cases, it is a question of the definitions we give to the terms of the proposition, it is always open to the person concerned to argue that he defines the terms in some unusual sense. Our only hope of "trapping" him, then, is to show that he normally defines these terms in the usual way, and has merely altered his definitions in order to get out of a logical difficulty.

Another difficulty about self-contradictory propositions is that the defenders of them can sometimes claim that they are "paradoxically true" - that, in other words, the contradiction is apparent only and conceals, or, in some cases, emphasises a profound truth. The argument is that the "truth" is so stated as to appear obviously absurd and self-contradictory, thus "shocking" the reader or hearer into thinking more carefully about something he had overlooked or had always taken for granted.

Now, no doubt, paradoxical statements are sometimes justified as a pedagogical device, but in so far as it is claimed, as it often is, that there are some truths which are so profound that they cannot be expressed in ordinary logical language, but can only be "hinted at" in the form of paradox, then these so-called

"truths of paradox" must be viewed with some suspicion. When subjected to a rigorous logical analysis, with each term in the proposition precisely defined, they either prove to be indeed self-contradictory and therefore false; or, to be ambiguous statements of some truth which can only be properly expressed by means of a number of propositions; or, finally, to be meaningless. The fact of the matter is that if a "truth" is so profound that it cannot be expressed in ordinary logical language, then it is better not to express it at all; or, if the need to say something about it is too insistent, to rely on the language of "feeling" - to express the truth in music or art or drama or poetry. As it is, paradoxical statements are too often a "cover-up" for half-truths, or for ill-digested thoughts.

(2). In respect to those cases in which it can be shown that there is an inconsistency between propositions each of which we accept as true, we note that these propositions may be held to be true within the framework of a particular argument - i.e. what we say at one point in our argument contradicts what we say at a later point in the argument - or else they may be any two propositions which we accept as true but which we have never in any sense tried to relate to each other or bring together for purposes of an argument. In these days of highly specialised knowledge, for instance, it is not uncommon for persons of high intelligence to be quite unaware of the fact that some proposition which they accept, say, as a scientist, contradicts something

which they hold to be true as a Christian believer. They may not even realise that there is any connection between the two beliefs, so that, in trying to prove to them that these beliefs are inconsistent, we may first have to show how they are logically related to each other. For example, we may have to point out to the Freudian psychologist that the deterministic assumptions of his psychological techniques are in conflict with, or appear to be in conflict with the assumptions underlying his Christian faith.

And this brings us to the third, and most important type of inconsistency, namely, where a person does not accept the logical implications of what he accepts as true.

(3). There are two kinds of inconsistency here. In the first case we show that if A is accepted as true then a certain logical consequence of A, namely, B ought also to be accepted as true. Thus a pacifist may try to prove that if a person accepts the Christian religion as true then it logically follows that he must refuse to participate in warfare.

In the second case we try to show that if X is accepted as true, then Y, which formerly had been held to be true, must be false. Thus a business man may advocate tariff barriers against Japanese competition as being sound economic policy. We point out that if it is true that this is sound economic policy then his former advocacy of complete laissez-faire must, at least, be severely qualified.

In either of these two cases if the person concerned refuses to accept the logical consequences then we have a prima facie case for saying that he is acting irrationally.

We can include under this heading those cases in which a person refuses to accept the implications of certain criteria which he has laid down for determining something as true or false, good or bad, beautiful or ugly etc. Thus a historian might formulate certain rules by which we can determine at what stage of development or decline any particular civilisation is but not apply the rules to determine the particular stage that his own civilisation has reached -or else apply them in such a way that they become useless as objective criteria.

The question of the consistent use of criteria does, however, raise a special problem to which there is no easy answer. The problem is this: sometimes, in stating that a certain criterion is the right one to apply to situations of a certain kind, we find that we must, perforce, make an exception of the situation in which the criterion itself is stated. The rule, as it were, must make an exception of itself. Thus the marxist who claims that all philosophical, religious, political doctrines are determined by

the modes of production prevailing at the time must make an exception of his own political philosophy otherwise it can only claim to be relatively true. Similarly, it is sometimes held against the positivist criterion of "significant propositions" that the propositions in which the criterion is stated have to be exempt from the rule.

Now the question is whether a real inconsistency is involved here. Logical criticisms of this kind are often made, especially against theories of a relativist kind, but in themselves they do not seem to carry complete conviction. Though we have made what seems to be a fatal criticism of the criterion in question we are still left with the uncomfortable feeling that we have not really disposed of it - that, indeed, it contains a large element of truth. Thus, though it is true that the Marxist makes an exception of his own philosophy, and though, moreover, it is true, as a matter of fact, that a good deal of marxist doctrine is obviously a reflection of the social and economic conditions of the time in which Marx wrote, yet we do not feel that a logical criticism of this kind is necessarily a serious one.

Nevertheless it can be made - and is made - against theories of great significance, and even though we do not regard it as a fatal criticism some kind of answer presumably has to be given to it; or, at least, some reason has to be given for treating it as an unimportant criticism. Two possible ways out of the logical difficulty can be suggested. First, we can say that our rule has a pragmatic value only - that what we are doing is recommending

that a certain way of speaking or a certain way of thinking about a certain class of objects or relations is the most useful. This, I understand, is the position adopted by the more cautious of the positivists now, and it is one which certainly removes the sting from the logical criticism. But, at the same time, it reduces the power and prestige of the theory itself. Logical rectitude is gained at the expense of authority.

Secondly, we can take the bold line of claiming that our own theory is exempt from the criterion. But since this is, in effect, a claim to some kind of infallibility it is not a position which the cautious theorist would be likely to adopt. Having claimed some infallible intuition for oneself it is difficult to dispute a similar claim by others.

A third way out, possible in some cases, is to state the rule in such a way that it is made clear that we allow for the possibility that our own doctrine may be affected by the criterion which it proclaims. We do not suggest that our principle has a pragmatic value only; we merely state that we are not claiming that it gives us the full truth on the matter in question. Thus the cautious marxist may admit that his own doctrines have been influenced by the conditions of the time, and that even the central doctrine may be viewed as a typical product of the economic conditions prevailing at the time it was put forward, but he would assert that this is only a significant point if the marxist principle is stated as an infallible and all-explanatory dogma.¹

1. There is a sense, I suppose, in which the marxist can claim that criticisms of this kind merely emphasise the truth of the central principle. Complicated logical questions are involved here which we cannot discuss in this thesis.

To sum up this particular point: The logical charge of self-contradiction brought against those who exempt their own statements or theories from the criterion they propound is effective, only if the propositions stating the criterion are formulated in an incautious and dogmatic way. To that extent, this logical point serves a useful function in "toning down" the over-enthusiastic advocates of some new theory. But where the criterion is stated cautiously and with suitable qualifications then the fact that the advocate of the principle is making an exception for himself ceases to be of any importance.

4. In the practical field the principle of consistency is applied as a criterion of rational action in the following cases:

(1) Where there is an inconsistency, as we say, between precept and example: where, in other words, it can be shown that the propositions implied in our actions are inconsistent with the propositions stating how we ought to act in such a situation. It is important to reiterate what has been said before, that we can only talk of inconsistency where what we may call the "theoretical belief" implicitly contains an injunction that such a belief ought to be acted upon. Thus a politician may state that he believes that all men are equal and yet act in such a way as to imply, by his actions, that they are unequal. We cannot however charge him with inconsistency unless he has stated, not merely that all men are equal but also that they should be treated as equal under all circumstances. It is true that we often describe such conduct as inconsistent, but this is because we assume that the statement of

some principle necessarily implies that such a principle is to be acted upon. And this, of course, does not follow at all. A politician who sincerely believes in the essential equality of all men may yet believe with equal sincerity that in the present circumstances it will not help the "depressed" classes or races if their right to equality is insisted upon and forced through by legislation.

(2) Another kind of practical inconsistency can be described thus: In situation X we act in accordance with principle A; in situation Y which, in all relevant respects, is the same as situation X we use an entirely different principle of action, B.

Though unpredictability of behaviour is often regarded as coming under the heading of "inconsistency" it is important to note again the point that there are occasions on which unpredictability of conduct is actually a sign that a certain principle of action is being carried out faithfully - the principle, namely, to act unpredictably.¹

When a person acts very differently in situations that are similar any one of the following interpretations of his behaviour are possible:

(a) He may have a clearly defined principle of action

1. For a principle of this kind to be successful it is, of course, imperative that others should not know that we are using it!

which he faithfully carries out in some situations, but fails to "live up to" in other instances. Here it is not a question of having a different principle of action in each situation, but rather¹ of acting on it on one occasion and not acting on it in another.

(b). He may not have any principle of action at all, and is therefore influenced by whatever factors happen to be dominant at the time. In cases like these we say that a person is acting irrationally only if the situations in question involve serious and important issues. We argue that a person, a rational person, ought to try to work out some consistent line of policy. Thus we do ^{not} expect a person to show any great consistency of action while on a holiday at the beach: it is not surprising if his actions seem to be governed by no particular policy. But we would expect a parent to have some principle of action in respect, say, to what actions of his children are punishable, and what methods of punishment should be used.

(c). He may not be sure what policy to adopt for situations of a certain kind, and to that extent tend to change policy or modify it in the light of later experience. No inconsistency is involved here, though we often do describe a person's actions as inconsistent when he does change or modify policy in this way.

(d) He may have no principle of action, in the sense of moral principle, and thus weigh up each situation entirely from the

1. The question arises here whether any two situations can be similar in all "relevant respects", and if so, what we mean by this phrase. Thus a person may formulate a principle of action to the effect that he will not give any money to beggars at the door. He carries out this policy with the first few beggars who come to his door, but, later in the week, gives money to a beggar who differed in no obvious way from the others. One would

point of view of his own interests. From the point of view of the onlooker such a person's conduct might seem quite unpredictable and inconsistent -especially as the person concerned is not likely to announce publicly that he does act entirely from selfish motives -but insofar as he has a principle of action, namely, the principle of self-interest, and applies it consistently, then his conduct, however deplorable morally, cannot be described, in terms of the criterion of consistency, as irrational.

(c) He may not realise that situations which are different in some respects are really similar in all relevant respects. If this is the case then what appear to be inconsistencies in conduct are really caused by an inability to grasp the facts of a certain situation or situations properly. Very often it is a failure of the imagination which is responsible for our overlooking basic similarities in situations. Thus a child who is gentle with her baby brother may be quite cruel to the cat, and her parents may wonder at this strange inconsistency, only to find later that the child had not realised that cats could suffer pain too.

say there was an inconsistency here. Yet if we include in the total situation the person's feelings or general state of mind at the time of action we might have to say that the situation was really different in this case: for example, the person might be feeling in a very cheerful frame of mind that morning. It might seem easy enough to get round this point by asserting that subjective feelings should not be included in the data of the "situation", but the difficulty is that these feelings often affect our judgment of the "external" facts of the situation. If we meet a beggar while we are feeling in a good mood we might tend to regard him in a favourable light, to notice his good points only -we might even persuade ourselves that he is not really a beggar at all. This being so, our only hope, often, of nailing a person down with the charge of inconsistency is to get him to define his terms most precisely: to state, for example, what sort of persons he regards as beggars and so on.

(3)The above point brings us to the third kind of practical inconsistency,namely,where we are not prepared to accept the logical implications of our practical rule of action.

In consistencies of this kind are very frequent.We are all liable to state dogmatically very general rules of action, only to find that the rule,if carried out consistently,has awkward implications which we had not at first realised.In particular we are often forced to enlarge the field of application of a principle in a way which we do not relish.The principle may, as it were, recoil back on ourselves -we may have to include ourselves,or "our side" in the "list" of things to which the principle can be applied.It is indeed one of the main functions of the principle of consistency to show that principles of action which seem valid when stated in general terms may require¹ modification when their full implications are revealed.

1.Often,of course,there is nothing wrong with the general principle itself,but merely with the way in which it is stated.The crystallization of complicated ethical principles into pithy political slogans is especially dangerous in this connection.Thus to take a topical example:the slogan "no forcible repatriation of prisoners" was bandied about during the conflict over the Korean prisoner of war issue,as though it were a perfectly clear and self-evident ethical principle.Yet,if interpreted literally,it opens the way for any prisoner,who so chooses,to seek asylum with the enemy -including those who have committed traitorous acts during their imprisonment.Moreover,if a prisoner can claim asylum on the grounds that he does not approve of communism and is not prepared to fight for it,does not the same reasoning apply to the prisoner who does not like capitalism?And if it is wrong to force the hater of capitalism to return to the democracies of the West,are we entitled to force him to fight for the defence of capitalism in the first place?No doubt some of these difficulties could be resolved, but the slogan,as it stands,has dangerous political implications which no country is probably prepared to accept.

5. We have now briefly summarised the kinds of situation in which, using the principle of consistency as a criterion, we may say there is a *prima facie* case for asserting that the action in question is irrational. It is necessary to stress that it is only a *prima facie* case, for in any given situation where a person is apparently acting inconsistently, or indeed is actually proved to have acted against the principle of consistency, it might be argued that nevertheless his action was a rational one. Thus, for somewhat the same reasons as we outlined in the case of the principle of accordance with the facts it can be shown that it is by no means always in our own interests to conform strictly to the principle of consistency. Not only do we not necessarily suffer any bad consequences if we act on beliefs which are self-contradictory or are inconsistent with one another, but it can be argued that the person who is too concerned with consistency is often less able and ready to deal with the practical affairs of life. Moreover, as has often been pointed out, a high sense of intellectual integrity in this matter sometimes leads to much unhappiness, inasmuch as it prevents us from accepting as true, beliefs which we would like to accept, and which others, less concerned with consistency, accept without reservation. How often do we find ourselves envying the person for whom these "trivial questions of consistency and inconsistency" are of no great consequence.

Of course it is, in general, true to say that it is in our interests to conform to the principle of consistency, though the correspondence between conformity to the principle and the

state of one's welfare is not as close as in the case of the principle of "accordance with the facts". The mathematician would not get very far if he did not conform strictly to the principle of consistency; and the person who, in practical affairs, throws consistency to the winds is not likely to succeed for long in any of his enterprises. Nevertheless, in so far as we cannot always equate conformity to this principle with "what is conducive to our interests" it is not possible to say that the use of this principle as a self-evident criterion of rational action depends ultimately on the fact that our interests are best served by conforming to it. Nor can we assume, when there is a conflict between our happiness and conformity to this principle, that the principle of consistency is the superior criterion of rationality. This position is only tenable if we hold that, in some sense, the principle of consistency imposes a moral obligation on us so that we feel under a necessity to conform to it even if it is not in our interests to do so - that, in other words, the criterion of consistency has an authority which the principle of happiness does not possess.¹ And this brings me to the next point.

6. When we say that it is rational to try to act in accordance with the principle of consistency it is doubtful whether we have in mind the thought that it is in our interests

1. I am assuming here that moral obligations really have the authority which they seem to have, and that it is rational to give duty the priority over desire. This problem will be discussed later, in chapter VII. It is not perhaps necessary to point out that even if we accept that we have an obligation to try to conform to the principle of consistency it is not therefore necessarily rational for us to act on this principle in every instance. In some cases the prima facie obligation to conform to the principle of consistency may be confronted with another obligation with superior authority.

to conform to this principle. If we were asked why we consider it rational to conform our actions to this principle we should probably regard the question as meaningless -we would say that it was "self-evident", that it was part of what we mean by the term "rational". And, as we have just said, it is unlikely that the question of the relation of this principle to our happiness would enter into our mind when we were making this statement. Indeed, in theory anyway, we should probably be prepared to assert that the question of happiness was irrelevant -that when, for instance, we modify an argument because it has been shown to contain a contradiction we do so simply because it is contradictory, and we feel under a necessity to try to remove the contradiction. Later on, it is true, we might be led to leave the argument as it stands because it is in our interests to do so, and we might be prepared to defend such a position as being a rational one, but this would not alter the fact that the immediate response to the presence of a contradiction is a feeling that it ought to be resolved or the argument given up.

This is tantamount to saying that we have a *prima facie* obligation to try to conform our actions to the principle of consistency, and that it is an essential characteristic of a rational being that he should feel under the necessity to try to resolve a contradiction whenever he is aware that one is present.

7. This whole question of the obligatoriness of the principle of consistency will be dealt with in detail when we consider the general problem of "the obligation to act

rationality" in chapter IX, and there we shall argue that there is a sense in which we can regard the obligation of consistency as the fundamental obligation. Here, I wish to make only a few comments on the common sense attitude to this obligation.

In theory, as we have said, common sense does seem to accept the notion that we have an obligation of this kind, but in practice its attitude is somewhat ambiguous. This is in part due to the fact that, in general, common sense is confused about the general problem of moral obligation, but there are more specific reasons too. For one thing it is sometimes the case that when we say to someone "you ought to be more consistent" we are implying not so much that they have an obligation to act consistently as such, but rather that they ought to be consistent so that, say, their friends will not be inconvenienced by their unpredictability. The real obligation lies here - i.e. the consideration of the interests of the friends.

The importance of this point is that it leads us to scrutinize more closely the common sense position in respect to this matter, and when we do so it seems to be less obvious that common sense does accept the idea that the principle of consistency has per se an obligatory force. There would seem indeed to be a certain suspicion of the idea of "consistency" for its own sake. The saying that "consistency is the hobgoblin

of small minds" is quoted with approval; we become impatient with the person who tries to be "too logical", or who worries too much about what we think of as "mere inconsistencies". Whereas we might say that it was irrational for a person to maintain, say, a religious belief which was obviously based on a falsehood, we do not so readily condemn a person for irrationality if his religious beliefs contain certain inconsistencies.

These observations do not, of course, necessarily disprove the former contention that we do accept, in principle anyway, the idea of an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency; but they do, at least, tend to show that we give the obligation a low ranking in the scale of moral values. We tend, in particular, to think that it is wrong for a person to be too fastidious about "mere intellectual consistency", especially if this fastidiousness¹ leads him to neglect more important duties.

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1. One can think of at least two reasons for this bias against over-concern with intellectual consistency. First, in many cases the really important thing about a theory or belief is whether it works. A scientist may realise that there is an important inconsistency between two hypotheses, each of which seems true, and may be worried about it; but from the common sense point of view the important thing would be that each of the hypotheses works, that it does its job. The scientist would be condemned if he wasted too much time trying to reconcile the two, instead of getting on with the practical applications of the hypotheses. Secondly, where we firmly believe that a certain set of beliefs is correct we often try to get round the difficulty of inconsistencies between them by asserting that though we cannot ourselves reconcile them yet we believe, in faith, that there is a solution to the problem. Thus the Christian, when confronted with the problem of undeserved suffering, will often say that there is an answer to the problem, but it is beyond human understanding. In cases like these the obligatoriness of the principle of consistency is formally recognised, but our obligation to apply it is evaded by pleading "invincible ignorance".

(See over)

We shall be concerned later (in chapter IX) to clarify the common sense position and, where necessary, to modify it. We may anticipate to this extent, however, by stressing the point that common sense does seem, in general, to underestimate the importance of the principle of consistency and to overlook the extent to which all human intercourse does depend on the assumption that men will feel some obligation to conform to the principle of consistency. It is not merely in the field of the intellectual pursuit of knowledge that this principle occupies a basic position; everytime we discuss any problem or try to persuade or teach somebody to accept some particular belief we are assuming that all concerned are prepared to abide by the principle of consistency. Moreover there is a sense in which, as we shall see, the principle of consistency plays a fundamental role in all moral questions.

This is not to say that in every given situation in which an apparent contradiction is present it will be our actual obligation as distinct from our prima facie obligation to try to resolve it. Often there are, indeed, more important obligations pressing on us at the time, so that we have to postpone the attempt to deal with the contradiction. But even if this be the case, or even if there are occasions on which we think that a set of beliefs are true notwithstanding apparent inconsistencies between them, the fact still remains that it is an essential aspect of man's

In respect to this latter point we must note that the appeal to "faith" does not really release us from our difficulty. The argument that "if we knew more we would see there was no contradiction" is, in effect, an admission that one or both of our beliefs is partly false. In other words, we have to admit that if two beliefs are contradictory then they cannot both be maintained as true in the form in which they are stated.

rationality that he should feel constrained to conform to the principle of consistency. Whatever he may finally decide to do about it in any given situation in which a contradiction is present, we take it for granted that, as a rational being, the presence of a contradiction will cause a sense of "unease", will give rise to a feeling that something ought to be done about it.

C H A P T E R V.

T H E C R I T E R I O N o f H A P P I N E S S.

I.

1. In this chapter I wish to consider the application of the principle of the "greatest good" in so far as it is used as a criterion of rationality in those situations where the question of our moral obligations either to ourselves or to others is not relevant, or in any case not immediately so. In other words, we are concerned with the question as to what the rational course of action is whenever, being faced with a number of possible sources of satisfaction, we have to decide which desire or complex of desires should be satisfied. And, of course, so long as moral questions do not obtrude themselves, the answer to this problem is a very simple and obvious one, namely, that we should choose to satisfy that desire or complex of desires which will bring us "the greatest good". In this context, the expression "greatest good" is best translated into the less ambiguous though equally vague term "happiness". Thus we consider it rational if a young man sacrifices the prospects of immediately high wages in order to train himself for a profession which, in the long run, will, it is thought, bring him greater satisfactions.¹

2. There is a sense in which the idea of "happiness" may be considered the most fundamental to the concept of rational

1. We are postponing until chapter XI consideration of the problem whether we are ever justified in thinking of any choice of action solely in terms of our own happiness. We are taking for granted here that there are some situations in which the question of our duties to others is not relevant.

action -that is,whether we are considering the effect of our actions on ourselves or on others we tend to think that the crucial test of the rationality of our actions is that they should lead to happiness or to the greatest happiness possible in the circumstances. Even if we qualify this statement, as we do, by saying that we should not seek happiness at the expense of moral and other values, it still remains true that we find it difficult to accept the notion that an action can be really rational if it does not -in the long run -result in an increase in happiness. As we shall see later common sense finds it a very "hard pill" to swallow that there might be an absolute conflict between the claims of duty and the claims of happiness, and will do everything possible to avoid accepting such a conclusion. In the same way, when we are considering how we should try to influence others in the matter of their moral standards or their general cultural and intellectual standards we tend to assume that an improvement in these standards will not be detrimental to their chances of happiness. If, in any given case, we think that our influence in these directions will result in a loss of happiness, or, rather, in an absolute loss of happiness then we usually think it wrong to pursue our course of action. We may think that the intellectual standards of a primitive tribe could be considerably raised, but if we think that by so raising these standards we are going to upset the traditional way of life which has given them security then we hesitate before taking the required action. Similarly, we hesitate before "wrecking" the religious faith of an old person because we feel that he is

incapable of recovering from the knowledge of the true facts. In short, whatever other values the "good life" might be said to consist of, common sense asserts that it must be a happy life.

Another way of putting the same point is to say that common sense tends to think that the most satisfying reason of all for action, the one which is the most self-evidently reasonable, is that the action will produce happiness. Even in regard to the moral field, where often we seem to be dealing with obligations which cannot possibly be interpreted in terms of their conduciveness to the greatest happiness, common sense does tend to apply some kind of utilitarian formula as the test of the rightness of actions. As Sidgwick puts it: "Few will deny that happiness is an end at which it is thought ultimately reasonable to aim: if I can say of any action that it makes me happier, it seems that no further reason need be given for my doing it. 2

It might be questioned whether, in fact, common sense does give such prominence to happiness as a criterion of rationality, and this is a question which we shall deal with later in this chapter, but here it can be pointed out briefly that some of the objections which one hears raised against the idea of happiness as a satisfying and reasonable end of conduct have their origin in certain confusions of thought regarding the nature of happiness itself and the means whereby the state of happiness is to be obtained. Often we find that the objection is not against happiness as such, but rather against, say, the seeking of

1. See chapter X for discussion of this point.

2. Op. cit., p. 84.

one's own happiness to the exclusion of the happiness of others; or against, say, the identification of happiness with a kind of life which we regard as morally undesirable. And these objections, perhaps legitimate in themselves, lead us to think that happiness is not per se an end at which we ought to aim. Happiness becomes associated with selfishness or with pleasure-seeking or with something else which we disapprove of morally.

3. When we say that a person acts rationally if he chooses that course of action which will give him an increase of happiness the term "rational" refers not only to the intrinsic desirability of happiness as a state of being but also to the fact that the person concerned, in order to pursue his course of action, had to control his immediate impulses, reason out consequences etc. - in other words had to engage in actions which we think of as specifically human, as specifically belonging to a being who possesses reason. Thus if a lad resists the temptations of an immediately high-paying job we praise him, not merely because he has thought in long-range terms - in terms of happiness rather than of immediate pleasures - but also because he has sufficient control over himself to resist the immediate temptation. Similarly, if a person, faced with a complicated problem, refuses to take the most obvious way out which suggests itself, but tries to work out in detail the effects of each possible alternative course of action on his general well being, we praise him for having acted rationally not merely because he has, again, thought of happiness rather than of some immediate interest, but also

because his close and accurate reasoning out of the problem has demonstrated that he is a man who is capable of controlling his actions by the judgments of reason.

This point is worth noting, for it is sometimes forgotten by those who raise moral objections to the pursuit of happiness, that the successful attainment of happiness often depends, in part anyway, on the ability of the person concerned to resist immediate temptations, to control natural instincts, to engage in patient reasoning, and finally, to accept the judgments of reason and to modify his desires so that they come into conformity with the actual possibilities of the situation. In other words the achievement of happiness can be, though it not always is, a moral achievement also.

II.

4. In respect to the principle of happiness as a criterion of rational action there are three main problems to be discussed: first, whether there can be an absolute conflict between the claims of happiness and the claims of duty, and if so what the rational course of action should be in such a situation; secondly, whether in fact happiness is the desirable end of action which it seems to be; thirdly, whether it is rational in the sense of practicable to pursue happiness deliberately - to make happiness a deliberate aim in life. The first of these problems will be dealt with in chapter XI, the latter two in this chapter.

Before we can discuss any of these problems, however, it

is necessary to say something about two questions which are usually taken for granted, viz., the question of what we mean by the term, "happiness", and the question of what we mean when we say that "so and so was motivated by the thought of happiness". Ambiguity in our use of the term "happiness" in either or both of these contexts (i.e. where we are talking either about happiness in general or about happiness as a motive) is responsible for some of the confusion of thought which one associates with this whole problem of happiness as a criterion of rational action. In particular, we have to be careful not to confuse the idea of happiness, considered as a state of being, with happiness, defined in terms of the things which we consider will give us or will produce this desirable state of being.

5. Happiness, of course, is one of those words which seem clear enough in meaning for practical purposes, but which are nevertheless impossible to define in precise terms. Any definition which we formulate is bound to be vague. For all that, it is possible to say, with some preciseness, what we do not mean by the term, and in so doing to differentiate clearly between happiness and other states with which it can be easily confused.

The great difficulty, in defining happiness, is to avoid, on the one hand, the purely formal definition which tells us nothing and which begs all the important questions; and on the other to avoid defining happiness in terms of those things which

1. Thus, see Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, (trans. Ross) 1095b: Presumably however to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired."

we think are necessary to happiness, or which will produce happiness. In this latter case we not only confuse the end with the means, as pointed out above, but in identifying certain activities or certain possessions with happiness we open ourselves to the obvious criticism that other people seem to obtain happiness through quite different means. It would indeed be impossible to state either what the minimum conditions of happiness are, or to give any particular recipe for happiness which would be effective for all persons.

The nearest we can get to a satisfactory definition of happiness seems, to me, to be the following: Happiness is a state of being in which we enjoy an indefinitely prolonged feeling of pleasureable contentment.¹ It cannot be denied that this definition is very vague. It is also somewhat formal in character, though less so than the definition of happiness as "the chief good".

An objection might be raised here, viz., that our definition, far from being formal, is really of a highly controversial nature. It might be argued, for instance, that the idea of "indefinitely prolonged pleasureableness" would seem boring, if not repulsive, to many. It is in meeting a criticism of this kind, however, that the formal character of the definition becomes apparent, for, of course, the term "contentment" can be employed in such a way that the defenders of the definition always have, as it were, the last word. All we need to say is that, if we are

1. This is rather like Sidgwick's definition: "---the most pleasant consciousness conceivable, lasting as long and as uninterruptedly as possible."

repulsed by the idea of "indefinite contentment" then we are probably thinking not of the state of happiness as such but of some particular state of consciousness which we associate with happiness. For example the idea of "contentment" may bring to mind thoughts of a quiet, uneventful life and we may rightly say that a life of this kind would be very boring. But of course the state of contentment cannot be associated with any particular way of life. It is, by definition, quite simply a state of being which cannot be boring or unpleasurable.

6. Although our definition is vague it is not entirely trivial. It does emphasise the point, obvious enough to common sense, though not always to philosophers, that the state of happiness, whatever else may be said about it, is at least a pleasurable state, and is desired because of its pleasurable nature. This obvious point has sometimes been obscured by moralistic dissertations on the path of duty being the only way to happiness, and also by the fact that we sometimes sentimentalise about the psychological benefits that result from actions of an heroic nature. Thus we sometimes hear statements of this kind: "the martyr who suffers for conscience sake enjoys true happiness". This statement only makes sense if it is interpreted to mean that the martyr will enjoy true happiness as a reward for his sacrifice; it cannot possibly make sense if it is interpreted to mean either that the martyr enjoys happiness in contemplating the actual martyrdom, or that he enjoys the process of being martyred. Aristotle puts the matter bluntly: "Those who say that the victim on the rack, or

the man who falls into great misfortunes is happy if he is good, are
 whether they mean it or not, talking nonsense." ^{1.}

7. Our definition also prevents us from accepting the position, frequently held, that it is possible to be happy without at the time being consciously aware that we are happy. Many fables and wise sayings turn on this point, viz., of the elusiveness of happiness - that it is not until we have lost our happiness that we are aware that we had been happy.

The fact of the matter is, however, that all pleasureable states have this one thing in common, viz., that they are conscious states of being. A state of being cannot be pleasureable unless it is felt as pleasureable at the time of experiencing it. This is not to say, of course, that it could not have been pleasureable had the person concerned been able to appreciate it.

In making this point we do not mean to imply that we have to be self-consciously aware of the experience as pleasureable in the sense that we are continually reminding ourselves that "this is a pleasureable experience". Such an interpretation would cancel out, not only those pleasureable experiences which are so intense that their existence is incompatible with reflective thought, but would also raise all kinds of difficulties in respect to the way in which animals experience pain and pleasure. What we have to distinguish between is the consciousness which is merely the feeling that or the knowledge that we are experiencing pleasure, and the introspective consciousness which enables us to analyse

1. Op., cit. 1153b.

what kind of pleasure we are feeling. It is only the first of those which is a necessary prerequisite of our experiencing pleasure.

The point is well made by Sidgwick: "Still it seems to be a fact that any very powerful feeling reaching to the full intensity of which our consciousness is normally capable is commonly diminished by a contemporaneous stroke of cognitive effort; and indeed it has often been noticed as a difficulty in the way of exact observation of our emotions that the object cognised seems to shrink and dwindle in proportion as the cognitive regard grows keen and eager. How then are we to reconcile this with the proposition first laid down that pleasure only exists as we are conscious of it? Perhaps we may say that in so far as mere consciousness of present feeling is concerned, apart from distinct representative elements, the cognition cannot diminish the feeling of which it is an indispensable and inseparable condition; but in what we call introspective cognition we go beyond the present feeling, comparing and classifying it with past feelings, and the effort of representing and comparing those feelings tends to decrease the mere presentative consciousness of the pleasure.¹

We can only conclude then that when people talk of their not having been aware they were happy until they had lost their happiness they mean either: (a) that they now realise that the conditions for happiness were present at this former time, could they have but realised it; or (b) that the former state seems² blissful compared with what they are suffering now.

It is true, of course, that we are often unable to grasp the potentialities for happiness inherent in a situation until the situation has irrevocably altered - we are constantly learning wisdom when it is too late to profit by it. But admission of this does not alter the fact that we cannot be happy unless we are conscious of being so.

1. Op.cit., 132-131.

2. One of the reasons why we approve of this paradoxical doctrine regarding the elusiveness of happiness is that we always tend to idealise the past - to remember only the pleasureable incidents, or, if we recollect the unpleasant incidents, to view them in a way which suggests they were not really so unpleasant after all.

8. It is, I think, possible to give more content to the idea of happiness by the indirect method of distinguishing it from other pleasureable states. We can use two criteria here. In the first place the state of happiness has a more permanent quality than other pleasureable states. Pleasures which are associated with specific objects - the pleasures of eating, drinking etc - have a determinate time limit which can be assessed and predicted with some accuracy, but in contrast to these, happiness is of indeterminate duration. Or rather, to put the matter more precisely, it is only possible to be happy if, at the time, we feel sure that the conditions of happiness will remain stable. Any insecurity in this respect ruins the feeling of happiness. So far as specific pleasureable states are concerned the knowledge of a time limit does not diminish our pleasure in any degree, and in some cases may heighten it, but if we could have pre-knowledge that our happiness was to come to an end in the near future then it is reasonably certain that our happiness would end there and then. Of course we all know that happiness is a vulnerable state which can be destroyed at any moment by factors beyond our control, but this indeterminate knowledge - like the knowledge that we will ultimately die - need not ruin our happiness if we are able to adopt the right attitude to it. However, this general awareness of the precariousness of human happiness is a very different thing from specific knowledge of the how and when of the ending of our happiness. In other words we must feel sure that, for all practical purposes, our happiness is secure.

The second criterion is closely related to the first. It is that whereas most pleasureable states are associated with a specific activity or group of activities, happiness seems to be the product of a complex situation in which a whole range of desires of very differing kinds are satisfied. This being so the feeling tone of happiness is bound to be more diffused than in the case of more specific satisfactions most of which have a pronounced hedonic tone of their own.

There are some difficulties about this criterion which we can mention very briefly. In the first place we sometimes use the term "happiness" to describe a pleasureable state arising from a specific satisfaction. Thus we watch a man engrossed in his meal and we say, "well, he's happy anyway". In a case like this we may simply be using the term carelessly; on the other hand the use of the term may indicate that we think the person is enjoying not merely the specific pleasures of eating but also satisfactions of a more general and complex nature. The fact is that there are a number of pleasureable activities which have the power not only to produce their own characteristic satisfactions, but also to produce a more general feeling of well-being which is not permanent enough to be called happiness, but which, perhaps, could be called a "moment of happiness". Thus for one person music is not simply a matter of pleasant sounds, but is also a means whereby he can enter into a world of peace and serenity; for another, a walk in the country might have much the same effect. And these objects may be used for these purposes rather than for their own specific

satisfactions.

Secondly, it is sometimes the case that happiness seems to result from the occurrence of some major piece of good fortune, so that we say, "I date my happiness from such and such a time". Thus a man might claim that it was the winning of a fortune which really gave him the chance of happiness.

In cases like these, however, all that we are really asserting is that this particular event provided the final condition or the necessary condition for the achievement of happiness. We cannot intend to imply that this good fortune was in itself a sufficient condition.

9. I now wish to say something about the meaning of the term "happiness" when it is used in expressions which assert that happiness was the motive of the action. As we shall see the term is used more loosely here and covers a wide range of meanings.

The first point to note is that happiness, defined as a particular state of being, is not in itself an effective motive of action. The idea in general of a state of pleasureable contentment no doubt appeals to us - and in that sense we desire it (i.e. would like to enjoy it) - but the notion is too vague and elusive for it to compete with more concrete and immediate desires. When, therefore, we say that we are moved by the thought of happiness we usually have in mind the thought of something more specific and realisable than the vague notion of a state of contentment. The various possibilities which suggest themselves can be summarised as follows:

(a) Sometimes, when we say we are moved by the thought of our happiness, we mean only that we are moved by the thought of what we want to do as distinct from what we ought to do. Happiness is made synonymous with desire. This is too loose an employment of the term, and does not distinguish between being moved by what Butler calls "particular passions", and being moved by the more general idea of one's well being.

(b) More frequently, we mean that we are moved by the thought of what will give the greatest pleasure. We choose to do X rather than Y because we think X will give us greater pleasure.

It is not at all obvious that the principle of the greatest pleasure is to be regarded as always equivalent to the principle of happiness. For instance, if we are trying to choose between two specific activities - say, cricket or boating - as to which would give us the greatest pleasure it seems somewhat extravagant to say that we are here thinking about our happiness. Even in respect to choices between immediate pleasure and distant pleasure we have to differentiate between those instances in which we are concerned with specific pleasures only - whether to eat the extra cake and suffer indigestion later - and those instances in which the choice we make is likely to affect our life as a whole - e.g. whether to concentrate on sport now or forego the pleasures of athletic fame in order to make sure of a successful career later. It is only in the latter case that we can really talk of being motivated by the thought of happiness.

In this connection it is interesting to note that in

situations where we do have to choose between the long-term interest, and the immediate pleasure, our only hope often of countering the impact of the immediate pleasure is to concentrate in the imagination on some particular pleasure which we shall enjoy if we adopt the long-term policy. Hence, though our motive is the thought of our general well being or happiness, the actual conflict takes the form of a contest between two specific pleasures.

(c). Sometimes, our concern with our general well being arises not from any particular situation where a conflict arises between immediate pleasures and long-term interests, but rather from a general and vague feeling of dissatisfaction. We decide to "look into the matter" and to find out what is wrong. Thus we talk of a person being moved by the thought of happiness if, in a "cool moment", he tries to discover what his general well-being "consists in" - what objects give him the most satisfaction, what "way of life" would be most satisfactory, and so on.

This more intellectual approach to the problem is comparatively rare, and it is even more rare to find a person actually attempting to carry out, as a practical policy, the theoretical principles formulated in these "cool moments". It is against this particular interpretation of the happiness motive - with its implied assumption that a direct and systematic attack can be made on the problem of happiness - that the well known "paradox of hedonism" argument is directed.

(d). Occasionally the vague general notion of happiness is given sensuous content by the fact that we think that the way to complete contentment is to be found in a particular way -in the possession of certain objects, or the experiencing of certain feelings, or in the chance to lead a certain kind of life. Our problem then becomes the practical one of finding the means to satisfy these particular desires. Where, then, we are moved by the thought of "key desires" of this kind we may be said to be motivated by happiness.

In general it is probably true to say that though every man desires to experience the state of happiness, the thought of happiness as such is neither a common nor a powerful motive in human affairs. Even if we interpret the happiness motive in the most concrete manner possible -i.e. as the problem of discovering which of two possible courses of action will, in the long run, give us the most pleasure -it is by no means clear that the vast majority of men are, in fact, capable of deciding such a question in those particular terms. Thus, suppose a man is trying to discover whether he will, in general, be happier if he accepts the offer of a highly paid but very exacting job rather than stay in his secure, but modest and rather dull position in the Civil Service. In coming to a decision he may have to weigh against one another such complex factors as boredom, security, the wishes of his wife, hard work, responsibilities to children, and so on. This in itself would be a formidable task but if, as is usually the case, the task is undertaken without any clear principles to guide the investigation

then the possibility of a right decision being given would seem remote. In actual fact, where such difficult alternatives present themselves the decisive factor, as often or not, is likely to be some particular desire which happens to exert a powerful influence at the crucial moment. Often when we are faced with an important decision we decide, as we say, to be rational about it and to weigh up all the relevant factors coolly with a view to our general interest. But soon we get bogged down with the complexities of the problem, and baffled by the number of unknown factors with which we have to operate. We may not be sure what our desires really are, or whether we desire this more than that, or what the possibilities in the situations are. In the end we take a gamble, or decide the issue in terms of the particular factor which at the time seems most important.

The truth is that it is only the person who has thought a good deal about the problem of happiness in "cool" moments who is likely to be able to use the principle of greatest pleasure (or any other mode of the happiness principle) with any effectiveness. Unless we have a sound knowledge of our potentialities and weaknesses, of the relative strengths of our desires, and, moreover, a sufficiently wide experience of the world to give us a working knowledge of what is or is not possible, we cannot break down the very general principle of happiness into those rule-of-thumb principles of action which alone enable us to analyse a complex problem into factors which are manageable.

10. I now wish to deal with some of the criticisms which are made against the idea that happiness can be regarded as a rational end of action, and in particular against the idea that it is rational to make happiness a deliberate aim.

First, I wish to examine the view that happiness is not in itself a desirable state of being; that, in other words, it is not sensible to desire it, for in doing so we are really desiring something we don't really want. This argument, when stated baldly like this, seems so obviously fallacious that it may be doubted whether, in fact, it is ever used. But one does indeed hear moralistic sermons whose main tenor is along these lines. The argument takes various forms, and in each case it is possible to deal with the main criticism briefly:

(a). It is said that we should quickly get bored with happiness.

We have already dealt with this point. We need only repeat here that the argument confuses the end with the means; it assumes that happiness is synonymous with a particular way of life.

(b). The above argument may be modified thus: it is in the nature of man to get bored with any state of being he enjoys for a long time - the pleasure loses its savour. Therefore happiness is an impossible state of being. We are asking for an impossibility when we try to find happiness.

In answer to this we can make these two points. First, this argument confuses happiness with more specific pleasureable

states. Presumably, in "planning" for happiness we would make allowances for this tendency to boredom; we would try to arrange things so that we were never dependent on any one kind of pleasure for our general well being.

Secondly, in so far as some pleasures are more durable and intense than others; and in so far as some ways of life are found to be more satisfying than others, then this criticism would still leave scope for actions directed towards the maximising of pleasureable states.

(c). Sometimes the argument against happiness as a desirable state of being takes a moral form: it is asserted that happiness is not an end which would seem desirable to a man of good moral sensitivity.

It is difficult to know what arguments of this kind are really intended to prove. The following interpretations are possible.

(i). It is morally wrong to pursue one's own happiness.

This point, of course, is quite irrelevant to the question whether happiness as such is a state of being which is worthy to be desired.

(ii). It is morally wrong to make happiness our main aim - there are other ends which have greater value.

Again, even if this were true, it does not in any way affect

the point that happiness is per se a morally desirable state of being.

(iii) Sometimes the argument rests on a confusion between end and means. It is assumed that those who seek happiness will be what we call "pleasure seekers" - people who spend most of their time pursuing trivial or even morally disreputable satisfactions. That this argument does not touch the question of happiness itself is shown by the fact that those who use this argument often go on to assert that the only way to happiness is by the path of duty.

(iv) In some cases the moral argument against happiness is not directed against the state of happiness as such but rather against our being preoccupied with the thought of happiness when we ought to be concerned with doing the right thing for its own sake. Thus we criticise the man who follows the precepts of his religion for the sake of the reward in heaven.

(v) Occasionally the argument is directed against "pleasurable states" as such. It is said that the essence of happiness being the idea of prolonged pleasurable consciousness such an end would have no attraction to a morally sensitive man. Pleasure, in other words, is of no value in itself; any value which may seem to attach to it does so only by virtue of the activities from which the pleasure is obtained. Thus if a person derives pleasure from listening to good music we may congratulate him on his good taste or his good sense of values, but in doing so we are referring not to the pleasure but to the music.

This is the only moral argument which is directly aimed at the state of happiness itself, and it seems to me obviously false.

It is not denied that we do differentiate between one pleasure and another by reference to the means whereby the pleasure is obtained. We say that the man who gets pleasure from listening to Bach has a better musical taste than the man who gets pleasure from listening to jazz; or we say that a man ought not to get pleasure from inflicting pain on animals. But this in no way contradicts the assertion that pleasureable consciousness as such is desirable on its own account. Indeed the above argument can be used in such a way that it disproves the point which it was intended to make. For we could say that the value of pleasure as such is not in question when we say that "this or that pleasure is bad"; all that we are referring to is that the means whereby the pleasure is obtained are morally bad.

More positively we can point out that there are cases in which pleasure is derived from activities which are, as it were, neutral so far as values are concerned. They are not morally bad, but neither have they any claim to distinction either from an aesthetic or a moral or an intellectual point of view. Yet, from a common sense point of view, we certainly do regard the pleasure obtained from these activities as a good in itself. Thus while one would not rate the pleasures of sun-bathing high on the scale of possible pleasures, nevertheless it does seem excessively contrary to common sense to argue that the pleasure qua pleasure has no value at all.

If this moralistic argument were true it would be difficult to explain the enjoyment we derive from watching the pleasure of children. Nothing, indeed, seems more good than the innocent laughter of a child, or the raptures of a child on Christmas morning.¹

11. The above, then, are some of the arguments which are used to prove that in one way or another happiness is not a desirable state of being and that therefore it is not an "end" to be aimed at.

I now wish to deal with those arguments whose main purport is to show that it is not rational, in the sense of practicable, to make the thought of happiness an actual motive of action. In other words it is the argument that we cannot achieve happiness by making happiness a deliberate aim.

These arguments fall into two categories, the second of which is the more important. Sometimes the stress is laid on the fact that the actual conditions of happiness are largely beyond our control; secondly, the stress is sometimes laid on the fact that thinking about one's happiness sets up psychological barriers which make it impossible for us to achieve happiness.

In respect to the first of these arguments a few brief comments only are necessary. The argument consists in trying to show that happiness is not a state of being which we can command at will since its existence depends on factors which are largely beyond our control. Not only do we require reasonable environmental

1. See E. F. Carritt, *Ethical and Political Thinking*, pp. 92 ff. for a good discussion of this point.

conditions -economic security, opportunities to satisfy basic needs, interesting work, leisure etc., -but hereditary factors also have to be favourable -we need a sound physical constitution, certain temperamental qualities, normal appearance and so on. Sometimes we can alter these to suit our interests, but very often these factors are beyond our control. Luck, in other words, plays a very large part in determining whether we shall achieve happiness or not.

The strength of these factors can be admitted without our having to admit that it is therefore impracticable to make some kind of systematic attack on the problem of happiness. For one thing it is obviously rational to control or to modify those conditions where it is possible to do so. If the external conditions are so unfavourable that complete happiness cannot be obtained we can at least try to get the maximum pleasure out of the situation.

Secondly, this argument overlooks the fact that the achievement of happiness depends as much on the attitude we adopt towards the limitations imposed on us by environmental and hereditary factors as on those factors themselves. It can be readily granted that the external factors can be so heavily weighted against us that happiness in any degree is clearly impossible. A man sentenced to solitary confinement for life is hardly likely to achieve any kind of contentment, even though he be a saint. At best he might experience odd moments of serenity. But it is nevertheless possible to overcome unfavourable conditions by adopting an attitude of cheerful resignation concerning the things we cannot enjoy, and of intense appreciation towards the

things we can enjoy. And in so far as our attitude towards these conditions which are imposed on us is within our control, and can to some extent affect our chances of happiness, then, in that measure¹ it is practicable to aim at happiness as a deliberate policy.

12. The psychological argument, usually known as the "paradox of hedonism" is much more important, not only in that it is more penetrating than the above argument, but also because it has exercised a great influence. Indeed, in criticisms of hedonism, it is usually taken for granted that this argument delivers a completely effective blow.

The paradox of hedonism argument is usually directed against what we may call the "pleasure-seeker", but in so far as it is valid then its main point is also relevant against the "happiness-seeker". The argument is stated in many forms, but its general import is clear enough and can be summed up thus: Happiness is not the kind of thing which we can obtain by directly aiming at it. As soon as we try to achieve happiness by some kind of deliberate policy we find that we become over-preoccupied with our own states of mind and this sets us a psychological barrier to happiness itself. Therefore the only way to achieve happiness is by aiming at something other than happiness. We must become absorbed in things for their own sakes, and then -perhaps- happiness may follow as a "by-product". Or, to put the point more precisely:

1. It may be questioned whether these "attitudes" are within our control. Are they not, too, determined by temperamental and other factors? This view is only tenable, I think, on the assumption that we have no freedom of choice at all. Certainly, if we do think we have some freedom then it would seem to lie here, viz. in the attitude we adopt to the fact of our being determined in all other ways.

the best way to achieve happiness is by forgetting all about it.

There is so much obvious truth in this famous argument -indeed the "by-product" theory of happiness is now almost regarded as platitudinous - that it might seem that any criticisms which could be brought against it would be trivial only. What I wish to show, however, is not that the theory is wrong, ^{but rather} as that, in its usual form, it tends to over-state its case, and by so doing to give the misleading impression that happiness as a possible state of being cannot be made the subject of rational investigation.

First of all, let us state the valid points in the theory

(1) The theory correctly emphasises that it would be impossible for us to be happy unless we were interested in something other than our own happiness. We must have an interest in things for their own sake. As Butler puts it: "Happiness or satisfaction consists only in the enjoyment of those objects which are by nature suited to our several particular appetites, passions¹ and affections".

(2) The same point can be stated negatively if we assert that as a general rule those who are too much interested in themselves - in their own states of mind - are unhappy.

In this connection, however, it is important to be clear as to what is cause and what is effect. Moralists are inclined to use the above observation to prove their contention that the self-centred man suffers in the long run for his sins, as if to

1. Op.cit., p. 229.

157.

suggest that preoccupation with the self and its problems is always the cause of unhappiness. But while this is sometimes the case -that is, that the unhappiness is the direct product of a self-centred attitude of mind -it is also true that such a preoccupation with the self is often the effect of unhappiness whose cause lies elsewhere. It is, after all, the normal state of affairs for a person to have many "interests".

As we shall see this point is of some importance when we come to criticise the paradox of hedonism argument.

(3) Further positive support for the doctrine is to be found in the common observation that people who lead unselfish lives are often very happy. In thinking about the happiness of others they gain their own happiness.

This argument cannot, however, be pushed too far, for it is also true that people whom we think of as "selfish" are sometimes happy, or at least as happy as seems possible in this world. So long as his selfishness does not take a neurotic form, but is the selfishness of the ordinary man of average moral sensibility, then with some luck our "selfish man" may well achieve a kind of happiness. In other words, the world is not so arranged as to make happiness an inevitable reward of the "righteous man". It seems to be much more friendly disposed to the very average man who, gifted with a cheerful disposition and a shrewd sense of his own interests, does not worry over much about the finer points of the moral law.

13. So much for the valid points in the theory. Before

criticising it, it is necessary to point out two arguments which sometimes get confused with the paradox of hedonism argument but which are really quite distinct. The first we have mentioned just before: namely, that happiness is unattainable by deliberate planning, because most of the conditions of happiness are beyond our control. Whether this is true or not, it has certainly no bearing on the truth or falsity of the paradox of hedonism theory.

The second is the argument that the state of happiness is incompatible with reflective thought about one's state of happiness, a theory which, as we have seen, leads to the popular paradox that we are only aware of having been happy when we are no longer happy. We have already criticised this theory, but even if it were true it would have no bearing on the problem of the right means to happiness.

(1) The main fault in the usual statements of the paradox of hedonism argument is that the expression "thinking about one's own happiness" is not precisely defined. It is not made clear that there are two ways in which this expression can be interpreted, and that it is only in respect to one of them that the paradox of hedonism argument is valid.

(a) We may think about our happiness, or unhappiness, in the sense that we are constantly aware of and worried about ourselves - about the "state of our soul"; so much so that we have little time for the ordinary pursuits of life. Such a highly introspective state of mind may involve little actual thinking, in the strict sense of the term, and may actually be a bar to it. In any case, it is against this "neurotic" preoccupation

with the problem of one's own happiness that the paradox of hedonism argument is most effective.

(b) On the other hand we may think about our happiness in the sense that we make it a habit to review our life critically from time to time to find out in what respects we can arrange things so that we secure greater happiness or make the happiness we enjoy more secure. Or, it may be the case that an experience of unhappiness may lead us to examine our way of life more carefully in the hope of discovering what it is which is causing us to feel unhappy.

Now here there is neither a neurotic preoccupation with one's own states of mind, nor any question of a dangerous over-indulgence in self-analysis. What we have is, first, the belief that it is worthwhile on occasion to subject one's way of life to a thorough examination, and second, the belief that it is sensible, when confronted with the experience of unhappiness, to analyse one's attitudes and the total situation as it affects one in as cool and objective manner as possible. What we may discover as a result of these periods of self analysis may well be that we have, indeed, been thinking about ourselves too much, but the point to note here is not the particular recipe that we discover but the fact that results, conducive to our general well being, can be found from such analysis.

Now in respect to this kind of "thinking about oneself" it seems to me that the paradox of hedonism argument is not effective. Indeed, one could say that the paradox of hedonism

argument is itself the product of reflective thinking about the problem of happiness.

(2).The second fault in the paradox of hedonism theory stems from the point made above:it is that this theory tends to obscure the fact that "preoccupation with the self" is often the effect of unhappiness rather than the cause of it.If we are,for instance,very worried about something,or in bad health,we are far more likely to become "wrapped up" in ourselves than if we have no pressing worries,enjoy good health etc.

It is true that the habit of self-analysis,even when applied intelligently,can sometimes lead to the more neurotic introspective."thinking about oneself" which we have criticised above.But this is the kind of hazard which we must risk if we are ever to achieve anything.To over-emphasise the danger is to fall into the fallacy of condemning a thing because it can be abused or because it can lead to results not intended.

The fact of the matter is,as Butler pointed out,that we do not suffer from too much "self-love" but from too little.Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that what we suffer from is the superficial self-love which issues in selfish conduct and in a concentration on our own problems,and whose ill-effects can often be overcome only by a more searching analysis of what our happiness consists in.It would be idle to deny that the cause of

unhappiness lies often in factors beyond our control, but sometimes it is to be found in a lack of self-knowledge. We do not understand ourselves well enough: what it is we really desire, what our limitations are and so on. And knowledge of this kind can only be obtained by some kind of process of self-analysis. In other words our chance of happiness may often depend on our being willing, occasionally, to spend time in thinking hard about the problem of happiness.¹

14. We have now covered the two main objections to the idea that happiness is a rational principle of action. We have seen that the state of happiness per se is one which any rational being would wish to enjoy; and we have tried to show that there is a sense in which it is practicable and indeed necessary to aim directly at happiness if we are to achieve it. There remains the moral question, however, whether, granting that the state of happiness is, as a state of being, morally desirable, we are morally justified in making our own happiness an aim in life. And, of course, this question comes to a head in those situations in which there appears to be an absolute conflict between our own happiness and our moral obligations. We shall, however, postpone these questions until the final chapter.

1. It is to be noted, in any case, that the paradox of hedonism argument is not relevant to those cases in which the happiness motive takes the form, either of the desire to discover which of two particular courses of action will bring the most pleasure, or the desire to achieve a certain object or state of affairs which we think, as a result of past experience, will give us happiness. It is only relevant to the third interpretation given above. (p. 42)

CHAPTER VI.REASON AND DESIRE.I.

1. We have now examined the prima facie criteria of rational action. The question may be asked, however, why we have omitted from the list what would seem to be the most obvious criterion of all, viz., "that which is in accordance with reason". Certainly when we are describing a rational action we often use the term "reason" in some such expression as the above: we say that the action was "based on reason", or that "so and so was moved by reason", and so on.

2. There are two reasons why we have not accepted the principle of "accordance with reason" as a criterion of rational action. The first is the extreme vagueness of the term "reason" itself. Thus we may mean by "reason" either a "motive" ("he seemed to have no reason for doing that"); or "common sense" (you can do anything you like within reason); or "facts" ("his theory is based on sound "reasons"); or "right view of things" ("you must make him see "reason"); or "happiness" (he was tempted to give in to his passions but in the end "reason" won the day - he realised it was against his true interests); or the faculty of reason ("animals have no reason"). This being so it seems better to avoid the use of a term which can be as ambiguous as this, the more so as it can be shown that the expression "according to reason", when used as a principle of rational action, is analyseable into one

or other of the more precise criteria which we have already examined.

3. The second objection follows on from what has just been said: it is that the expression "accordance with reason" or equivalent expressions tend to give the misleading impression that the only actions which are rational are those whose motive is reason, using that term in its strictest sense as referring to the faculty of reason. As a matter of fact, as we shall see shortly, it is difficult to give any kind of sensible interpretation to the view that "reason can be an original motive of action" - unless of course we define reason in very broad terms - and on the whole common sense takes the view that the main function of reason is to be a guide to our desires. We reason in order to satisfy our desires. But this predominant view of common sense tends to become confused because of the ambiguousness of the term "reason" in such expressions as, "based on reason"; "moved by reason" etc. Thus, we sometimes contrast the rational man with the irrational man by saying that the former allows his actions to be controlled by reason whereas the latter allows his actions to be dominated by his passions, and this vague way of stating the position can easily lead to the view that the rational man is one who is motivated by reason as distinct from desire. In the same way, when we talk of a conflict between reason and desire we sometimes tend to talk as if this were a conflict between conflicting motives. It may of course be so, but it cannot be taken for granted that such a conflict really does take place. Often what we really mean when

we talk of such a conflict -and this, of course was Hume's main^{160.} point in his famous discussion of this problem - is that there is a conflict between an immediate desire (or "violent passion") and our general interest or happiness.

Because^{of} this confusion in respect to the definition and functions of reason it is therefore necessary to stress what might otherwise seem too obvious to mention, viz. that desire as such is a good reason for action. To be moved by the thought of a possible satisfaction is, indeed, one of the two main reasons - some would say the only reason - for acting at all. Nor does this desire have to be associated in any particular way with the faculty of reason for it to qualify as a rational motive - i.e. it is not necessary for us to be able to prove that the desire has its source in reason in the same way in which we might say that sex desire has its source in the sex instinct. Any desire at all, qua desire, has a prima facie claim to be regarded as a rational motive of action.

Similarly there is nothing intrinsically irrational about our allowing our actions to be controlled or even dominated by a particular passion. The decision to allow a particular passion to dominate the scene may, in fact, be irrational - it may, for instance, be impossible to satisfy this passion, or in satisfying it we may cause ourselves more pain than pleasure in the long run. But we cannot, out of hand, condemn a man because his actions are ultimately motivated by some strong emotional force, any more than we can say that a man is necessarily acting irrationally if his response to a situation is, as we say, "emotional". It is one of the

dangers of an over emphasis on the role of reason in human actions that it can lead to an unnecessary suspicion of the emotional and "passional" aspect of life.¹

4. It also follows from what has been said that we have to be careful not to take for granted that when we say "so and so acted rationally" that this is equivalent to saying "so and so acted according to reason", or "according to the principle of reason". It depends entirely on the definitions we give to the terms, "reason" and "rational" as to whether we can properly regard these expressions as equivalent. Obviously we could define "reason" so broadly that it is made to cover all the criteria we have listed as criteria of rationality, or we could restrict the criteria of rationality to those principles which seem to be closely connected with reason in the strictest sense of that term - say, to the principles of consistency and accordance with the facts. But prima facie it seems as though it is possible that the term "rational" would normally have a wider connotation than the term "reason", so that it would be proper enough, or might be proper enough to say

1. Thus the rationalist might accuse the religious man of being dominated by his emotions if he admits that he finds in his religion great emotional comfort, or that he first became interested in religion through a desire to experience mystical emotion. But of course there is nothing irrational about these desires as such. There would only be a prima facie case for accusing such a person of irrational conduct if we thought he was allowing these desires to cloud his judgment as to the true facts. No doubt this is often the point which the critic intends to make, but he sometimes gives the impression that he suspects the emotions as such, or that he thinks it irrational for a person to desire something which he personally does not find at all attractive. Thus critics of the Coronation sometimes seemed to be saying that it was irrational for adult people to enjoy ceremonials of this kind - a criticism, incidentally, which could be levelled at our enjoyment of drama!

that a person acts rationally and yet does not act according to reason. Thus we might hold that, in certain circumstances, a person is acting rationally enough if he does what is for his own happiness, and this, even though he is acting against reason in the sense of acting against the principle of consistency. Similarly, in the field of morals we may sometimes appeal to the rational principle of the greatest good to justify our acting against the principle of accordance with the facts, a principle which might justifiably be regarded as having its source in the faculty of reason.

5. However that may be, it cannot be doubted, I think, that the term "reason" is too vague to be used as the operative term for a criterion of rational action, and that the various aspects of the concept of rationality are best covered by confining ourselves to the criteria given above. Nevertheless, we cannot leave the matter there, without further comment, for the obvious question arises as to what relation there is between reason in the strict and more philosophic sense of the term (i.e. as referring to the faculty of reason) and rational action in general.

To this question there seems to be two possible answers: First, that the function of reason is to be a guide to the passions (and "passions" is here defined to mean "that which moves to action", including both desires and moral obligations). In other words, reason has no power of its own either to initiate action or to control it. Reason only comes into play when some desire has moved us to action, and its purpose is to show us how

our desires can be satisfied or, where necessary, how our obligations can be fulfilled. Though reason has no power of its own to move us to action it may, however, indirectly influence us in the direction of some passions or against others by judging which ends are practicable and which are not, by showing that an object has certain qualities which we had not known before, by demonstrating that this or that action will have such and such consequences and so on. In other words reason may mediate influence action. Ultimately, however, the springs of action are not to be found in reason.

On this view of the functions of reason it would be held that a person acts rationally if he accepts the judgments of reason, but it would also be held that in certain circumstances it might be rational (i.e. in accordance with the principle of happiness) to ignore the judgments of reason. In any case we are quite free to choose whether to accept the "advice" of reason or not; reason cannot exert any constraining power over us such that we feel we ought to obey it whether it is in our interests to do so or not.¹

The second interpretation of the function of reason is that reason can be an original motive of action in its own right, and not merely a servant of the other passions. This interpretation takes either or both of two forms.

(a) Reason exerts a constraining force over us. In other words we have an obligation to obey the judgments of reason, and

¹This, of course, is in general the interpretation of the function of reason given by Hume. It differs from his point of view only in the fact that we have accepted the idea of moral obligations as motives distinct from desires.

this obligation is itself an aspect of the functioning of the faculty of reason.

Two questions are obviously involved here: first, whether we have such an obligation; and second, whether the source of this obligation is to be found in the faculty of reason.

(b). Reason provides an original motive of action in that it is the source of, or gives rise to a particular desire. What this desire is, how it is to be defined - these are questions of some difficulty; but provisionally we may describe it as the "desire for knowledge for its own sake".

Common sense seems to affirm both the instrumentalist view of reason and the latter view, viz. that reason is a motive of action in its own right - though the first is easily the more common, and certainly the less ambiguous. It is possible that, on analysis, the second of the interpretations will prove to be but a confused variant of the first. Thus, though common sense talks of "putting ourselves under the control of reason" and of a "conflict between reason and passion" it may be that this is really only a metaphorical way of speaking, and that what we really mean, as Hume suggests, is that there can be a conflict between "calm" and "violent" passions.

Then, again, though we sometimes talk as though reason

prompts us to seek knowledge, to ask for the why and the how of things, at other times we argue as though the only good reason for searching after knowledge is that we may the more effectively satisfy our desires. Knowledge is a means to other ends, not an end in itself.

6. Now it is with the interpretation of reason as an original motive of action - and, in particular, with that aspect of it which suggests that reason is the source of its own desire - that we are concerned here. There are no special difficulties associated with the view that reason has a function as a guide to the passions; but many puzzling problems arise if we suggest that reason itself can be interpreted as a passion. Thus, if reason gives rise to its own desire we have the possibility of a conflict between this "desire of reason" and other desires; we might even have a conflict between such a desire and our general interest, in which case we would have the seemingly paradoxical position of a person's being moved by reason and yet acting irrationally in the sense of acting against his general good. In such a case reason would be a "violent" passion. And one can imagine even stranger paradoxes resulting from the admission that reason can provide a motive of action in its own right.

In this chapter I shall deal only with the theory that reason is the source of a particular desire; in Chapter IX I shall examine the view that reason can exert a controlling power over our actions by means of a moral obligation whose source is to be found in the faculty of reason.

II.

7. In dealing with any such question as, "Is reason a motive of action in its own right" we are bound, immediately, to come up against the objection that the question is not a proper one, since, in using faculty terms like "reason", we can simply beg the question by defining the faculty term to suit whatever view we wish to support. Obviously, if we define reason as the faculty which prompts us to seek to know the "how and the why" of things then it is self-evident that reason is an original motive of action.

Point is given to this charge by the fact that Hume, in respect to his handling of this problem, has been criticised by Reid and others for begging the question in this way. Thus Reid, in his polemic against Hume's doctrine of the relation of reason to the passions, continually stresses the point that Hume has deliberately excluded from his definition of reason that which was inconvenient for his purposes:

"Mr. Hume gives the name of passion to every principle of action in the human mind, and in consequences of this, maintains that every man is, and ought to be led by his passions ----- for if we give the name of passion to every principle of action, in every degree, and give the name of reason solely to the power of discerning the fitness of means to ends, it will be true that the use of reason is to be subservient to the passions ----. The contrary maxim maintained by Mr. Hume can only be defended by a gross and palpable abuse of words. From the meaning of the word reason he must exclude the most important part of it by which we

are able to discern and to pursue what appears to be good
¹
 upon the whole.

This particular kind of objection cannot be met without our making a short diversion from our main topic in order to defend the use of faculty terms in general.

8. It is fashionable today to make fun of the old faculty psychology, but I think it is possible to defend the use of faculty terms, provided they are employed with care.

The central objection to faculty psychology is, of course, that when we use faculty terms we tend to suppose that we are describing or disputing about empirical facts when really we are simply discussing matters of terminology and definition. We may begin, safely enough, by using a name or some other symbol to stand for a certain class of actions, but then, inevitably, we begin to talk as though the symbol stood for an existent. The psychologist, say, decides to use the letter "g" to stand for something called general intelligence, and he defines what kind of intelligent actions are to be ascribed to this "g" factor. But soon he starts arguing as though "g" existed, and as though general intelligence, or rather acts of general intelligence were the product of this "thing" named "g".

Now it is claimed that it is from this main error that all the well-known dangers of faculty psychology spring. In particular the following three points are often made: First, that

1. Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind Vol. 3, Ps. 217-219.

See also, J. Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature, P. 203.

in using faculty terms we tend to over-simplify our descriptions of human actions by the attempt to assign the cause of every action to one or other of the faculties in our faculty schemata; second, that we tend to juggle with the facts if they seem to conflict with the "tidiness" of that scheme; third, that we tend to define the faculty terms in such a way that we can prove whatever we wish to prove.

This is not the place to give detailed answers to these objections, but in general the answer to the critics of faculty psychology would seem to me to proceed along these lines:

First: It seems to be, in fact, impossible to avoid the use of faculty terms. All that seems to happen is that one kind of faculty schemata gives way to another. Certain terms or certain systems prove to be no longer useful and a new set of faculty terms take their place. Even those who are most concerned to avoid falling into the errors of faculty psychology tend, in unguarded moments, to employ their carefully defined terms in exactly the same way and for exactly the same purpose as the faculty psychologists and philosophers use theirs.

The reason for this apparently inevitable tendency to slip back into faculty ways of thinking is, I think, a very simple one, viz., that it is much more convenient to describe and explain human behaviour in terms of faculties than in any other way. It is more convenient, for instance, to say: "John Smith will pass that examination because he has a good memory", than to say, as we are taught to do now, "John Smith will pass that examination because he shows a strong tendency to remember facts more easily

and for a longer period than do most other people.

Secondly, while it is often the case that it is less misleading to say John Smith did this or that, instead of saying that it was his "reason" or his "conscience" or his "memory" that did it or was responsible for it (and this is particularly the case where the causes of the action are so complex that they cannot easily be assigned to any one faculty), nevertheless it is often necessary to refer to faculties in order to explain why such and such a thing was done or why such and such a thing happened. Thus if John Smith passes his examination, and someone expresses surprise at hearing that he did so we may reply by saying, "his good memory got him through -he remembered all his lecture notes perfectly".

Third, none of the dangers which we associate with the use of faculty terms are inherent to that method of exposition. So long as we are aware of these dangers and understand clearly the limitations of faculty terms, we are not likely to over-simplify or to twist the facts to suit our faculty schemata. There is nothing wrong in our talking as if faculty terms such as "memory", "intelligence", "imagination" etc. referred to real existents, provided that we realise that there is little or no empirical evidence to suggest that there are any "physical compartments" corresponding to these faculty divisions.¹ The physical sciences do not hesitate to use concepts such as "ether" if it is convenient to do so, even though there is much doubt as to whether

1. It would be begging the question, however, to assume that there are no physical "compartments" corresponding to our faculty divisions. Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that there may be such a physical basis.

the term refers to any actual thing.

It is more difficult to find an effective reply to the charge that the use of faculty terms in an argument always exposes one to the danger of a *petitio principii*. Since the definition of a faculty term must always, in the nature of the case, be somewhat arbitrary, is it not then always possible that we shall define our terms in such a way as to make it easy to prove whatever it is we wish to prove?

We must differentiate here, however, between the case where the proof of our theory really depends on the definition of the faculty term which we have stated at the beginning, or on the assumptions underlying that definition; and the case where, assuming a certain definition of a faculty term to be accepted as the right definition, we proceed to show that the particular theory we have been advocating necessarily follows from this. Thus if we wish to prove that reason is an original motive of action it would obviously beg the question to define reason as "the faculty which moves us to desire knowledge for its own sake". But if we take some common sense or widely accepted definition of reason and try to prove that there is some particular desire which is "linked" with reason, as so defined, then we have not committed any logical fallacy. Even, as a matter of fact, if we decided that the usual definitions of reason were inadequate, and recommended some other definition which made it more easy to show that reason is an original motive of action, we should not be guilty of a *petitio principii* so long as we did not use

the definition to prove our argument. Our case would rest simply on the adequacy of the reasons we were able to bring forward in support of our definition.

9. We may now come back to our main problem, viz. whether reason is a motive of action in the sense that it is the source of a particular desire.

I propose to define reason as the intellectual faculty by which conclusions are drawn from a given statement or set of statements. On this definition we can assert dogmatically that the operative principle of reason is the principle of non-contradiction.

From our point of view this definition seems to be the most useful for the following reasons:

First, it approximates closely to the common sense¹ view of the faculty of reason.

Second, it states, as it were, the minimum powers of reason.

1. The significant difference from the common sense view is that we have not allowed for the possibility that reason has intuitive functions. Common sense does seem to hold that reason gives us self evident truths; or rather it is the faculty by means of which we are able to intuit self evident truths.

I have not included this idea of the powers of reason in the above definition for these two reasons: First, that it would lead us into difficult philosophical questions far removed from our central theme. Thus, to mention briefly some of the difficulties: The intuitions which we most commonly think of as the work of reason are, (a) the so-called self-evident truths of mathematics; (b) certain fundamental a priori notions - for instance, "that every event has a cause; (c) certain fundamental moral axioms - e.g. it is wrong to take pleasure in inflicting pain. But, as we know, the interpretation of each of these classes of "self-evident" truths is an extremely complex task. Thus, the "self-evident" truths of mathematics might be held to be tautologies only, in which case they are all explainable in terms of the single intuition which we describe as the principle of non-contradiction. As for the a priori conceptions which seem to be implicit in all knowledge there are, as we know, very great differences of

It may well be the case that the functions and powers of reason range over a much wider field than is suggested by the above definition, but at least this definition gives powers to the faculty of reason which would have to be included in any definition of the term.

Third, it follows from what has just been said that we are less likely to beg the question in pursuing our enquiry if we define reason in this restricted way. Obviously it is more difficult to prove that reason can be a motive in its own right on the above definition than it would be on a definition granting wider powers. Indeed the above definition seems to suit the instrumentalist interpretation of the function of reason more than any other.

opinion both as to the interpretation of these a priori principles and as to their source. Then, in respect to the so-called moral axioms we again face obvious difficulties: first, whether there are any such axioms, and secondly, if there are, whether it is reason or a moral sense which is the source of these moral principles. Common sense itself seems somewhat ambiguous about this latter point, and often appears to use the term, "reason" as more or less equivalent to "moral sense" or to "conscience".

Secondly -and following on from this last point -we do not wish to prejudge the issue about moral intuitions. Certainly, if we show that moral distinctions are "given" by reason this does not necessarily prove that when we are moved to action by the thought of a moral obligation we are moved by reason. The question as to which faculty discerns moral facts, and the question as to what moves us to action when we try to act morally are distinct, though it seems reasonable to assume that they are closely related. And it would seem to go some way to proving that reason is an original motive if we could show that reason gives us moral distinctions, especially as we commonly think that the mere thought of something's being morally right gives us a motive to action. However, I want to postpone consideration of these questions until chapter VIII.

10. Before going on to discuss the question of how reason, as defined thus, can be an original motive of action there is one preliminary point which requires to be clarified. It is sometimes implied, in discussions on this problem, that reason might possibly be a motive quite distinct in kind from either motives of desire or motives of moral obligation. And this view is encouraged by the fact that the problem is often discussed in terms of the Humean statement of the contrast between passion and reason - passion as the moving force, reason as the instrument which we use to find means of satisfying our passions. It is thus thought that if we are to show that reason is a motive of action then we have to distinguish it clearly from passions or desires; if we do not then we shall either make nonsense of the problem itself, or else give the case away to the Humean viewpoint.

To all this we must emphasise what we have stated earlier that, ¹prima facie, there appear to be only two kinds of motive which can move us to action, viz, desire and obligation. Ultimately, whenever we act, as distinct from "behave", we do so either because we want to satisfy some desire or because we think we have a moral obligation to do something. No other possible reason for action can be given. Therefore when we discuss the question whether reason is a motive of action this can only be interpreted to mean that we are discussing whether reason can be a desire or a moral obligation, or both. And this, in turn, is

1. I say "prima facie" because it would be held by some that moral obligations are analysable into desires of some kind or other.

only a shorthand way of asking whether there is any particular desire or obligation which we can link with the faculty of reason in much the same way, say, as we link the desire for relations with the opposite sex with the sex instinct. In other words is there some motive of action which we would not experience if it were not for the fact that we "possess" reason.

To some extent the above point was grasped by the moral philosophers who argued, as against Hume's point of view, that it is reason which moves us to action when we are moved to do what is morally right, though their argument was vulnerable to the extent that they were not precise enough in their use of the term "reason",¹ and did not distinguish between the problem of what faculty it is which discerns moral facts and the problem of what it is which moves us to do what is morally right. But it did not seem to occur to them that reason might be the source of a particular desire which competes for our attention with other desires.

1. It is odd that Hume, who was so concerned to show how loosely the term "reason" is used by other philosophers, has nowhere, so far as I know, given a precise definition of the faculty of reason himself. The nearest we get to a definition in the Treatise is in the passage beginning, "Reason is the discovery of truth and falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact" (op.cit., p. 458). The vagueness and general unsatisfactoriness of this definition, even from the point of view of Hume's own position, has often been commented upon. In this connection see D.D. Raphael, *The Moral Sense*, pp. 51-52.

11. Now, as I have mentioned before, common sense sometimes seems to talk as though it is reason which prompts us to seek knowledge for its own sake, though at other times it implies that knowledge is sought for utilitarian purposes only, or perhaps in order to boast about our intelligence, knowledgeability and so on.

It is impossible to discuss the pros and cons of this question, however, until we have made it clear as to what we mean by the term "knowledge". Prima facie it would certainly seem to be the case that there is little connection between reason as defined above and the desire for knowledge.

When we talk of the desire for knowledge we may mean, at least, any one of these three things. First, the desire to have personal experience of something (and in particular of certain emotions). Thus the young artist may say that he requires greater knowledge of the world before his painting can become mature, and in saying this he no doubt thinks primarily of experiencing at first hand a wider range of emotions - he wishes to experience all that life can offer.

In respect to this interpretation of the desire for knowledge we can say at once that it is obviously impossible to show that it is in any special way connected with reason, as we have defined it.

Secondly, in desiring knowledge we may desire what we may describe as "factual information". Here we are concerned with that kind of curiosity which is, perhaps, exemplified most

obviously in the delight which people take in "quiz" programmes,¹⁷⁶
or in the insistent questioning of children.

There does not seem to be much doubt that we do desire knowledge of this kind, and desire it for its own sake. We enjoy finding out the names of things, whether such and such exists, how such and such works etc, and this quite apart from any possible utilitarian service such knowledge might perform, or quite apart from any desire to boast of our knowledge. We are simply curious,
as we say, to know the facts.¹

Hume, in the chapter dealing with "Curiosity, or the love of truth" seems to me to be quite wrong when he suggests that "the satisfaction which we sometimes receive from the discovery of truth proceeds not from it, merely as such, but only as endow'd with certain qualities". Among the qualities which he lists are, the pleasure we receive from exercising our mental faculties and from being successful, and the practical benefits of knowing the true facts.

It is probable that he was misled here by his general tendency to underestimate the role of the "particular passions". He did, in theory, allow for these passions: "Besides good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct which is perfectly unaccountable ---", but in practice he usually tried to fit the passions into his general utilitarian scheme, especially when, as in the present case, it might have been dangerous to have interpreted the passion as a motive in its own right. Thus, to admit that the "love of truth" moves us by itself, quite apart from any of the qualities associated with it, is to admit something which might well prove to be the "thin edge of the wedge" so far as Hume's doctrine of the function of reason is concerned, the more especially as he elsewhere defines reason (admittedly, in a very vague and loose manner) as the "discovery of truth".

The odd thing about this chapter on the "love of truth" is that if Hume's interpretation of curiosity is right then it casts a somewhat cynical light on the first sentence with which the chapter opens: "But methinks we have been not a little inattentive to run over so many different parts of the human mind, and examine so many passions, without taking once into the consideration that love of truth which was the first source of all our enquiries"

The fact is that Hume seems to be somewhat confused as to how he should interpret the passion of curiosity, and in particular how to fit it into his general schemata of human

The problem is to account for this kind of curiosity. Obviously it would be impossible to find the source of this motive in reason, as defined here. If we describe the operating principle of reason as the law of non-contradiction then it might be possible in some cases to show that our desire for factual information arises out of our awareness of inconsistencies in something we have hitherto accepted as true. Thus a child may come to be aware of certain inconsistencies in the stories she has been told regarding her baby brother's birth, and this may prompt her to enquire more closely about the "facts of life". But while the principle of consistency is the "trigger" which sets the enquiry going, the desire to know the true facts cannot itself be explained in terms of this principle. And, in any case, there are many instances where our desire for factual information is quite spontaneous and is not prompted into action by the awareness of contradiction.

If we do not place the source of this desire in reason, how else are we to account for it. We could, no doubt, explain it in terms of some inborn propensity - an instinct of curiosity - but this is one of those cases in which to explain something in terms of an instinct is more or less equivalent to saying nothing at all. All that we are really doing is giving a name to the desire and asserting that it is an original motive which cannot be explained in terms of any other motive. The reference to an

passions. He more or less admits that it is a difficult passion to interpret: ---"it is an affection of so peculiar a kind that it would have been impossible to have treated of it under any of those heads which we have examined without danger of obscurity and confusion".

instinct would only be fruitful if we could show that our intellectual curiosity -our desire to know the facts -was in some sense a development of a more primitive curiosity such as we find, perhaps, in the exploratory activities of the higher animals; or, again, that it was related to primitive man's fear of the unknown - that just as primitive man felt that if he could give a name to thing then it no longer had complete power over him, so now, whenever we want to know "the facts" we are being driven by a sub-conscious desire to "tame" the world by virtue of our being able to name, classify, give the "how" of things and so on. But, of course, even if such theories have an initial plausibility it would be impossible to prove that they were true, or that in themselves they gave a complete explanation of intellectual curiosity as we are¹ acquainted with it now.

¹Hobbes is particularly interesting in respect to this whole problem of curiosity, and it is instructive to compare his brief account of the matter with Hume's. He defines curiosity as "the desire to know why and how" thus, I think, broadening its scope to include not only the desire for factual information but also what I should call "the desire to understand" (see later). He carefully distinguishes curiosity from reason, though he thinks they are similar in so far as they are both peculiar to man. ("--such as is in no living creature but man; so that man is distinguished not only by his reason; but also by this singular passion from other animals"). In making this distinction Hobbes was of course influenced by his view of reason as an instrument of the passions. Curiosity, then, being an active force, could not be linked with reason, but rather brought under the general heading of passion - it is a "lust of the mind". One could have wished, though, that Hobbes had considered whether there was any particular relationship between reason and curiosity the more so as he claimed that they were both distinguishing characteristics of man.

The only other possible explanation for our desire for factual information is that it is a desire which has developed out of intellectual activities which once had a purely utilitarian aim. In other words man originally desired knowledge only for the sake of satisfying his passions, but gradually he came to have a delight in pursuing knowledge for its own sake. This may well be a true account of the matter but there is no particular reason for accepting it as true except in so far as we are prejudiced against the whole notion of knowledge for its own sake.

We must leave the matter there, there being no need for us to pursue it at any length since, unless this kind of curiosity can be shown to be connected with the faculty of reason, the problem of its origin is irrelevant to our central theme.

12. A third interpretation of the desire for knowledge is summed up in the expression the "desire to understand". On this account of the matter what we are desiring is not so much the facts as such - or, more precisely, we are not interested merely in odd scraps of information - but rather we desire to find a coherent explanation for things, to obtain a significant and intelligible explanation which will relate the mass of phenomena into some kind of system and render our experience meaningful.

Spinoza apparently seemed to think that the desire to understand had its source in reason or was "part" of reason:

"The essence of reason is nothing other than our own mind in so far as it clearly and distinctly understands; hence that which I

desire when governed by reason is nothing but to understand".

Though this is very vague, this statement does seem to be a possible answer to the problem we have been discussing, though admittedly it is difficult to see, at first glance, how the desire to understand could arise from the faculty of reason as we have defined it. However, when we seek for further elucidation of Spinoza's position we find that he is not really saying that we desire to understand for its own sake, but rather that we desire to understand in order that we may live virtuously, which for Spinoza means "doing those things which (we) know to be of primary importance for our lives and which therefore we desire most". Hence his theory concerning the function of reason does not really differ radically from Hume's. Reason, whether it be defined as the desire to understand or in any other way, is a guide to the passions. It shows us how we can live in the most satisfying way possible; or, how to satisfy those desires which are of the greatest importance. Thus we find Spinoza saying, -- this desire to understand is the one and only foundation of virtue, nor shall we desire to understand things for any other end".

And again, "For us to act with absolute virtue is nothing else but to act in accordance with the dictates of reason -- to live, to persist in our own essence (all of which mean the same) in seeking what is useful for us.¹

1. All these quotations are taken from Chapter V, Reason and Conduct in Hume's treatise -- R.M. Kydd.

In this chapter Mrs. Kydd tries to counter Hume's doctrine of reason as a slave of the passions by quoting Spinoza's interpretation of reason as the "desire to understand". Unfortunately her treatment of this problem seems to me thoroughly confused, and at no stage of her argument does she really convince one that Spinoza provides an answer to Hume. Indeed the quotations from Spinoza merely seem to emphasise the fact that fundamentally they

It is, I think, possible, however, to show that the desire to understand can be an original motive of action -that is that we can seek understanding for its own sake -and also that this desire can be so interpreted that its source in reason

both take the same attitude to the role of reason.

It is instructive to summarise the argument put forward by Mrs. Kydd for it illustrates very clearly the dangers inherent to this kind of discussion if the operative terms are not defined with precision.

She first describes Hume's doctrine of the role of reason as the doctrine of reason as the "mediate cause of action". Reason can acquaint us with facts which will "determine the nature of those ideas which are at any given time before the mind", but in the last analysis it is desire and not reason which is the original source of action.

She then states that "Spinoza also thought that reason was no more than the mediate cause of action", but adds that nevertheless he did not underestimate the control of reason over the passions in the way that Hume did. And in illustration of this point she quotes Spinoza: "we easily see the difference between the man who is led by emotion or opinion alone and the man who is led by reason. The former does willy nilly things which he knows absolutely nothing about; the latter on the other hand is governed only by himself and does only those things which he knows to be of primary importance for his life and which therefore he desires most"

But of course this is just a description of what Hume would call the conflict between a violent and a calm passion. Hume, too, thought that we could control our more violent passions by thinking of our "greatest good", or by thinking of the real and intrinsic value of objects instead of being carried away by their superficial attractiveness. (see Kydd, p. 133 and p. 142).

Mrs. Kydd then tries to express the difference between Hume and Spinoza by saying that whereas for Hume we reason only in order to satisfy our desires, Spinoza claims that we reason for its own sake. But when she tries to explain what is meant by "reasoning for its own sake" her account of the matter becomes very confused. She first defines it as "determining ourselves by reason is an end in itself" which seems an odd interpretation of the desire to reason for its own sake. One would have thought that a more obvious interpretation is that we enjoy the actual exercise of reasoning, a proposition which seems to me true.

This determining ourselves by reason is elsewhere described as the "desire to act rationally for its own sake", but when we enquire into the meaning of this latter expression we find again that it really amounts to no more than the desire to be determined or to act in accordance with the thought of our greatest good, or the thought of those things which really make

is made plain. First of all, however, we have to define more precisely what we mean by the "desire to understand".

This may be interpreted to mean the desire to find an intelligible reason for everything that is -to find a satisfactory answer to the question "why". And this is, no doubt, the sense in which people interpret the desire for understanding whenever they

for our happiness. Mrs. Kydd herself defines the desire thus: "for to desire to act rationally for its own sake is to desire to enquire what I should want to do all things considered".

It is true that elsewhere she states "that we can establish by introspection and by questioning others that men are often moved to determine themselves by adequate ideas simply for the sake of so doing", and this seems to suggest that we desire to be controlled by adequate ideas whether it is for our happiness to do so or not. It is not clear whether this really is what she is implying, and certainly it is not an accurate interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine. It would make more sense if she said that we feel under an obligation to determine ourselves by adequate ideas whether it is for our happiness to do so or not.

Finally, Mrs. Kydd tries to make a distinction between Hume and Spinoza on the grounds that whereas for Hume the main task of reason is the discovering of the means to satisfy our desires, for Spinoza the first task of reason is to give us adequate ideas about our desires -to tell us whether this or that desire will really give us the satisfaction we think it will.

But here again she overlooks the fact that Hume also regarded it as one of the main tasks of reason to give us the "real and intrinsic value" of an object as distinct from its apparent value ("the light under which it appears to us"). She asserts that Hume asked no questions about the original motives of action, whereas Spinoza subjected all desires to the scrutiny of reason, the only desire being exempt being the desire to act rationally itself. But though Hume did not question the rationality of being moved by the thought of happiness he did regard it as rational to scrutinise every particular desire from the point of view of its conduciveness to happiness. And this seems to be very much the same position as that adopted by Spinoza.

talk of men being moved by a desire to find "the meaning of life", the "truth about reality" and so on.

We can dismiss this interpretation as being useless from our point of view since, obviously, it would be impossible to show that reason, as we have defined it, is the motive force "behind" questions of the above kind. As a matter of fact even if we accept a wider definition of reason it would be difficult to prove that it is reason alone which prompts us to questions of the "why" order. When we seek to "understand nature" in the sense of seeking an explanation which will reveal the design or purpose "behind" the order of events we are usually influenced by other motives than mere intellectual curiosity. Motives of a religious or semi-religious character nearly always play a part - the desire for significance, for a sense of security, and so on. That is not to say^{1.} that questions of the "why" order are irrational. In so far as they are concerned with issues which have a very direct bearing on the problem of human happiness then they are at least worth asking, though we may not think we have very much hope of answering them satisfactorily. But the complicated strands of motivation which together seem to cause these questions to arise include factors which would seem to have little or no connection with reason, on any accepted definition of the term.^{2.}

1. Sometimes of course, in scientific work, the question "why" is asked where it is really quite inappropriate or quite useless. We are not concerned with this kind of "irrationality" in what we state above.

2. See note at end of chapter for further comments on questions of a teleological nature.

A second possible interpretation of the "desire to understand" is that it is a desire to understand "how things work" -to find the efficient causes of whatever happens. This seems to accord closely with the scientist's interpretation of such expressions as "understanding the workings of nature" and so on.¹

This way of stating the position gives, however, a somewhat inadequate description of the scientist's aim; it suggests that he is concerned only with particular problems as they arise - to find the cause of this event, to describe the behaviour of this particular organism etc. Thus we overlook that aspect of the scientist's work which is concerned primarily with the formation and development of hypotheses which will bring some kind of system or coherence into a field of apparently unrelated phenomena. It is with this aspect of scientific work that we are interested here, and it is from this point of view that we shall try to define the "desire to understand", or at least to give one legitimate interpretation of it.

On this interpretation we can describe the desire to understand in two ways:

First, it is a desire for unity, for system. Ideally this desire could only be satisfied when the whole field of human knowledge had been brought into some all-embracing unity, but in actual fact this desire usually operates only within a particular field of knowledge, or, at best, within a field of closely related disciplines. Only the philosopher has usually concerned himself with the establishing of wider systems, and even here it is probably true to say that very few philosophers now

1. See W.H. Walsh, Reason and Experience. P 14.

would consider it practicable, or even perhaps meaningful to
 try to establish vast metaphysical systems.^{1.}

Secondly, it is a desire to reduce to the fewest possible, the number of principles or laws by which any set of phenomena is explained. This may, perhaps, be regarded as simply a re-statement of the above interpretation, and it will be with the first of these interpretations that we shall be concerned below.

It is our proposed task then to show, first, that we can be moved by the desire to understand (as so interpreted) for its own sake; and secondly, that, in being so moved, we are motivated by reason.

13. In asking whether we are ever moved by this desire for its own sake it is necessary, first of all, to guard our position by making some preliminary qualifications.

First, it is not claimed that this desire plays an important role in the lives of the majority of men. It may indeed be almost entirely absent as a motive force in those who are preoccupied with the cares of daily living.

Secondly, even in the case of those who seem specially involved in the search for knowledge - e.g. scientists - it is obvious enough that this desire is not the only motive or even the chief motive of action so far as this search for knowledge is concerned.

All that we can plausibly argue is that some men are occasionally moved to act simply and solely because they desire

1. This does not mean to say that the idea of a completely unified system of knowledge does not appeal to them. It is doubtful whether we can ever "throw off" the attraction of such an idea.

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to seek for some kind of system where none appears to exist.

Now it is, of course, always impossible to prove that when a person appears to be moved by a particular passion he is not in fact being moved by some other desire of which he may be unaware or by the thought of pleasure in general. But it seems a good rule not to assume that sub-conscious factors are at work, or that pleasure in general is the object of desire, unless there are strong empirical grounds for suspecting the "purity" of the desire in the first place. And this should be kept in mind when one considers whether we really do desire understanding for its own sake.

Firstly, it might be objected that we are not really interested in system as such but only in the practical benefits to be derived from the establishment of some kind of organisation where once there had been chaos. Either we are interested in the saving of time and effort which such organisation will give, or else we believe that certain "utility" by-products will result from the establishment of a system.

To this argument we can only reiterate the point which is usually made when we are dealing with the desire for knowledge in general, viz. that it is quite obvious that the thought of possible practical by-products often plays no part in a person's search for knowledge. Indeed it is often difficult to imagine that some knowledge could result in any "practical" benefits. In the same way it is clear enough that the desire to unify, to connect up, is often quite unrelated to the thought of any possible practical applications. Sometimes indeed a scientist, say,

will pursue a problem long after the practical implications have been exhausted simply because he has seen the possibility of relating the problem to some other problem which previously he had thought to be quite unconnected with it.

Secondly, it might be said that it is not the idea of system as such which pleases us, but rather certain qualities or features possessed by the system. If these are absent then we lose interest. In this connection two kinds of qualities are particularly relevant: (a) qualities of an aesthetic character; and (b) qualities which give the system teleological significance. To deal with each of these briefly in turn.

(a) The idea that it is an aesthetic pleasure which we are really seeking when we try to achieve system seems very plausible because, not only do we prefer the more elegant or the more simple of two systems each of which explains satisfactorily all the relevant facts, but also we tend to remain dissatisfied with any system which is too complicated, and this, not merely for utilitarian reasons, but because simplicity is more aesthetically pleasing. We are always longing for the complete simplicity of unity. When we do not achieve it we tend to feel as the small boy does when his answer to the arithmetic sum is a most undistinguished fraction.

This can all be admitted and yet at the same time we can assert that the desire to relate, to connect up does exist quite distinct from any particular desire as to what kind of system we wish to discover. No doubt, as we have said,

we always hope that any system which we establish will be elegant as well as efficient, simple as well as sound, and there is bound to be a sense of dissatisfaction if we find that the only system which seems to explain all the facts is extremely complicated and inelegant. But we do not scrap a hypothesis because it is ~~in~~ inelegant, nor, when we are seeking for some way of tying together the facts into some kind of system, do we necessarily assume that the hypothesis which does the job will satisfy any aesthetic standards. Indeed the demand for system may be a strong moving force in someone for whom aesthetic pleasures mean very little. At the other extreme, of course, we have the person who has to fight against the influence of aesthetic standards. Thus Kepler is reputed to have been misled at first by his conception of the circle as the most perfect figure to which, as he thought, the movements of the heavenly bodies should conform.

There is one more point: in respect to aesthetic qualities we have to differentiate, I think, between the desire for simplicity and the desire for aesthetic qualities of other kinds. The desire for simplicity can, I think, be legitimately regarded as a form of the desire for system. It would be foolish to assume that, in fact, the proper hypothesis to explain any set of phenomena will always conform to the ideal of simplicity, and in some cases we may have to resist the temptation to "twist" the facts to suit the simpler of two hypotheses; but the desire for simplicity is nevertheless linked very closely with the desire for system.

(b) In respect to the objection that it is not mere

system as such which we desire, but a system which satisfies our desire for some teleological explanation of our experience of the world, we need only give the briefest of answers. It need not be denied that, for some, the only kind of explanation which is really satisfactory is one which answers the question "why". Even if the scientist were able to explain everything, that is, by means of a few simple principles many would remain dissatisfied with this type of explanation given in non-teleological terms. But it is equally true that, for some, the achievement of the kind of system which scientific explanation can give is a source of deep satisfaction. And one may also note that it is possible for a person who is satisfied only with teleological system so far as "ultimate explanations" are concerned, nevertheless to find satisfaction in the achievement of system of any kind within a more restricted field of knowledge. The religious man who finds all scientific explanations of the "universe" quite unsatisfying may yet, as an amateur naturalist, obtain great satisfaction from reading of a hypothesis which satisfactorily relates, say, the behaviour of migrating birds to certain variations in weather.

14. It is obviously more difficult to prove that this desire for system is connected with the faculty of reason than to prove that the desire exists in its own right.

The theory which I propose to put forward is that the desire for system is the positive expression of the motive which prompts us to try to remove any contradiction in an argument or between two theories whenever we become aware that such a

contradiction exists. Just as it is a sign of "reason" in a person to be worried by the presence of contradiction, so it is a sign of the operation of reason if he tries to show that phenomena which seem unrelated are really part of a coherent system.

It is not possible logically to deduce the desire for system from the fact that we are moved to try to resolve particular contradictions as they appear, but it is possible to show that the two motives are so closely related as to make it reasonable to suppose that they have their source in the same faculty.

(1) It would be agreed that the ideal exemplification of reason at work (reason, that is, as defined here) is in the disciplines of mathematics and logic. Now the appeal of these disciplines lies very much in the fact that they give us scope for the construction of self-contained systems within which every "part" can be shown to be necessarily related to every other part. Nor is this view outmoded if we take the modern interpretation of mathematics and logic as being the correct one. Even if we grant that the primitive propositions of logic and geometry are not self-evident truths about reality but simply "convenient assumptions", nevertheless the construction of alternative logical and geometrical systems gives reason wide scope for its employment. Its demands are satisfied in the building up of a consistent body of propositions on the basis

1. How this motive is to be described is a problem which we will deal with later. See chapter IX.

of certain accepted assumptions.

(2)The motive which prompts us to try to remove some contradiction often gives way imperceptibly to the desire to relate ,to unify.Thus the appearance of a contradiction in a theory,or of an inconsistency between two hypotheses may lead us to search for some wider system or frame of reference which will not merely enable us to overcome the inconsistency but bring into relation a wider range of facts.The appearance of an inconsistency is often the starting point of a more fruitful hypothesis or a more far reaching system of thought.

In this connection it should be noted that it is not merely the presence of an inconsistency which constitutes a threat to any hypothesis or theory we have formulated,but also the presence of facts which cannot be accounted for,or of phenomena which cannot be related to one another.There is always the possibility that the only explanation to fit these facts or the only hypothesis which can relate these phenomena will prove to be inconsistent with the more general hypothesis or explanation which had so successfully covered all the other relevant phenomena.Thus the desire to achieve system,and to extend this system to cover a wider and wider area of phenomena can be viewed as an attempt to avoid all possibility of contradiction arising. So long as there is one fact which cannot be accounted for by a hypothesis (even though an apparently minor fact),so long as one branch of knowledge seems to be quite unrelated to another branch then reason cannot rest -the possibility of contradiction

always exists.

(3) Lastly, if we are prepared to admit that the desire for system does exist quite apart from any utilitarian considerations as to the practical value of system then to what faculty or "instinct" are we to assign it, if not to reason. Of course we can dispense with faculty descriptions altogether and simply assert that the desire for system is an original motive of human action, but in so far as we are concerned with faculty divisions then it certainly does seem much more reasonable to place the source of this desire in man's reason than anywhere else.

III.

15. If we accept the notion that reason gives rise to a specific desire, viz. the desire for system, then some interesting questions arise as to the relation between this desire and the general problem of the rationality of our conduct.

First of all let us consider the relation between this "desire of reason" and the rational desire for happiness. We have already noted that the principle of happiness is used by common sense as a criterion of rational action. Now, in seeking happiness, we may be led astray either by mistaken judgments as to the facts or by being tempted by some immediate passion to turn aside from the course of action which we know it is in our real interests to pursue. There are some desires - we may call them, with Hume, "violent" - which are particularly liable to operate against our happiness in this way, but it is common experience that almost

any desire, given certain circumstances, can lead us astray, making us prefer the lesser to the greater good. Thus it is a conceivable possibility that reason, considered as a desire for system, could, in certain circumstances, become a violent passion conflicting with our general good or happiness - in other words, be an irrational desire, or, more accurately, a cause of irrational conduct.

This seems excessively paradoxical largely because we tend to use the terms "reason" and "rational" as being equivalent in meaning - that is, the term "reason" has a much wider connotation for common sense than it has in this particular context. Hence, to common sense, it seems a contradiction in terms to say that a person was "moved by reason" and yet acted "irrationally".

Nevertheless, when we have defined our terms more carefully, the paradox disappears and our view no longer appears contrary to common sense. It is true that common sense does not think of a conflict between reason and happiness in the sense described above, mainly because the desire for system, being a weak desire in most men, is not usually thought of when we are considering the dangers of an "excess of reason"; but, in other ways, common sense does regard reason as being a possible threat to happiness. In dealing with the principle of accordance with the facts we noted that there were occasions when it was considered quite rational to ignore the judgments of reason; here, it is sufficient to note that though in general common sense regards reason as a "friend" - a guide and adviser - it also

thinks of reason as a possible enemy. We are warned that we can have "too much reason", or that "we should not allow reason to dominate our life to the exclusion of emotion", and so on; and while the term "reason" is used here more loosely than in the context described above, yet these statements indicate that common sense is aware of the fact that man's reason, like any other faculty or propensity, can be employed in a way that is detrimental to happiness.

Whether, in fact, the desire for system ever becomes a danger in this way is a very difficult question to answer with any confidence. It is possible that where it does appear to be a dominating motive, other motive forces are also at work, using this desire as a means to the satisfaction of more fundamental desires, but it is not inconceivable that, for some minds, the desire for system could, given certain circumstances, become a violent passion upsetting the balance of life.

16. A paradox, or apparent paradox, that has more interesting implications is to be found in the statement that reason in its executive capacity may be incapable of carrying out the plans or fulfilling the demands made upon it by reason considered as a desire.

An objection may be made to this statement on the grounds that it is introducing ambiguity into our notion of reason to talk as if reason could be both a desire and the instrument by means of which the desire attempts to satisfy itself.

This objection seems important only if we take the

faculty theory of the mind too literally and suppose that there must be a corresponding physical structure for every specific activity. As a matter of fact, however, even if we do assume that faculties have a physical basis we do not need to assume also that the structure is simple -that any particular physical structure can only be linked to one specific activity. We can use the example of instincts to illustrate the point here. It is commonly thought that an instinct proper consists both of an innate propensity or drive and also of certain reflex patterns which are "geared" to this drive. These reflex actions carry out, as it were, the "instructions" of the propensity. In the case of instinctive creatures the "gear mechanism" is almost infallible, but the mechanism can break down if the environment changes too drastically, or if either the propensity or the reflex machinery is in some way defective. Now there is no close connection in man between his innate propensities and any one set of reflex patterns -man is not tied to any rigid pattern[?] reactions in order to satisfy his basic needs. But in the case of some of these basic needs man is equipped with the essential machinery required for the expression and satisfying of the innate "drive". Thus when we talk of the "instinct" of sex we include in that concept both sex desire and the mechanisms by which that desire finds expression.

There is nothing extraordinary, therefore, about including under the concept of reason a certain desire and also an instrument by which the desire tries to find satisfaction. The unique feature, of course, about the machinery of reason is that it is at the disposal of all other desires as well.

17. We must now state more precisely what we mean when we say that the machinery of reason may not be capable of fulfilling the demands made upon it by reason, considered as a desire.

This could be interpreted in the following ways:

(1) That in some particular case our actual reasoning ability was not sufficient to achieve the system desired. There was nothing inherently impossible about the task, but we were simply unable to find the right answers.

(2) That, in a given case, our reasoning ability was sufficient to satisfy our demand for system but that we did not employ the reasoning instrument efficiently - e.g. we were careless in our reasoning, or did not pursue the chain of reasoning with sufficient pertinacity.

(3) That the demands made by reason were of such a kind that the human reasoning instrument, as such, was quite incapable of satisfying them.

It is this last possibility which is of relevance here, though we cannot do more than touch on the problem briefly since to deal with it adequately would lead us into some of the most difficult issues in philosophy.

In saying that the human reasoning instrument is incapable of answering the questions prompted by reason, considered as a motive of action, we may mean one of two things: First, that the questions cannot be answered because they are not proper questions. Neither human reason nor any other instrument could give us an answer for, in fact, there is no answer to give. Second,

that the questions are proper -it is possible to think of some meaningful answer being given to them -but that human reason is incapable of discovering the right answer, or perhaps even to suggest possible answers.

In respect to the first of these two interpretations we can be reasonably sure that the point made in it is not a relevant one so far as reason, in the sense in which it is defined here, is concerned. It is possible that if we define reason in some broader sense then we can show that it does tend to prompt us to ask questions which, when carefully analysed, are seen to be meaningless. And from this point of view we might perhaps be justified in saying that there is a conflict within reason itself - reason in its analytic mode disciplines reason as the force which moves us to seek the answer to certain questions.

But if reason merely prompts us to seek for system then it is difficult to see how such a task could ever be a meaningless one. Of course if what we seek is not merely the establishment of a net-work of relationships, but a system which will satisfy certain requirements -especially requirements of a teleological nature -then it is possible that the desire which moves us to try to satisfy these requirements will lead us to ask questions which are meaningless. In its purest form the desire for system is not concerned with any one particular type of system to the exclusion of others. Each situation is approached, as it were, with an open mind, the problem being to find that hypothesis which will link up the various factors in the simplest way possible. But of course, in practice, we usually have a bias towards some particular

kind of solution -we approach a situation thinking that only a certain kind of hypothesis will really satisfy us. And it is here that the danger lies. Either we try to "force" the facts to fit the theory, or else our desire for a certain kind of explanation moves us to ask questions or to propound theories which are really without any significance. Thus the desire of a religious person to prove that there is a "design" in everything that happens may lead him either to impose fantastic interpretations on the facts, or else to suggest hypotheses which, though they appear to offer an explanation, are really non-significant in that they are the kind of hypotheses for which¹ no conceivable disproof could be found.

13. In those cases where the questions seem significant but where the reasoning faculty appears to be incapable of providing answers we have to differentiate between two kinds of situation. In the first the questions are of the type which seem to be outside the scope of reasoning altogether -that is, it is not so much an incapacity of the reasoning faculty which forces us to admit failure but rather an inability to find any other means of answering the question when it is clear that reasoning alone cannot do so, or that the method of reasoning is quite inappropriate.

Thus we may feel that no amount of reasoning will ever convince someone that a particular painting is beautiful if he has no "feeling" for visual arts in the first place. The question of beauty is not one which can be settled by reasoning from a given set of rules. It is not a question of any inadequacy in

1. See ps 276-278.

our reasoning capacity; it is rather that the problem is not one which should be dealt with by the faculty of reason. Similarly, assuming that the question, "Does God exist?" is a proper one, we may argue that it is not a question which can be settled by reasoning. Reasoning may help us to dispose of certain untenable positions, or to clarify what we mean by the question but, so we may argue, the problem of God's existence, if it is soluble at all, could only be solved either by some intuitional process or by some revelatory experience..

Now it seems clear enough that the type of questions prompted by the desire for system do not come into the above category. In trying to "impose" some kind of order on the "given" we may be setting ourselves a task which is beyond our reasoning capacity, but the task is not one which it is inappropriate to handle by means of the faculty of reason, or in which reasoning would play only a very subsidiary role. Other qualities besides reasoning capacity may be required - imagination for instance - but the attempt to order data into some kind of system is one which reason is eminently equipped to handle. And this leads me to the next point.

Sometimes reason may set tasks which are properly enough dealt with by the instrument of reasoning but which prove, in fact, to be beyond the powers of the human instrument. The task is too complex for us to handle with ease.

Now in this sense I think it is true to say that sometimes reason, defined in terms of the desire for system,

set^s tasks beyond the capacity of the reasoning instrument. And in some cases we may feel reasonably sure that the demands will never be fulfilled. But there is nothing particularly paradoxical about this. It is true of other desires also that they make demands beyond our power to fulfill. It is, of course, not irrational to feel such desires; we are acting irrationally only if we waste time trying to satisfy a desire which is obviously incapable of satisfaction.

19. It is only, then, in this last sense that we can talk of some kind of conflict "within reason itself", and even so "conflict" is a rather misleading term. It is true that if we define reason in a broader sense than we have done then more puzzling paradoxes seem to arise - it has sometimes been suggested, for instance, that it is reason which causes us to ask questions which are really meaningless, or that reason leads us astray by appearing to be capable of answering questions which, though proper, are nevertheless quite beyond its scope. However that may be, these more profound questions need not concern us here, since, on our interpretation, the source of the difficulties would not be in reason itself, but rather in those desires which try to "use" reason for purposes outside its range. That is not to say, of course, that these questions are not important. However we define reason the fact remains that we still have to deal with the problem that the human mind seems to ask questions to which no kind of satisfactory answer can be given. These questions seem legitimate enough and yet when we try to answer them we come up against

baffling problems -our minds"beat the air".It is in so far as we try to deal with the problem in faculty terms -to apportion the blame,as it were, -that the problem is not our concern here. For,as we have just said, we have argued that the source of these questions - we may,perhaps,conveniently label them "metaphysical questions" -is not in reason,but elsewhere,notably in the desire of the human being to find a significance for his place in the universe,a "meaning" for his life.

Note on teleological questions.

It is sometimes said that the question "why" is an irrational question, a relic of primitive anthropomorphism..The following brief comments seem apposite here:

(1)This criticism is only applicable when the question "why" is asked in a certain kind of context.Sometimes,for instance,it is more or less equivalent to the question "how".We ask,"why did the light fuse";we want to know the cause.Again,in trying to explain the behaviour or conduct of creatures who are capable of acting from purpose -and in particular of man -it would be considered sensible enough to ask "why" this or that was done -to ask for the motive or the purpose of the action.

(2).It is when we ask for a "why explanation" for things in general -when,for instance,we say that scientific explanations of the universe are not ultimately satisfactory,that only a teleological explanation would satisfy the mind -that the above criticism seems more relevant.

(3)Yet what does the criticism really amount to.It is not enough to say that the question "why" is primitive;one can never really explain away anything by revealing its origins.Nor is the charge of anthropomorphism as relevant as it seems.There is a sense in which all thinking must be anthropomorphic -that is, we can only think in terms of our own experience.Certainly it would be presumptuous to assume that the world is explicable in terms of purposes which are similar in every way to human purposes,just as it would be presumptuous to assume that the universe is ordered for man's benefit,but there does not appear to be anything nonsensical per se in asking whether there may not be a teleological explanation for the universe ,or in stating that it is only such an explanation that one would find satisfactory.

(4) When we criticise questions of the "why" order as irrational we can mean one of two things:

(a) That it is obviously the case that there is no "purpose" behind the order of events; there is as much evidence of lack of design as of design. Therefore, when we persist in wanting a teleological explanation we are simply shutting our eyes to the facts.

(b) That the question "why" is meaningless because there is no conceivable way of putting any answer we give to it to a test. Provided we word our theory carefully we can give almost any answer we like to the teleological question and be certain that it cannot be disproved.

In answer to these two points we can say this:

(a) While it may be clear enough that the universe does not conform, as it were, to any of the "orthodox" patterns (say, to the idea of rule by the Christian God), it would be begging the question to assume that no possible teleological explanation could be true. Indeed, an unbiased appraisal of the evidence would seem to suggest some kind of dualistic explanation: that we can most satisfactorily understand the world by reference to the idea of some final cause expressing itself through, or even in spite of, brute, formless matter.

(b). The second criticism above, if just, would be relevant if we actually tried to find an answer to the teleological question - we would be engaged in a fruitless pursuit. But this would not mean that the question per se was meaningless. It is not contradictory to say at one and the same time, "no possible answer could be given to this question, but nevertheless the question itself is quite legitimate".

(5). On the other hand, critics of the teleological approach are on firmer ground if they assert merely that the source of the question "why" is not to be found in reason, or not in reason alone. Those who do assert that it is reason which prompts the question "why" have to account for the fact that, for some minds, the teleological principle has no appeal at all. Some scientists, for instance, seem to be perfectly satisfied with the kind of understanding of nature which science can give us.

The bias towards one kind of explanation rather than another is probably caused by a number of factors, many of them emotive. This is not always realised by those who condemn teleological modes of thought. Thus the less sophisticated evangelists for positivism are usually unwilling to admit that their choice of "meaningful criteria" has been to some extent conditioned by emotive factors.

CHAPTER VII.DUTY AS A GOOD REASON FOR ACTION.I.

1. In considering the question of the relation between moral action and the concept of rational action we immediately come up against a difficulty which did not confront us when we were concerned solely with actions whose motive is some desire. The difficulty is this, that while common sense accepts in principle the idea of duty as a distinct and ultimately good reason for action, in practice it often seems to waver in its loyalty to this principle. And this hesitancy in practice is reflected in the scepticism of the more reflective man about the whole notion of a "categorical imperative" which we are obliged to obey whether we wish to or not, or whether it will be for our happiness or not.

Thus, though we should think it nonsensical to ask "why should I do what I desire to do?" we do not think it nonsensical to ask "why should I do my duty?" We see no point in asking what we mean when we say that "to desire something is, *prima facie*, to have a good reason for acting", but we do feel it necessary to question the meaning of the statement that "duty is a good reason for action".

Of course the question, "why should I do my duty?" from one point of view is a meaningless question. In so far as the term "duty" is used at all we are stating that there is something which "ought to be done" - therefore in any given case in which we know there is something which we are morally obliged to do

it seems meaningless to ask, "why ought we to do it". What we are really saying is, "why ought I to do what I ought to do?"

Sometimes, too, the question "why ought I to do my duty," when stated in a particular context, is really only a loose way of asking, "Is this really my duty?" What we are questioning is not the idea of duty as such, but whether we really are morally obliged to do this or that particular action.

There is, however, a very general sense in which it seems proper to ask the question, "why ought I to do my duty", and that is where we are concerned to know whether the notion of duty itself "makes sense". We are not denying that we are moved by something we call "duty", and that when we are so moved we experience something which seems quite distinct from the feeling of being moved by "desire". What we are inclined to question is whether the "feeling" of authority, of a claim on us, which the experience of being under a moral obligation always involves, is really genuine or not. Might it not be, in a sense, an illusory "feeling", the product of social conditioning? Perhaps, if we could trace back the origins of the notion of duty, we would realise that there is nothing very mysterious about its "authority" after all; that, indeed, we are not really under any necessity to do what we call our "duty", except in so far as we want to do it, or find it in our interests to do it; that, in other words, the only ultimately good reason for doing something is that we think we shall satisfy some desire in doing so.

It is with questions of this kind that we shall be concerned here.

2. As we have said, the ordinary unreflective man does not question, in principle, the idea of duty. There are several reasons for this, which we can only mention briefly.

First, we always tend to take for granted whatever is "natural", and as a sense of duty seems to be natural to man - i.e. is a characteristic of all normal men - it is simply assumed that there is nothing to question. Secondly, the ordinary man always tends to emphasise the social utility of the idea of duty, and to argue that we can only reap the benefits of living together as a community if everyone does his duty. Thirdly, the fields of desire and of duty often overlap - we desire to do what we ought to do. Fourthly, there is the widely held belief - often no more than a superstition - that the man who does his duty will not suffer for it "in the long run". Given this belief, the "sting" of the categorical imperative is removed, and the problem of what the rational course of action is when the claims of duty and happiness conflict is no longer a real one.

That the doubts of the more reflective man do find, however, an echo in common sense is shown in several ways. Thus, though in theory we accept duty as a good reason for action - as a satisfactory motive - yet, in fact, the term "motive", in ordinary speech, is more or less equivalent to the term "desire". For

instance, when we ask, "what was the motive behind his action" we nearly always think of some desire, not of some moral obligation. Similarly if we are explaining an action which was done, say, because someone had promised to do it, we may say "he did it because he had promised to do so", but we are much less likely to say "the motive for his action was his obligation to keep a promise".

Now this is a linguistic point only, and perhaps not too much should be made of it, but language habits often reflect deep-seated attitudes of mind, and it is possible that in this case the restriction of the denotation of the term "motive" to desires, only indicates that common sense thinks of desires as the ultimate motive forces - or rather "unconsciously" thinks so, since, of course, moral obligations are officially accepted as good¹ reasons for action.

1. There seems to be a similar confusion in Hume. In the chapters in which he discusses the role of reason in conduct he assumes that the cause of any action is always, in the last analysis, a desire (cf. R. M. Kydd, *op. cit.*, p. 104). But in the Third Bk. of the *Treatise* he argues as though moral obligations were also motives of action. "Morality --- is supposed to influence our passions and actions, and to go beyond the calm and indolent judgments of the understanding. And this is confirmed by common experience, which informs us, that men are often governed by their duties ---" (*op. cit.*, p. 457).

This contradiction may be only apparent, however, for it could be argued that Hume interpreted moral obligation simply as a special kind of desire (i.e. "when we are displeased "after a certain manner" at the neglect of an action we say we lie under an obligation to perform it").

That Hume was not entirely happy about this definition of moral obligation and about his general interpretation of moral action is shown by his strenuous endeavours to "explain away" the "oughtness" of the artificial virtues such as justice.

Then, too, while it is the case, as we have just mentioned, that the ordinary man tends to assume that in some way or other the dutiful man will ultimately be rewarded, it is also true that this belief is by no means held with firm conviction - in our more reflective moments we have many doubts about it. And the point to note is that as soon as these doubts become at all pressing we tend to become suspicious of the whole notion of duty - we question the validity of the claims of duty to over-ride the claims of personal happiness. This suspicion of the concept of duty may be held, moreover, by a person who is altruistic in conduct and not at all preoccupied with his own happiness. He may feel that though it is not very admirable to make the pursuit of one's own happiness the chief aim of life, yet nevertheless the question of one's happiness is of great importance and not to be set aside easily. Duty has to make out a case for itself, and this, it is thought, will be difficult unless it can be shown that, in some sense, the man of duty will be justly rewarded. There is something odd about accepting the notion of an absolutely binding categorical imperative if at the same time we believe that the world is completely indifferent to moral values.

Finally, we may note the suspicion with which the ordinary man views the idea of "duty for duty's sake". No doubt this is in part due to the fact that he mis-interprets the expression - he thinks that what is being advocated is a "theirs, not to reason why" attitude of mind - but there is also an element of mistrust of the notion of duty itself. The man, for instance,

who is of a "naturally" generous and kind disposition is contrasted favourably with the man who does things merely from a sense of duty, and so on.

3. It is when the ordinary man reflects carefully on the notion of duty that these vague suspicions become clarified and attempts are made to "explain away" the whole concept of duty as it is normally understood. That there is a persisting tendency in this direction is shown, I think, by the renewed attempts by philosophers (and usually by what we might call, "common sense philosophers") to analyse the duty motive into some kind of desire motive - to show that it ultimately derives from desire, or that it is just a special kind of desire, or that it is always in our interests to do our duty, and so on.

We can state the objection to the concept of duty in two ways, the one being complementary to the other.

(1). The concept of duty, interpreted in its strictest form (e.g. by Kant) does not make sense unless we presuppose that the world is ruled by some friendly, moral God of the Christian kind. In a world interpreted on purely naturalist lines, the idea of a moral imperative binding on us whatever the effects on our happiness seems quite out of place, and this for two reasons. First, that the notion of an imperative seems to presuppose the existence of something other than ourselves to which we owe, as it were, a natural obedience - which has a clear claim over us. Secondly, since we only have a duty to do what is morally right, it seems evident that the notion of duty presupposes the

idea that there are objective values, that in any given situation there is a particular course of action which is the right course.

Now, it is argued, in a "naturalistic" world neither of these conditions apply. It is meaningless to talk of "something," in such a world, to which we owe obedience, as it is also meaningless to talk of the existence of objective values. Indeed, if we regard the world purely from the point of view of science, then it seems quite indifferent to our moral values. Only the presupposition of a moral God could, as it were, save the day. Such a presupposition, it is said, gives meaning to the idea of a categorical imperative, forms a basis on which to build a theory of objective values, and, above all, provides the only assurance that the man who does his duty will not suffer in the long run for it - that, in other words, there is no ultimate clash between duty and happiness.

(2) A more positive attack on the notion of duty is taken by those who assert that the "feeling" of being bound by a moral obligation is the product of social conditioning. Originally men were moved by "natural" impulses, some social and altruistic, others anti-social and selfish. Society, however, could not be given a stable foundation unless the naturally social impulses of man were strengthened by sanctions which would deter the anti-social man and encourage the social. Thus certain actions of great social value came to be invested with strong emotional qualities - taboos were attached to certain actions, rewards given for others etc. Eventually, however, the utilitarian basis of moral codes was forgotten, and certain moral principles took on an almost mystical significance. Men came to feel that

they must obey these principles even though they would not suffer any external punishment if they disobeyed, and even though, in certain circumstances they might not see any good resulting from their obedience. Thus was born the idea of the categorical imperative.

Now it is easy to see that this explanation of moral obligation is in effect an attempt to "explain away" the whole notion of duty, to show that we are, in a sense, the victims of an illusion, though a socially valuable illusion, whenever we act as though absolutely bound to do some action we think right. And it is significant that this social conditioning theory is usually held by those who do not accept any kind of theological interpretation of the universe.

4. In the following section I propose to discuss the above two theories but before doing so it might be advisable to state that the point of view taken here is that the only fruitful starting point for discussions of this kind is to accept as given, as a matter of plain psychological fact, the uniqueness of the experience of being under an obligation. It may well be possible to prove that the experience of obligatoriness is, in some sense, illusory, that the being bound by duty is not what we think it is, but *prima facie* we must accept as a datum of experience that the feeling of being under an obligation is different in kind from the feeling of being moved by a desire. In other words, if a person had never had the experience of being under an obligation we should find it impossible to describe the experience by

means of an analogy with any other kind of experience.

Similarly we must accept as given that whatever else may be said about the motive of duty it at least carries an authority which no motive of desire can claim. In other words, it is a plain psychological fact that when we are confronted with a conflict between duty and desire, the motive of duty always exerts a peculiar force which we can only describe as the force of "authority"; it claims precedence over desire. This is not to say, of course, that it necessarily has more power than desire. Very often desire proves to be the stronger motive.

An attempt to explain or explain away the concept of duty which does not accept the above as data of experience is, I think, open to the charge of begging the question.

II.

5. The view that the idea of moral obligation makes sense only within the framework of some kind of religious interpretation of the universe is, of course, a challenge to the doctrine that the sphere of morals is quite autonomous and that the fundamental concepts of morality cannot be explained or justified in terms of non-moral concepts. And it is in this light that we must discuss the question.

First of all, let us summarise briefly the points in favour of a theological interpretation of the concept of duty:-

(1) On the presupposition of the existence of a God of the Christian kind a plausible explanation can be given for the existence of a sense of obligation in man, though the concept of

obligation itself cannot be defined in [terms of] theological terms for reasons which we shall note shortly.

Thus it could be said that God has "given" man a conscience so that when he is tempted to act contrary to what he knows to be right he experiences a sense of obligatoriness. God "speaks" to him through his conscience. Whether this seems a plausible explanation or not will depend largely on whether one accepts belief in God as a reasonable belief, but given this presupposition then the above theory seems to me somewhat more convincing than the usual run of naturalistic explanations.

(2). Acceptance of the idea of a Christian God guarantees that there will be no ultimate conflict between duty and happiness, thus removing one of the greatest difficulties confronting the defender of morality.¹ Admittedly the presupposition of a Christian God raises difficulties of its own -e.g. in respect to the problem of evil -which may seem more impossible of solution, but these are outside the scope of our discussion.

(3). Religion provides sanctions which, if they are accepted as real, encourage people to do what is right and to refrain from doing what is wrong. These sanctions usually provide a more effective spur to moral behaviour than any sanctions imposed by the state.

On the other hand it needs to be noted, though the point

1. As Sidgwick points out: "When a man passionately refuses to believe that the wages of virtue are dust, it is often less from any private reckoning about his own wages than from a disinterested aversion to a universe so fundamentally irrational that good for the individual is not ultimately identified with universal good" (Op.cit., p.463).

is obvious enough, that a belief in religious sanctions is not necessary for the performance of one's duties. Indeed it is often the case that duties are performed without any thought of external sanctions of any kind.

(4) Finally, belief in a God of the Christian kind gives a general sense of purpose and security to life which makes it more easy for us to perform our duties and in general undertake difficult tasks. Even though we could show that the moral field is quite independent of the religious, it would still be true to say that religious belief provides the right psychological environment for the growth of a morally vigorous life. The problem which the thorough going and honest naturalist must always face is the psychological one of being overcome by a general lassitude, a sense of meaninglessness. With no guarantee that the moral values, for which he is prepared to sacrifice everything, have any root in the universe, he must always be tempted to give the struggle up, especially when the indifference of the universe makes itself apparent in some personal way.

6. All the above points may be granted and yet it may still be questioned whether we need to presuppose some theological interpretation of the universe in order to make sense of the idea of moral obligation.

(1). The first point to note here is that we cannot deduce the moral "ought" from any non-ethical premiss, even though that premiss be a statement as to the existence of some God. The statement that a God of such and such a kind exists and that He

will punish those who do not obey His commands -such a statement might make us conform to the moral law; it would not, in itself, make us think we ought to conform, unless, that is, we already thought we ought to obey God. It might be thought that the proposition, "God exists," necessarily implies the proposition, "we are morally obliged to obey God", but this is not so. It is conceivable that God might be the kind of Being whom we would fear but could not respect; and, indeed, the history of mankind can be viewed, from one point of view, as the history of the failure of successive Gods to satisfy the moral aspirations of man. Even if the God we believed in was a God whom we thought we had a moral obligation to obey, it would not be possible to deduce the obligation to obey from the fact of His existence. Our sense of obligation to Him would be based not on the fact that He is God, but rather on the fact that He is a God of a certain kind -that He has attributes of which we approve.

No doubt we could argue that we would not approve of these qualities unless God himself had created in us the ability to appreciate moral attributes, but this is a quite separate issue, and must not be confused with the question of the logical derivation of the concept of obligation.

(2). Similarly, the content of our moral code -our particular notions of what is right and what is wrong -cannot be deduced from any proposition as to God's existence unless we add the further proposition that God's commands ought to be obeyed. The independence of the content of our morality from any theological presuppositions is shown by the fact that the moral

intuitions of those holding the same religious doctrines may differ quite radically in a given situation, whereas it is also the case that a sceptic in religious matters may nevertheless have fundamentally the same moral standards as the religious believer. Of course it is true that what we believe so far as religious doctrines are concerned will affect our views as to what is morally right and wrong. The Muslim thinks it morally right to have more than one wife; the Christian thinks it is wrong. The village atheist who is converted will probably change his opinion as to the rightness of drinking intoxicating liquor. But this does not mean that morality is dependent on a belief in God. The non-religious person can justly claim that his moral views are based on certain fundamental moral intuitions. And it is interesting to note in this connection that though the religious person, when asked to justify his moral views, can plead that his obligation is simply to do what God commands, or what the Bible or the Pope commands, in fact he usually tries to defend himself by appealing also to certain moral intuitions which he assumes that all rational beings regard as true. The Catholic, for instance, tries to show that his religion's prohibition of birth control is based on the fundamental axiom of respect for life, or¹ of the sacredness of the human personality.

1. It is sometimes said that the religious sceptic does not realise the debt owed by society to religion for the formulation and maintenance of moral values. A pagan generation inherits the moral code of a religion without acknowledging the source.

But the evidence seems to me to point as much the other way, namely, to the debt which religion owes to the sceptic for his pioneering work in the field of morals. Thus, in the last century, it was often the non-churchman who led the way in

(3).The view that the duty motive requires some kind of theological backing in order to be made intelligible is, in part, a product of a certain confusion as to what we mean when we talk of a moral obligation having a "claim" on us, or of conscience having "authority" over all desires. It is sometimes thought that we are referring to something "outside" us - to a Moral Law, to God - to which we must render obedience, and which has the power of life and death over us. And the inference is drawn that if no such "outside" authority exists then the whole structure of morality collapses and we are free to do as we please.

This view is encouraged by several factors. First, our knowledge of what is morally right and wrong is first taught us in the form of commands from parents and teachers, and suitable rewards and punishments are attached. Secondly, as adults we are very much aware of the legal, social, and in the case of religious people, theological sanctions imposed for any known breach of certain moral rules. Moreover, even if we have lost any belief we once had in religious doctrines, morality is usually taught to children in the context of religious belief, and hence we find that, unconsciously, we are influenced by the thought of possible religious sanctions. Thirdly, the term "duty" has come to be associated with unpleasant tasks which we would much prefer to leave undone were it not for the social pressures which force us

progressive social legislation, and in this century the development of moral sensitivity in such matters as the treatment of criminals and animals has coincided with a decline in religious belief.

The religious man often counters the above argument by saying that the sceptic is merely pointing out implications in ~~of~~ religious doctrines which the believer has overlooked. This may be so but it still remains true that the sceptic's moral views were not themselves based on any religious doctrine.

to conform. Also, we often use the moral "ought" in referring to actions which, privately, we think to be quite unnecessary or even wrong, but which we feel must be performed because of custom, family tradition, and so on.

As against this approach to the problem of moral obligation it has to be emphasised that the only moral reason for doing our duty is that we think the dutiful action to be the right action - a feeling of approval must be aroused, either at the contemplation of the action itself, or at the thought of the results which we hope the action will produce. This is not to say that we can define "right" in terms of feelings of approval; it is not self-contradictory, for instance, to say that we feel approval of what is wrong. But it is an essential characteristic of our thinking anything to be right that we should have a feeling of approval. This fact is obscured, partly because we come to take certain right actions for granted (e.g. we may keep promises as a matter of course); partly because we sometimes do the "right thing" merely because it is accepted as right, and not because we ourselves have given a "full-blooded" assent to its rightness; and partly because the performance of a duty sometimes involves us in the performance of actions which in themselves are distasteful, or in the denial of competing desires.

We can put the above point in another way by saying that the only claim which duty, as duty, makes on us is the claim that we should try to do what is right. But this, when all is said

1. We may actually have a feeling of repugnance at the thought of doing the dutiful act (e.g. the thought of hanging a murderer) and yet morally approve of the action (we approve of justice being done, or of potential criminals being deterred). It is easy to confuse these two feelings.

and done, is a claim we make on ourselves. It is we who, in the last analysis, have to decide what is the right course of action, it is we who decide what criteria we should use for determining what is morally right, and it is we alone who ultimately have the choice as to whether to act in accordance with what we know to be right or not. In other words, in so far as we try to act dutifully we are voluntary agents, and need not look beyond ourselves either for the criteria of rightness or for the source of the will to act dutifully.¹ This fact is overlooked, as we have said above, because in so many cases we seem to be acting "against our will" when we do our duty. Morality is seen as something which is imposed on us by someone else - by God, or society - and we long to be free of its shackles. Hence, when a person ceases to believe in God his first thought often is, "now I can do as I please; now I know that all this business about duty is really a sham". But, of course, he soon finds out that there are still things which arouse his moral fervour - that, for instance, when he sees an animal being cruelly treated he still says the action is wrong, and still feels moved to try to prevent further cruelty. And he would think it strange if someone said to him, "you need not bother any more about things like that, now you no longer believe in God", for the fact is that he wants to prevent the recurrence of the cruelty - the intuition of "rightness" is in itself a good enough reason for action. When we think we ought to do something we are not

1. Even if we say that the source of our standards is in God this presupposes, as we have said before, a prior intuition that we ought to obey God. This intuition cannot - prima facie, anyway - be traced to God. It is we who decide what God or Gods are worthy of our obedience.

of course always "filled with pleasure" at the contemplation of the act to be done, any more than we are always pleased to do those things which are necessary for our happiness, but in so far as our only motive in doing the dutiful action is that it is the right action then it is true to say that it is an action which we want to see done, even though we have no desire to do the action ourselves, or to do it at that particular time.

The voluntary nature of the dutiful act is shown most clearly in the moral actions of those who do not accept the possibility of theological sanctions. The religious man sometimes wonders why the non-religious man should bother about duty in situations where no external social sanctions can be applied, but this reveals a total misunderstanding of the nature of the moral motive.

From the point of view taken here, then, it is as irrelevant to say that the idea of duty only makes sense within the context of theological beliefs as it would be to make the same assertion about desire. This is not to say that duty and desire are really the same; nor is it to say that questions of theology have no relevance to the problem of the existence of moral motives in man. But it has to be accepted as a fact about man that he is moved by the thought of what is right just as much as he is moved by the thought of some desire; and it is a fact which has to be taken into account when we are attempting any general explanation of the universe. We may think, of course, that a theological explanation of the existence of moral motives is more plausible

than any other, just as we may think that we need theological assurance as to the friendliness of the universe to our moral values to provide us with the necessary psychological backing for the performance of difficult duties. But to say that we require to accept the above propositions as true before we have any rational justification for allowing our actions to be influenced by duty is really tantamount to saying that we cannot rationally justify our being influenced by anything at all until we have explained the motive in terms of some metaphysic. In their own way the experience of beauty and the experience of love are as mysterious as the experience of moral obligation, but we do not think a person is acting irrationally if he allows himself to be influenced by the desire for love and beauty before he has tried to explain them metaphysically.

III.

7. The points made above have to be kept in mind when we consider those attempts to explain the characteristic feature of the duty motive -its claim to authority -by showing that it has developed from a complex of simpler ideas. Explanations of things in terms of their supposed origins need not necessarily be attempts to "explain away", but very often they are. It is taken for granted that what is being explained is, in some sense, not "real", that we are the victims of an illusion if we take them at their face value, and the purpose of the explanation is to emancipate us from the hold they have over us. Thus the Freudian tries to release us from the superstitious belief in God by

showing us how the idea of God developed out of the child-parent relationship. But, of course, we beg the question if we use this kind of explanation as a proof of the illusoriness of whatever it is that is being explained. Other evidence is required in the first place to show that some belief is possibly false; only then is the explanation in terms of origins of much value.¹

And this needs to be remembered when we are discussing attempts to explain the concept of duty by showing the origin of the idea. Very often theories of the origin of the idea of duty are used to prove the contention that the concept of duty as we understand it now does not stand for anything "real" - that we are, as it were, the victims of an illusion when we feel that we "must" do our duty come what may. But this is to beg the question unless we can bring forward other evidence to support this contention. Nor will it be sufficient, as we have seen above, to argue that the idea of duty is quite out of place in a purely naturalistic universe. The only kind of evidence that would be effective would be, say, reliable testimony as to the existence of certain tribes whose members were totally lacking in any understanding of the idea of obligation; or experimental evidence to show that if a child were brought up in a certain way then the idea of moral obligation would never occur to him.

8. With these warnings in mind, let us glance briefly at

1. Explanations in terms of origins have often been criticised. (see Carritt, *The Theory of Morals*, p. 17). One of the commonest errors here is the supposition that the mature state of a thing is of less significance than the most primitive - that, in other words, the end must be interpreted in terms of the beginning, and not the other way round. This supposition may be true, but it should not be taken for granted.

some of the attempts to explain the concept of duty by reference to its supposed origins.

Of these the most famous is undoubtedly the social contract theory which, in its most sophisticated form, offers not so much a historical, as a sociological and psychological explanation.

The social contract theory of the development of moral concepts is too well known to require description here, but before commenting on it it is necessary to make one or two distinctions. First, we have to distinguish between the idea of obligation as such and particular obligations which we are called upon to fulfill. It is obvious enough that social conditioning plays an important part in the determination of what we think it our duty to do; it is not so obvious that the notion of duty itself is the product of social conditioning.

Secondly, we have to distinguish between the fact of our being able to understand the idea of obligation, and the fact of our capability to perform a duty when we know that we have one. Again, social training may well help us to perform our duties, or to perform particular duties with some readiness, but it is not so easy to understand how the idea of obligation itself can be the product of social training.

Now the usual criticism of the social contract theory of obligation is that it presupposes the very thing whose origin and development it is supposed to explain. If all the members of the

original society were prepared to trust one another to abide by the covenant then presumably the idea of an obligation to keep promises was already present in the members before the society was established.

This particular criticism is, however, only completely effective against those social contract theories which stress the binding force of the covenant, but it is possible to formulate a social contract theory in which this difficulty appears to be overcome.¹ All we need to postulate are the following factors:

1. Hume was awake to this point: "This convention is not of the nature of a promise; for even promises themselves, as we shall see later, arise from human conventions. It is only a general sense of common interest ---"

Though Hume presents the subtlest form of the contract theory, it is obvious that he finds difficulty in explaining away the fact of "obligation". He thinks that the origin of such "artificial virtues" as justice and promise keeping is self-interest, but realises that something more needs to be said if we are to account for the fact that we feel obliged to act justly even when it is not in our interests. Sometimes he seems to suggest that it is just a matter of conditioning; then he says that "for the sake of our reputation" it is wise to fulfill these obligations; but he realises that even this does not take us far enough, so he adds that there must be "something" in our nature to which parents, educationalists and politicians can appeal: "For if nature did not aid us in this particular it would be vain for politicians to talk of honourable or dishonourable, praiseworthy or blameable - these words would be perfectly unintelligible ---"

Then again, in another passage, he states that the artificial virtues have two foundations: "that of interest when men observe that it is impossible to live in society without restraining themselves by rules; and that of morality when this interest is once observed and men receive a pleasure from the view of such actions as tend to the peace of society--"

He thus tries to show how we may come to feel the same pleasure at an act of justice as we would naturally feel at witnessing an act of kindness, but he never clearly shows how this feeling gives rise to the idea of obligation, any more than in his analysis of the natural virtues he shows how the feelings of pleasure and pain which we associate with acts of virtue and vice give rise to feelings of obligation.

First, that men are aware of the advantages of community; secondly, the realisation that these advantages could be more securely obtained by a system of rules, with suitable punishments for the breaking of the rules; thirdly, a natural desire on the part of the members of the community to be well thought of; fourthly, an educational system which teaches the basic rules of the community as absolutely binding principles founded on religion; and lastly, a time-span of many generations so that the original utilitarian basis of these rules is completely forgotten - given all these factors, I say, and it is possible to give a plausible explanation of the origin of the idea of obligation. There is no particular reason, however, why we should accept it as true, unless there is some concrete empirical evidence to support the theory. It is only if we assume that the idea of obligation requires to be "explained away" that the above theory takes on an air of plausibility. Without this assumption it seems much safer to adopt the more convincing organic theory of the development of the state, viz. that the state, as we observe it now, is a natural product of a slow development from family life, through tribal organisation etc. - that the basic factors which contribute to the stability of the state, including the factor of moral obligation, are all present in the life of a family group. Certainly, the community experienced by human families would scarcely seem to be possible unless the members had some idea of duty.

One awkward implication of the social contract theory is often overlooked by its supporters, viz. that if its account of the idea of obligation is true then we really have no obligation

to conform to the rules of society if it is clearly not in our interests to do so. Why, for instance, should we sacrifice our lives in warfare if we can avoid doing so? To imagine that these rules are absolutely binding is to fall into the error which the social contract theory tries to expose.

9. Evolutionary theories as to the origin of the idea of duty are not so common, though they are in some ways more plausible in that they do not depend on the supposition of a historical break between man, living a non-political life, and man, living as a member of a fixed society in which he has rights and obligations. The basic theory would be that somehow or other, in the course of the evolutionary struggle, creatures of a man-like kind came to be influenced by the idea of obligation. The welding effect which this idea produced proved of great value in the struggle for existence, and those creatures whose groups were bound together by obligatory ties triumphed over their enemies. Thus the typical human society was made possible.

Theories of this kind have awkward implications for the "naturalist" who has perhaps formulated such a theory in order to explain away the idea of duty. For if we ask how the idea of duty could ever arise in the first place in creatures who had previously had no conception of it then ^{he} can only reply in one of two ways. We can say that it was part of the design of some God, or we can say that it was the product of some chance combination of circumstances. The naturalist would obviously settle for the latter conclusion but in doing so he really contradicts his other

assertion that the idea of duty does not make sense in a purely naturalistic world. For, of course, he would now have to hold that the idea of duty, as we understand it, was a product of natural forces; that, implicit in all that had gone before, was this idea of moral obligation, requiring only a favourable conjunction of forces for its birth. Moreover its success as an evolutionary weapon would almost seem to indicate that "nature" was on the side of morality - that it would be at our peril if we freed ourselves from its bonds.

IV.

10. Sometimes we attempt to "explain away" the difficulties which we suppose to be inherent in the notion of duty by interpreting duty as a special kind of desire. It is not denied that the duty motive is different in certain important respects from all other motives; what is denied is that it is completely different in kind from motives of desire.

Thus Hume seems to combine with his social contract theory the view that obligation is a special kind of desire. The latter view explains those obligations based on natural sentiments, the former explains how we come to feel obliged to act in accordance with the "artificial virtues". Hume nowhere gives a precise definition of what he means by moral obligation, and the only passage where he does appear to give a definition is so vague¹ that different interpretations are often given of it. In brief

1. Thus see Kydd, op.cit., p167 for a rather unusual interpretation.

his point of view can be summed up thus: (a) The term "pleasure" covers feelings which differ from one another in many respects - thus the pleasure we obtain from listening to music is very different from the pleasure of sun-bathing. Therefore in stating that morality can be interpreted under the general heading of pleasure and pain we are not necessarily denigrating its status. (b) All morality ultimately depends on our sentiments, on our capacity to experience certain feelings of pleasure and pain when we contemplate certain actions or states of being: "to have the sense of virtue is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. (c) The sense of obligation is derivative from these peculiar feelings of satisfaction. It arises when, for some reason or other, we do not wish to perform the action which we approve of as the right action: "All morality depends upon our sentiments; and when any action or quality of the mind pleases us after a certain manner, we say it is virtuous; and when the neglect or non-performance of it displeases us after a like manner we say that we lie under an obligation to perform it. (d). Therefore the obligation to do something can be interpreted as a peculiar kind of desire.

11. No doubt other variations of this view could be put forward, but we need not summarise them for they are all exposed to the same criticisms.

First, there is the question of appropriate terminology. Even if it could be shown that the duty motive could be adequately interpreted as a special desire, it would be quite misleading so to describe it. The characteristic which sets it apart, viz.,

its claim to "authority", not merely makes it different from other desires, but by its very nature often brings it into conflict with them. It is true that desires may come into conflict with one another, but what makes the conflict between duty and desire (ordinarily so called) unique is that duty always claims precedence in such a conflict. To call duty a special kind of desire tends to obscure this fundamental fact.

Second, if we interpret "rightness", as Hume has done, in terms of feelings of approval of a particular kind, then while we might be able to show that it was necessary to have these feelings of approval before we could have an obligation to do anything, we could not derive the idea of obligation from them, nor define obligation by reference only to them. As Hume himself has pointed out in another context, it is one thing to say that an action is right (i.e. that I approve of it in a certain way); it is quite another to say that it is obligatory.^{1.}

Of course if we define a right act quite simply as an act which ought to be done, then the above criticism does not apply, but such a criticism would not help those who, like Hume, are attempting to interpret duty as a kind of desire. It merely shifts the problem one step further back.

Third - and this is really only a re-statement of the first point above - when we think we have a duty to do something we feel that the question of whether we desire to do the action

1. See Kydd, op.cit., ps. 51-54.

or not is, in a sense, irrelevant. If the action is right then it ought to be done whether we desire to do it or not. Even if, as a matter of fact, we always did, in some sense or other, desire to do the action which we ought to do, and even if it could be shown that the desire was the operative motive, it would still be misleading to say that duty was just a special kind of desire. What we should have to say is that it is impossible to do what is right unless, at the same time, we desire to do what is right - a proposition which seems to me to be obviously false (unless that is, we beg the question by defining "desire" in a very special and unusual way.)¹

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1. Sometimes it is said that what moves us to do our duty when it conflicts with our interests is the desire to avoid the pain of a "bad conscience". If this is taken literally then it is really an admission that we think duty has a claim on us; but often what is meant here is either that we are worried about the possibilities of "being found out", or else that we fear religious sanctions. The person who does not believe in the idea of duty at all, but nevertheless finds it impossible to free himself from the superstitious fear of acting non-morally could, I think, legitimately talk of doing the accepted thing from a desire to avoid being pestered by "illusory" feelings of guilt.

Another theory is that what moves us when we do our duty is the desire to do our duty in general. We are moved by the idealised image of ourselves as a man of duty.

It is true, I think, that this motive sometimes plays a part in helping us to do difficult obligatory tasks. But it is not necessary. Sometimes we do the right thing simply because it is right. We must distinguish, in other words, between doing something because it is right, and doing it because we desire to do what is right.

12. The theory that the motive of duty is really only a special kind of desire has the merit, however, of drawing attention to the point which we made earlier, namely, that it is quite wrong to suppose that the chief difference between being moved by a desire and being moved by a moral obligation is that in the former case the source of the motive power is "within" ourselves, whereas in the latter case we are constrained against our will to do something we really do not want to do. The fact is that in so far as we act from a sense of obligation, and are not doing the right thing merely because we fear public opinion, or fear religious punishments, etc., then our action is an entirely voluntary one. The source of the moral action is as much "within us" as in the case of any desire, and though in any given case we may "curse" the being bound by an obligation this would not alter the fact that we think the obligation ought to be fulfilled. It constitutes a superior reason for action. It is, of course, impossible to define what we mean by "superior reason" in this context, but in so far as we have all experienced the conflict of desire and duty we know what is meant even if we cannot express it in words.

This truth is obscured, as we have said before, by the fact that we tend to associate the idea of obligation with legal or religious sanctions, and also by the fact that in many cases where we are called on to do our duty we are not really convinced that the action will produce any good, or we think that the sacrifice demanded of us is out of all proportion to the good expected. Thus the youth who has been taught that he must always

keep his promises suddenly finds himself in a position where he thinks it would do more harm than good to keep his promise. Nevertheless he finds it impossible to throw off the effects of his childhood training, and the result is that he tends to become thoroughly confused about the moral problem in general.

A correct perspective on the problem of the nature of duty can only be obtained if we think in terms of those instances in which we are thoroughly convinced that a certain course of action is the morally right course, and yet, because of a conflict with a competing desire, we find it difficult to do what is right. In such cases there is no doubt at all in our minds as to what we ought to do - as to which is the superior reason for action - and this applies even though, in fact, we find the temptations of desire too strong to withstand. A daughter who knows that she ought to care for her aged mother does not feel she is being imposed upon from "without", though she may think she is unlucky to be faced with such an obligation. The circumstances are imposed against her will; the dutiful act is a voluntary response to the situation. If, in circumstances of this kind, we refuse to accept our obligation, we do not really feel that we have struck a blow for freedom, that we have overcome the "guilt complex" and asserted our right to express our nature freely. On the contrary, we feel that we have denied expression to a fundamental aspect of our nature. And the more sure we are of the rightness of the action, the stronger will be our revulsion if we allow ourselves to be driven along by our desires.

C H A P T E R V I I I .

T H E P R E - C O N D I T I O N S O F D U T Y .

I.

1. The rationality of the common sense attitude to the question of duty may be attacked from another angle, using the principle of accordance with the facts as the criterion. of rationality. Thus it might be said that the common sense position in respect to moral questions is based on two assumptions, both of which can be shown to be false. The two assumptions are, first, that we have freedom of the will, at least in those situations in which we have a duty to perform; and second, that there are objective moral standards, that morality is not just a matter of private feelings, personal taste, and so on.

We shall now try to deal with each of these assumptions, reserving our main attention for the second.

2. Before we do so, however, there is one logical difficulty to note. If the whole idea of moral obligation is to be attacked on the grounds that it is based on false assumptions then there would seem to be implied in such a criticism that we have an obligation to conform our actions to the facts. We assume that once the falsity of these assumptions have been pointed out people will feel obliged to take up a different attitude to the question of morals. But, of course, to assume this would be in effect to accept the very idea of obligation the rationality of which we were concerned to dispute.

The only way out of this difficulty, so far as I can see,

is to take the view that in this particular case it will make for greater happiness if we modify or change our position so as to bring it into conformity with the facts. In other words, the relevant criterion of rationality would be the principle of happiness rather than the principle of accordance with the facts.

It would, I think, be difficult to prove that it would always make for greater happiness to give up the assumptions which underlie the common sense position in respect to morality, but at least such a theory avoids the logical difficulty mentioned above.

II.

3. It is a commonplace of philosophic thought that "ought" implies "can". We cannot be obliged to do an action, even though we know it to be the right action, unless we are capable of doing it. Thus we may agree that it is right to send money for relief work among earthquake victims, but if we are unemployed and penniless then that particular action is not obligatory for us.

The problem is whether this assertion need involve us in the vexed freewill issue. It is obvious that up to a certain point we can deal with the "ought implies can" principle on a level at which the freewill problem is not really relevant. This is the case, I think, at the following three levels of interpretation

(a) A person is not morally obliged to do something which is clearly beyond his physical or mental powers.

(b) A person is not morally obliged to do something if he is not physically free to do it (i.e. if he is forcibly restrained from doing it by external factors).

(c) A person is not morally obliged to do a right action if he has a prior obligation which clashes with it. (e.g. if a person has promised to give his surplus money to the mission fund he may not feel free to withdraw the promise in order to give the money to refugee victims whose cause he regards nevertheless as a pressing one.)

It is when we come to consider the psychological forces which restrain us from doing what we think we ought to do that we enter the territory which is usually covered by the freewill controversy, as well as involving ourselves in difficult practical questions. The following instances illustrate the point:

(1) A person is not morally obliged to try to do a certain action from a particular desire since it is assumed that we cannot command motives at will.¹ We may have an obligation to give assistance to our mother-in-law, and even an obligation to try to do so cheerfully, but we cannot have an obligation to desire to help her.

(ii). A person is not morally obliged to do some action if he has an invincible revulsion of feeling at the thought of doing the action. Thus a person may think it right to kill a wounded and suffering animal and yet be unable to do the act.²

1. There is one motive which we must suppose we have - in some cases anyway - the freedom to be moved by or not, viz. the motive of duty, otherwise the whole principle which is summed up in the expression "ought implies can" falls to the ground. When we say that we cannot have an obligation to do something from a certain motive we are assuming that desires are the only motives of action.

2. One of the weaknesses in the less sophisticated emotive theories of ethics is that a clear distinction is not made between the feeling of revulsion at the thought of an act, and the

(iii) A person is not morally obliged to refrain from doing some action which he knows to be wrong if he cannot resist the desire to do it.

Now it is obvious enough that from the common sense point of view (and often from the legal too) it is often very difficult in cases such as the above to know whether a person could have done other than he did -whether the psychological barriers were really insuperable. We find it difficult even to formulate clear guiding principles. But what we are concerned with here is the fact that in so far as we regard those psychological forces as relevant data in the assessment of a person's moral obligations then we do seem to be involving ourselves in the freewill issue as that is ordinarily understood. Therefore we have to say something to meet the criticism that the idea of duty rests on an assumption which isn't true.

4. It would be easy to answer this criticism either by saying, as many modern philosophers do, that the freewill problem is a bogus one, or else by asserting that the problem cannot be solved one way or the other, and that therefore the defenders of the common sense view of duty are entitled to assume as a matter of faith that we do have freewill. But, without trying in any sense to solve the freewill question, it seems necessary for us to

say something more by way of defence of the common sense view.

feeling of disapproval which accompanies the thought that the an act should not be done. Yet it is clear enough that there are many things which, emotionally, we should find it very difficult to do and yet which, when we think about the question calmly, we realise it is quite proper for us to do. Likewise there are many things which we feel attracted to do (perhaps they are acts of an altruistic nature) but which, on reflection, we realise we ought not to do.

In brief the following points may be made:

(a). When we have a choice between alternative courses of action we have a "feeling" of freedom. And this is a universal experience. Even those who on doctrinaire grounds do not believe in freewill cannot avoid feeling that they have freedom on some occasions. Of course this feeling might be an illusion, but we cannot beg the question by assuming that it is. The onus is on the determinist to give a plausible explanation of how such an illusion could arise. The fact that the defender of freewill cannot give a satisfactory intellectual account of his faith - cannot even give a satisfactory definition of "freewill" - is not in itself significant. The same position is to be found in respect to other fundamental "instinctive" beliefs such as our belief in our own identity, our belief in the continued existence of material objects when not perceived etc. It might indeed be said that the task of philosophy, or one of its tasks is to try to give a reasoned intellectual account of these beliefs. But if we fail in such a task we should not therefore assume that the belief¹ is false.

(b) It seems impossible to avoid the assumption of freewill when we are dealing with our fellows in the practical affairs of life. Sometimes we can feel confident enough that a person has not acted freely, but we find it impossible to act on the assumption that no one ever acts freely. We cannot of course argue that a doctrine is true simply because we cannot

1. See W.T. Stace, *The Problem of Unreasoned Beliefs* (Mind, Jan. 1945) for an interesting discussion of this question.

avoid assuming that it is true, but again the onus is on the determinist to show how a false belief like this could become^{1.} an integral part of our daily conduct.

(c). It could be said that we are arguing the wrong way round if we dismiss the whole notion of obligation because it implies the false belief that we have freewill. Would it not be more reasonable to argue that the fact of duty is itself the strongest argument for freewill? Certainly our awareness of being free agents is always most acute when we are faced with a difficult conflict between a moral obligation and a desire. Though we may be inclined, when observing the actions of others, to stress deterministic influences, we feel most uneasy about placing the blame for our own moral failures on, say, our heredity or our early environment. And the more sensitive we are to moral values the less inclined we are to excuse our failings by arguing that we have no freewill.

(d) Usually the determinist point of view goes hand in hand with a naturalistic interpretation of the universe in general. Just as it is thought that the idea of duty does not make sense in a naturalistic world so it is thought that there is no room for freewill in such a world.

But if we adopt the modern view of the significance of the scientific kind of explanation then it is doubtful whether we can argue that scientific theories as to the nature of the

1. It is sometimes said that we can adopt moral attitudes of praise and blame even though we do not believe in freewill. We can use them as practical techniques for encouraging or discouraging social and anti-social behaviour respectively. But it is often overlooked that these techniques could only be effective if the persons to whom they were applied really did accept responsibility for their actions. If no one believed in freewill they would lose their power to influence action.

universe have any relevance one way or the other to the freewill problem. It is only if we take what we think of as the 19thC. attitude to the task of science, viz., that the task of science is to discover the laws of nature by which everything can be explained, that we seem to trespass on the ground covered by the philosophic problem of freewill. And it is interesting to note in this connection that such a view of science is really a by-product of religious faith. Originally the scientist thought of his job as one of discovering the laws by which God governed the universe, and his faith in the possibility of discovering these laws was part of his general religious faith. Later the scientist tended to shed his religious belief but continued to maintain his belief in the idea of nature operating according to fixed laws. Parallel to this development was the development in the way in which the freewill problem was treated. At first it had been essentially a religious problem - how to reconcile man's freedom with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient God; later the problem became one of reconciling the idea of man's freedom with the existence of a universe conceived in terms of mechanical models. It was not until this century that the naive philosophy implied in 19th. C. science was adequately criticised by the scientists themselves, though of course the difficulties inherent in such a view had been dealt with by philosophers long before.

5. The above points seem to me to be of sufficient weight at least to dispel the notion that the concept of moral obligation can be easily explained away by attacking the doctrine of freewill.

6. I now wish to deal with the view that the notion of duty implies of necessity the idea that there are objective moral standards and therefore must "wither away" if it can be shown that in fact there are no objective moral standards.

Certainly, the common sense attitude to the question of moral obligation does seem to involve the assumption that there are objective criteria by which to judge of the rightness or wrongness of any particular action. When we say that we can only have a duty to do what is right we do not mean by "right" that which we happen, as a matter of personal taste, to approve of. We mean that we ought to do that which is "really" right, that which is right whether we happen to approve of it or not. And this common sense view would seem to reveal itself most clearly in the efforts we make to persuade others that this or that moral principle is valid or that this or that action is right. The fact that we argue with others about moral questions and are concerned with the problem of getting agreement as to the fundamental principles of morality - this is an indication not merely that we regard it as of practical importance to establish unanimity, but also that we find it difficult if not impossible to tolerate the thought that contradictory opinions as to what is right can both be true.

It is therefore a matter of considerable importance to establish whether this common sense assumption is justified or not.

7. Before we discuss this matter, however, it will be necessary to deal with one preliminary criticism. It might be said

that our interpretation of the common sense position is only valid in so far as we are thinking in terms of unsophisticated common sense. Among the better educated ordinary men and women there is, on the contrary, a widespread belief that moral judgments are purely relative; that what we believe to be morally right is largely dependent on the way we have been brought up and the environmental circumstances in which we are placed.

In answer to this criticism we need not deny that the ordinary man's point of view has been affected considerably by the discoveries of anthropologists and others as to the wide variations in moral standards that exist between one community and another. We can admit, moreover, that the evidence of these differences is often used as an argument for the view that there are no objective standards of morality. Nevertheless it is by no means clear that fundamentally the common sense assumption of objectivity has been modified. What the more sophisticated ordinary man might hold as a matter of theoretical doctrine is one thing; what as a matter of fact he tends to assume in his actual conduct is another. On the whole the assumptions implied in a man's conduct are a more reliable guide to his actual beliefs than what he propounds as an amateur philosopher.

In this connection we can make these few points. First, it is necessary to make the obvious distinction between an action's being right, and its being thought to be right. The knowledge that the moral judgments of other peoples varies from our own may make us less confident in asserting that our judgments are true, but we may still believe nevertheless that

where there are conflicting opinions as to what is right, they cannot all be true. Either one of them is true, or none.

Second, though we may reconcile ourselves quite easily to differences of opinion about moral questions which we do not regard as fundamental, we find it difficult to accept the fact that differences on fundamental, or what we regard as fundamental moral questions are simply a matter of personal taste. Thus it may not worry us very much to know that some people practise polygamy, and we may even be prepared to excuse actions which "shock" us (e.g. cannibalistic practices) if it is clear that some understandable motive such as economic necessity forced the natives into such practices, but if we find that a person does not accept some moral principle which we think of as fundamental then our benevolent neutrality drops away. The Englishman who believes with great conviction that it is wrong to inflict pain on animals for one's own pleasure is not likely to say that the Spaniard who loves his bull fighting is equally entitled to hold that it is morally justifiable to inflict pain on animals for pleasure. He will say that the Spaniard is wrong, that his moral judgment has been corrupted by social traditions etc.

Third, the ordinary man, if pressed to defend his view that there are objective standards, would probably reply that this objectivity is only apparent when we consider the views of those persons who have reflected carefully on the moral principles they have been taught as children. Such persons are able to dig down beneath the surface of merely conventional morality to the moral intuitions which provide the true foundation of all moral

conduct. The views of those who accept as a matter of course the ²⁴² morality of the society in which they are reared are really of no importance from the point of view of the question being discussed here. The problem can only be dealt with effectively if we confine our attention to those who have attempted to subject conventional morality to reasoned criticism. And the common sense faith is that at this reflective level the truly objective moral principles emerge very clearly.

8. Granted this common sense assumption, then, the question immediately arises as to what we mean by "objective" in this context.

The simplest answer to this question is that we mean that in any given situation there is a certain course of action which is the right action. We may not know what it is, but at least we know that actions based on contradictory propositions as to what is right cannot both be true. Moreover if the same situation were repeated then the action which was right the first time would of necessity be right the second time.

This is an important statement in so far as it stresses the point that when the ordinary man says that something is morally right or wrong he is not merely evincing his feelings, or stating a personal preference for one kind of action rather than another; he is intending to make a moral judgment, a statement which can be true or false - he intends to say something about a certain kind of fact. The trouble with the above statement of the position from our point of view is, however, that it is too formal. It does not give any content to the idea of objectivity.

What, for instance, do we mean by "true" when we say that moral judgments can be either true or false.

Three possible answers suggest themselves. Either we can say that it is God who establishes the objective standards; or, secondly, that the fundamental principles of morality are objective because they are based on reason; or, thirdly, that when we refer to objective moral standards we mean simply that there is agreement among all normal men regarding the fundamental principles of morals. We shall deal with each of these in turn.

9. We have already mentioned some of the difficulties that arise when we try to make morality dependent on the supposition of the existence of a certain kind of God. Here we shall summarise briefly the arguments which can be brought forward against the idea that the term "objectivity" when used in morals only has meaning within a theological context - that it is only by reference to God that we can establish an objective standard.

(i) There is first of all the practical point that the introduction of theological presuppositions involves us in disputes of an even more controversial and difficult nature than those which are involved in the moral argument. If, therefore, it is possible to give a satisfactory interpretation of what we mean by "objective moral standards" without introducing theological questions it would obviously be wiser to do so.

(ii) Secondly, to say that all moral standards derive from God presupposes the prior intuition that we ought to obey whatever God commands. We cannot, however, derive this obligation from the fact of God without begging the question. Even if, as a

matter of fact, our knowledge of what is right and wrong had come to us by means of some divine revelation which we had accepted as authentic, it would still not be true to say that these standards were accepted as morally binding because of their divine origin. Unless they seemed to us to be true per se we could not regard them as morally binding, though we might feel bound to submit to them for prudential reasons.

(iii) It is perhaps making the above point in another way to say that one of the criteria we use in deciding between the claims of rival Gods is the criterion of moral worth. Thus we are inclined to think that a more plausible case can be made out for the existence of the Christian God because of the superior ethic associated with the Christian revelation. It is not suggested that this is a good reason for accepting the idea of the existence of a God, but the above point is worth making if only because religious believers, when discussing the question of objective moral standards, are inclined to suppose that the problem is a very simple one. If you once accept the proposition that God exists, then everything else follows.

(iv). If we grant that it is God who is the source of all moral standards then it seems logical to suppose that he has made man in such a way that man can know what these standards are, and judge his actions accordingly. Thus we might argue that man's conscience or moral sense intuits the will of God in these matters. But if this is so then, for practical purposes, we do not need to bring God into it at all in our discussion of the meaning of objectivity. We can say that when we talk of objective moral

standards we mean simply that they are standards common to all men. Even if we introduce the complicating factor of "original sin", and hence argue that man's moral sense has been corrupted, we could still hold that man, potentially, is capable of knowing what is right; that indeed even the most unregenerate of men can be brought into some agreement about moral questions if, by some means or other, they are able to rid themselves, if only temporarily, of the distorting effects of self-interest, prejudice etc. But this view of the matter does not differ significantly from the view taken by the non-religious person who argues that all men would agree on moral questions if there was agreement about the facts and if it was possible for them to consider the situation dispassionately without allowing self-interest to influence them.

10. We shall now discuss the view that when we talk of moral judgments as being objective we mean that they are based on reason, and not on feelings which may vary from individual to individual. If this interpretation is correct then we could say confidently that all rational beings have fundamentally the same moral standards, and we would not require to confirm this by empirical observation. This is, no doubt, the point stressed by Hume when, in a letter to Hutcheson, he writes: "I wish from my heart I could avoid concluding that since morality, according to your opinion as well as mine, is determined merely by sentiment, it regards only human nature and human life ---- if morality were determined by reason that is the same to all rational beings: but nothing but experience can assure us that the sentiments are the same. 1.

1. Quoted, D. D. Raphael, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

This interpretation can be criticised on the following grounds:

(i) First, this is one of the occasions on which the critics of faculty psychology would be justified in arguing that it does not really solve anything to say that moral judgments are founded on reason since everything turns on the definition we give to reason. Obviously it would be easy enough to define reason in such a way that it would then become platitudinous to say that it is reason which discerns moral distinctions.

(ii) Following on from what has just been said, it is important to note that in any case, whatever the definition we give of the term "reason", it is futile to look for the same kind of necessity in moral judgments that we find in mathematical judgments. In the statement from Hume quoted above, Hume seems to imply that if morality were founded on reason then moral intuitions would have the same kind of certainty as we find in mathematical judgments - all normal rational beings would immediately recognise their truth. But of course mathematical judgments are analytic only. They are true by virtue of logical laws and in themselves do not tell us anything about the world though they may happen to be applicable to the world of experience. Moral judgments on the other hand are synthetic. We may disagree about their import, but it can scarcely be denied that the statement "it is wrong to hang war criminals" is different in kind from the statement "two and two equals four". If, then, we are to hold that moral judgments are necessary their necessity must be of another kind from that which we find in mathematical judgments. It is self-

contradictory to say that two and two does not equal four because it follows from our definition of these terms that two and two must equal four. But it is not self-contradictory to say that cruelty is right or that it is wrong to keep promises. No logical law is broken if we make these assertions. We cannot therefore argue that moral judgments are based on reason because they can¹ be shown to be logically necessary.

(iii) We could assert that all moral judgments are ultimately dependent on a few basic moral intuitions which are given by reason. No reason needs to be given in support of their truth since their truth is self-evident. Once these intuitions have been presented to us in such a way that their meaning is clear we give immediate assent to them.

This, of course, is really only a statement of faith; the empirical evidence would seem, *prima facie*, to be against it. We might say that it is a necessary presupposition of all our thinking about moral matters that there should be agreement on certain fundamental axioms, but this in itself would not prove that there is in fact such agreement. I think it is true that, as a matter of psychological fact, we cannot but think that there are objective standards of morals, and this is clearly shown, as we have mentioned before, by the fact that when we are sure that something is morally right we cannot conceive of the opposite being right. We can logically think the opposite to be true, and

1. I am assuming here that an analytic proposition is one which is true or false in virtue of logical laws only. If any other proposition claims to be necessary then its necessity must be other than logical,

we can of course conceive that another person should think the opposite to be true, but we cannot, psychologically, conceive of the opposite being true. If we think that cruelty is wrong we cannot psychologically imagine how in any sense at all it could ever be right. But to say this does not really help our enquiries. It is an important psychological fact about man that he finds it necessary or seems to find it necessary to make this presupposition but we cannot infer from this that moral judgments are based on reason.

(iv). A point to note which is often overlooked is this: if we suppose that it is reason which judges of right and wrong then we cannot assume that this kind of reason is necessarily the same for all rational beings (unless of course we beg the question by defining a rational being as one who possesses this kind of reason). In the quotation from Hume's letter given above, it is clear that Hume is giving a very restricted definition to reason. He is thinking of it as the faculty which is employed in demonstrative reasoning, the operative principle of which is the law of non-contradiction. This being so he feels safe in assuming that the judgments of reason are common to all rational creatures. But if we widen the scope of reason to include judgments of right and wrong then it is by no means so obvious that those judgments will necessarily be the same for all rational beings.

have tended to make us overrate the importance of logical necessity per se. But of course propositions of the most trivial and even nonsensical nature can make a claim to logical necessity. What is important is not the logical necessity of any proposition in itself but rather the fact that we feel under a necessity to accept as true what can be shown to follow logically from premises accepted as true.

In so far as they are synthetic judgments then the possibility is always there that the intuition of one rational being will differ from that of another.

(5). Finally, it is by no means obvious that common sense accepts the view that moral judgments are based on reason. It is true that we often seem to imply that they are. We say that a certain moral principle is self-evident, or that a person is "lacking in reason" if he cannot see that some fundamental moral principle is true. But the term "reason" is used very loosely here - often as a synonym for conscience or moral sense - and if the ordinary man were questioned about this he would probably prefer the latter terms. His preference would be due to the fact that he associates reason more with the intellectual activities of man, whereas he thinks of moral judgments as always involving some emotion. Moreover, we are accustomed to think that a man may be rational in the sense of "being able to reason correctly", and yet¹ insane, in the sense of "being warped in his moral judgments".

1. Moral philosophers have been anxious to show that moral distinctions are based on reason so that they could prove the objectivity of moral standards. If, however, we set aside this influencing factor and examine the problem on its own merits, then it does seem that this is a case in which the usual faculty divisions break down. We cannot easily make out a case either for reason, or a moral sense, or for feelings in general. - taken by themselves that is.

Perhaps all we can say is that when we make a moral judgment, "the whole man" seems to be "behind" the judgment. The approval which we give^{to}, or which we experience in the presence of a right action is an expression of our whole being.

It is to be noted here that even if we do not regard moral judgments as being based on reason it might still be possible to hold that moral judgments are objective in the sense of being common to all men. We could hold, for instance, that all men have a moral sense which, when uncorrupted, delivers judgments which are true for all men. Or we could say that moral judgments are ultimately based on feelings which are common to all men.

For the above reasons, then, it seems to me unsatisfactory to discuss the objectivity of moral judgments in terms of the question whether reason is the source of moral distinctions. This is not to say, however, that reason, even when interpreted in the strictest sense, does not influence us in our judgments of right / wrong. It is clear enough that it does so indirectly in so far as it determines questions of fact and definition; but I hope to show later that it exerts a more direct influence by forcing us to conform or to try to conform to the principle of consistency in all our moral judgments.

11. We now come to the third possible interpretation of the common sense belief in the objectivity of moral judgments, viz. that all morality is ultimately based on certain moral intuitions - whether given by reason or a moral sense is immaterial - which are common to all men. The truth of these intuitions is self-evident, and the truth of all particular moral judgments (i.e. as to what so and so should do in situation: X) is to be judged by their conformity to these basic moral truths.

This is the interpretation which gives us, I think, the central core of the common sense meaning of the expression, "objective moral standards". The point we must now discuss is whether it is true.

(i) The first point to note is that it is obviously not true in the form in which it is stated above. It is a matter of common observation that men differ greatly in their moral judgments and in the principles which they hold to be fundamental in the moral field. The common sense view must be taken then to mean that all men would agree about moral questions if all disagreements about non-moral factors were first resolved.¹

(ii) When we say that differences on moral questions are really caused by differences about the facts, this really covers a much wider field than we usually think of when we talk about the facts. Thus, to take a concrete example. Suppose the

1. In this connection we should perhaps note the futility of those discussions between rationalists and non-rationalists as to whether disputes about morals are really concerned with moral questions properly so-called, or about empirical facts. The rationalist thought that if he could show that we really do dispute about moral questions and give proofs and inferences about our opinions then this would prove that morality is founded on reason. But, of course, the fact, if it is a fact, that we dispute about moral questions does not in itself prove anything about the source of moral judgments. Indeed, the more it could be shown that we really do dispute about moral intuitions the more it would tend to prove that moral judgments must be based on feelings which differ from individual to individual. We argue enough about questions of taste, but we do not get very far because there are no fundamental principles on which we are all agreed.

On the other hand when the non-rationalist says that the disputes are only about the facts, and that there is no disputing about moral questions per se, he tends to think that he is thereby placing moral judgments in a special category quite distinct from, say, scientific judgments. We cannot argue about morals because "it's just a question of taste", but we can argue about empirical or logical judgments because these are

argument is about the way we should treat negroes. We first of all concern ourselves with the "factual" questions. But these may include any one of the following considerations:

(i) Are negroes really inferior in intelligence? It is questions of this kind that we usually think of when we talk about factual disputes.

(ii) Questions of definition: What do we mean by "equality of man"?

(iii) Problems of implication: If negroes have qualities x, y, z, and we desire to treat them in such and such a way, how are we to go about it? What are the implications so far as, say, our educational policy is concerned?

(iv). Questions of authority: Is the Pope really infallible when he speaks ex cathedra on morals and faith?

Questions of this kind are of great importance, for "infallible authorities" are one of the chief causes of differences in moral beliefs. Men will often act against their own natural moral feelings simply because they accept the ruling of some authority.

(v) Psychological questions: Are we being influenced only by self-interest? Do we believe this because we really think it is true, or have we been just conditioned into thinking it to be true? Is so and so normal, or insane?

based on reason. What these critics tend to forget is that in scientific matters too we ultimately come up against propositions about which we cannot argue - these may be about certain sensory perceptions, or about fundamental criteria. The fact is that in any field at all we can only discuss profitably within the context of some framework accepted by all. We may accept the basic propositions, as we say, for the purposes of the discussion, or it may just happen to be the case that we all do, in fact, accept them as true.

In any given case then in which we find that there is disagreement about what ought to be done the difficulties in the way of discovering whether the disagreement is really a non-moral one would seem to be immense. Moreover, there would appear to be endless scope for introducing question-begging arguments. Thus we could very easily beg the question whenever we decide to dismiss someone as abnormal or insane merely because he does not appreciate a moral claim which is obvious to the majority. And this leads me to the next point.

(iii) Since the belief in the objectivity of moral standards is a presupposition which we find it psychologically difficult to avoid making, we will tend to accept it as true "no matter what". Even though the evidence is piled up against the belief we shall always find some loophole to enable us to maintain it. And without doubt we are aided in this by the fact, just mentioned, that in any given case it would be impossible to prove that differences in moral judgments did not have their source in non-moral factors. How can we know for certain whether anyone is really being motivated by self-interest when he accepts some doctrine which we find morally repulsive? How do we draw the line between moral beliefs which we have been "conditioned" to accept and those which we have carefully thought out for ourselves? And so on.

It is not therefore possible to prove beyond reasonable doubt that this presupposition is false; the most we could hope to do is to show that there is considerable evidence to suggest that it is false. And the best way to do this would be to take the

objectivist's case where it would appear to be strongest and try to show that even here there are basic differences which cannot easily be explained away as being differences over non-moral issues. Thus we might try to show that even among men of similar social background and of roughly equal intelligence there appear to be fundamental differences in moral intuitions.

This we will now try to do.

12. Among educated people brought up in Western European traditions there are, of course, many differences of view on moral questions, but two moral problems seem to me to be particularly significant from the point of view of the general question being discussed here. First, the problem of our attitude to animals; and secondly, the problem of our attitude to the doctrine that all men are of equal importance. We cannot, of course, discuss these problems per se, but it does seem to me to be apparent that men who may agree on many other moral issues may yet differ radically on these.

The Englishman who cares for his horses and dogs with almost as much zeal as he cares for his children is morally shocked at the attitude, say, of a cultured Spaniard to animals. And within one social group there may be almost as great differences of view about the importance of animals. One man is definite enough about the necessity for the humane treatment of animals but nevertheless is quite clear in his own mind that they are inferior beings whom we can use, if we wish, entirely for

our own convenience; another person feels that our obligations to animals extend beyond the attempt to prevent their suffering unnecessary pain.

What causes persons -even within the same family group - to take up very differing moral positions in respect to behaviour to animals? Religion is sometimes an important factor -the Catholic is taught that man is lord over all the beasts -and obviously social traditions also play a part. But when we have allowed for all this we still seem to be left with the fact that some people feel a sense of obligation to animals which others, who have had an almost identical social and religious training, do not feel.

The same sort of thing can be said about the obligation to treat men as of equal importance. In the West we have been taught to pay lip service to the doctrine of the equality of man, and most of us would theoretically assent to this fundamental tenet of democracy. But among those who have reflected most carefully on this doctrine we find sharp differences of opinion. Some think that the doctrine can only be given meaning within a theological context, and that there is no clear intuition to the effect that all men are equal. Indeed, they say, if one regards the matter dispassionately without benefit of theological presupposition then it seems evident that there is almost as much difference between, say, a Shakespeare or a Newton on the one hand and a moron or "empty-headed" young pleasure seeker on the other, as there is between the poorest types of men and the most intelligent

of animals. Indeed one may find a greater community of feeling with an animal than one does with certain kinds of human being. Again, it is argued, one can find no criteria -outside of a theological context -which will give us a clear-cut distinction between man and the animals.

The conclusion then is that we have no *prima facie* obligation to treat all men as of equal worth, or as being equally entitled to all the benefits which society may provide, though of course we may find it politically useful to talk -or even to act - as though all men are equal.

As against this approach we find others who claim that they have a clear moral intuition that all men ought to be treated as of equal worth. It is, they say, an intuition for which no reason can be given since it is one of the fundamental moral intuitions from which moral intuitions of a more concrete nature are derived.

13. Here then we seem to find two examples of fundamental moral differences, and no doubt others could be adduced. For instance, we do seem to disagree about the relative moral worth of the various intrinsic "goods". Some think that satisfactory personal relations is the chief good to which all others ought to be subordinate; others again think we ought to pursue beauty or knowledge first; others again think our chief aim ought to be the achievement of communion with God. And of course it follows that our actions -what we think is the right thing to do- will be influenced by these value judgments.

If what we have just been saying is true we should then have to conclude that the common sense presupposition of objective standards in morals is not based on the facts. And in so far as this presupposition seems to be an integral part of the common sense notion of duty then it would follow that we should have to suspect the idea of duty itself. Certainly we should have to reconsider the whole question of moral teaching and moral persuasion, our pedagogic practice hitherto having been based on the assumption that men can be brought to agreement on the¹ fundamental moral axioms.

1. In fact, a belief that moral standards are subjective would not make quite as much practical difference as might be supposed. In the first place it would still be of great practical importance to obtain agreement on moral questions, so that we would be concerned to find any means which would help us achieve this agreement.

Secondly, though it is often said that we cannot argue about matters of taste the fact is that we do. For instance we try to improve a person's musical taste by placing him in situations where he will hear classical music at its most tuneful and appealing level. We only give up the task when we are convinced that he has some structural defect (e.g. is tone deaf), or is just being stubborn and prejudiced.

Thirdly, even if a person cannot see that he ought to do something we can often persuade him that it is nevertheless in his interests to do it.

Fourthly, we can make sure that all the non-moral causes of differences are cleared up.

The main differences between the subjectivist's approach and the objectivist's would be:

First, that the former would only concern himself with those moral differences which he thought it was of immediate practical importance to resolve, whereas the latter would be concerned to show that none of the apparent differences in moral judgments were really due to basic differences in moral intuitions.

Second, the subjectivist would be more inclined to appeal to self-interest as a motive for doing the right thing. Moreover - if he were consistent - he would find it difficult to use the weapons of praise and blame with any real conviction.

It is possible that we might be able to get round this criticism by showing that though common sense is wrong in supposing that moral standards are objective, nevertheless there is still a sense in which we can say that we can have a moral obligation to do what is right - right, that is, by our own personal standards.¹ But this particular defence is likely to lead us into so many difficulties that it would be wise to avoid using it if we can possibly avoid doing so. Fortunately there is another way of meeting the attacks of the subjectivists that is, I think, more satisfactory, and this we shall consider now.

14. There is no doubt, I think, that the content of our moral codes - the rules by which we try to determine what we ought to do in any given situation - is very much determined by subjective factors, i.e. by factors which vary from individual to individual and from society to society. And this is shown by the fact that it is extremely difficult to think of any one moral principle that is, in fact, accepted as binding by all men.

Even the defence which is often used by objectivists, viz that the differences are due to social conditioning, is in itself an admission that moral codes have their source in factors which seem to be extremely vulnerable and insecure. Indeed, from a practical point of view, it would often be very difficult, if not impossible to say what was a "natural" intuition, and what was

1. Of course, even for an objectivist, it would still be true to say that our actual obligation is always to do what we think to be right. We cannot have an obligation to do what is right unless we are able to appreciate that it is right. But this is a different point from the one made above.

a "conditioned intuition".

But though this much must be granted to the supporters of the subjective view, this does not necessarily mean that we must give up completely the idea of objectivity in moral standards. In the first place we can safely assume, I think, that the experience of "being under an obligation" is common to all men. Even if we try to explain away the experience as being in some sense illusory we at least know what people are talking about when they use words like "duty" and "moral obligation". We should regard a person as abnormal in a fundamental sense if he had never experienced the feeling of being under an obligation.

Secondly, even if we are sceptical about the whole concept of duty it is almost impossible for us to avoid assuming that there is at least some principle which we ought to accept as binding. Thus, as we have pointed out above, those who criticise the idea of objectivity in morals on the ground that this presupposition is not in accordance with the facts take it for granted that when this truth is pointed out those who support the objective view will feel bound to give it up. Similarly, when Mr. Ayer states: "Given that a man has certain moral principles, we argue that he must, in order to be consistent, react morally to certain things in a certain way. What we do not and cannot argue about is the validity of these moral principles. We merely praise or condemn them in the light of our own feelings" - he is assuming that all normal human beings will at least feel under an obligation to be consistent. The fact is that ordinary social life - all

1. Language, Truth and Logic (1st. Ed.) p. 167.

intellectual discussion for that matter -depends on the acceptance of obligations of some kind or other by those taking part in the life of the society. And this leads me to the next point.

Whereas most of our obligations, as Hume says, "follow the common and natural course of our passions" -i.e. have their roots in some particular feeling^{1.} -and are therefore liable to vary from individual to individual, there are two obligations which seem to be bound up with the faculty of reason rather than with any particular emotion, and which therefore we may assume to be common to all rational beings. These are the obligation to conform to the facts and the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency. All men capable of reasoning, we may assume, will sometimes feel the binding force of these two principles. This aspect of the matter we shall consider in the next chapter, where we shall try to show that the principle of consistency is the more fundamental of the two. Here our task is to consider briefly the relevance of these two principles to the general question of objectivity in morals. At first glance it would seem as if the acceptance of these two apparently formal principles would not take us very far. How could we deduce the content of any objective moral code from them? But we can, I think, demonstrate that these principles -and particularly the principle of consistency -can be employed in such a way that it becomes possible to iron out many of the individual differences in moral beliefs.

1. I am not suggesting here that we can define our moral obligations in terms of these feelings. The point being made is simply that the experiencing of certain feelings is often necessary before we can know what is our duty.

15. In the field of scientific enquiry we are accustomed to the idea that sensory observations require to be checked by certain objective tests -i.e. tests or rules accepted as valid by all scientists. And even on the common sense level we use certain criteria for determining a genuine sensory observation from one which we suspect to be illusory. Thus we check one sense against another -in particular we use the more reliable sense of touch to test the observations made by the more unreliable sense of vision. Now the point I wish to make here is that we can use the two principles listed above to check on the validity of those moral principles which we take for granted, or of those moral intuitions which we experience in particular situations. Just as our senses tend to lead us astray in the field of science, so our feelings, sentiments etc. are liable to lead us astray in the field of morals. We find it difficult to distinguish between quasi-moral feelings and genuine feelings of obligation; we are often unable to tell whether we really think a certain moral principle is right or whether we have been conditioned to think it right -and so on.

Now in the task of applying some kind of objective test (i.e. a test accepted by all men) the principle of consistency plays a key role. The principle of conformity to the facts is important in so far as it forces us to try to make sure that we have a relevant knowledge of the facts before coming to a moral decision -and in many cases this is the key to differences

in moral valuation -but it cannot help us if we are finally faced with an actual difference in moral intuitions. It is at this point that the principle of consistency makes its major contribution. And in the following ways:

(1). It may be pointed out that a certain situation B is exactly the same as situation A in which we consider it right to adopt a certain course of action. We are thus forced to give up the principle or else apply it in this new situation. Often, for instance, we would be very upset if someone else employed tactics against us which we think it right to employ against others. The merchant who believes in free competition considers it right to withhold goods from the market if they are in short supply so that the price will rise. But he does not always realise that, according to the same principle, the worker is entitled to withhold his labour (i.e. go on strike) if his labour is in great demand.

(2) Sometimes we accept a principle as absolutely binding in all circumstances and then we are forced to admit that there are certain circumstances in which we would think it right to violate this principle. Thus a Catholic may say that his objection to euthanasia is based on the absolute command that we must never take human life. When it is pointed out that his Church nevertheless supports war under certain circumstances he is forced to modify his statement of the principle.

1. Thus supporters of racial theories (e.g. Hitler and Dr. Malan) are not prepared to state that their views are based on a direct intuition. They try to support them with documentary evidence of a supposedly scientific kind. In doing so they expose themselves to damaging criticism. However, they can usually evade criticism by applying their own special criteria for determining what are the facts.

(3). In some cases we are not aware that some principle of action which we accept as binding is, in all essentials, similar to another principle which we think to be wrong. Thus the principle which the United States has recently put forward that prisoners of war should not be forcibly repatriated would seem, *prima facie*, to be similar in many respects to the older principle, now no longer accepted, that a man should not be forcibly conscripted into the army.

(4) When we assert some very general principle of morality to be true -e.g. that we should do unto others what we would like them to do to us -we are not always aware of all its implications. When we are confronted with some of those implications we are often placed in the awkward dilemma either of giving up the general principle, or else of doing something which we feel to be wrong in the particular situation. Our obligation to try to act consistently forces us to try to resolve the difficulty.

Using the principle of consistency in the ways mentioned above we can both introduce some kind of order into our own thinking on moral questions and at the same time help to iron out differences between ourselves and others. Very often, for instance, we discover that our differences are verbal only, as a result of employing this principle. A and B may appear to hold radically opposed moral principles of a general nature, but when each is forced to admit certain implications of these general principles they realise that, in fact, there is not really so much difference between them after all. Similarly, when we come up against what

seems to be a fundamental difference of opinion we can sometimes carry on the argument nevertheless by forcing our opponent to face up to some of the implications of his moral beliefs. We argue with him on his own ground, as it were, hoping to drive him to conclusions which he finds unpalatable.

16. In order for this principle to be used effectively two conditions must be satisfied. It must be accepted that we have a *prima facie* obligation to conform to the principle of consistency; and, secondly, those using it, and those "on whom it is used" must be at the reflective level of moral conduct - that is, they must have given some thought to the question why they consider this or that action to be right, or this or that principle to be morally binding. It might be said, however, that even so the principle of consistency is too intellectual a weapon to be effective on its own in bringing men to an acceptance of objective standards of morality. Moral problems are too bound up with the emotions, with factors of self-interest and pride, for us to be able to think cold-bloodedly about the moral principles which move us to action. This may be granted as a practical difficulty, though it does not detract from the value of the principle of consistency in those cases in which it is possible to achieve some degree of "calmness of thought". But it may be noted, as a partial answer to the criticism, that this same principle can often be applied dramatically so as to strike at the conscience of a person as well as at his reason - or, more accurately, so as to arouse his moral emotions in support of the dictates of reason. Thus the

method used by Nathan the prophet to drive home to David the enormity of his sin was, in effect, a dramatic application of the principle of consistency.¹ Where, perhaps, the principle of consistency would be least effective is in respect to those implications of general moral principles whose validity can be recognised not so much by a process of intellectual reasoning from these principles, but rather by a kind of intuition which stems from a finely developed sensitivity to the subtle nuances of personal relations. A person may believe very strenuously in the Christian doctrine of love and do everything possible to follow through with all the rule-of-thumb implications of the doctrine. But if he is by nature lacking in good taste and tact then all the reasoning in the world will not really help him to know and to practise the more subtle implications of his beliefs.

17. We may conclude, then, by asserting that though common sense is perhaps rather optimistic in supposing that the fundamental axioms of morality are common to all men, and does not fully appreciate the many factors which contribute to such a wide variance in moral beliefs, yet there are good grounds for believing that at least the obligation of consistency is common to all rational beings. And though this may appear to be rather a formal principle yet it can play an important part in forcing men to subject their moral intuitions to critical analysis. There is no guarantee, of course, that this principle, if applied rigorously, by all men, would in fact iron out all differences of opinion in

1. Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 12.

moral questions. In the very nature of the case we could never be certain that men might not have radically different moral intuitions. The subjectivist, however, cannot take much comfort from this admission, for his case fails even if it is possible to assert only that there is one moral principle common to all men. We have suggested that the principle of accordance with the facts and the principle of consistency are indeed *prima facie* obligations accepted by all rational beings; and it is difficult to see how the subjectivist himself can put forward his own case unless he accepts them as binding principles. It is now our task to consider them in more detail.

C H A P T E R IX.

T H E O B L I G A T I O N T O A C T R A T I O N A L L Y.

I.

1. In this chapter I propose to discuss whether, and in what sense we can be said to have an obligation to act rationally. Prima facie there would certainly seem to be a case for asserting that we do have such an obligation - we tell someone that he ought to be more rational, or we blame someone for acting irrationally - but the problem cannot be discussed with any precision unless we ask, not the vague question, "Have we an obligation to act rationally but rather, "Have we an obligation to conform our actions to this or that criterion of rationality?". When our enquiry is formulated in this way the two criteria which seem obviously relevant are the principle of accordance with the facts and the principle of consistency. In respect to the principle of the greatest good we should note that in so far as this is used in a moral context - i.e. as a criterion of rightness - then the issues raised are really of a different kind from those which we intend to discuss here. In this case we are taking for granted that we have duties to perform and we are concerned with the question whether the principle of the greatest good is ever a criterion of rightness, or indeed whether it is the only criterion of rightness. What we are concerned with here is whether we have a particular duty, viz. to act rationally, and granted this as our problem it seems clear that the relevant criteria are the two given above. In other words

1. See next chapter for discussion of this problem.

when we tell someone that he ought to act more rationally we usually mean that he ought to base his actions on the facts, or that he ought to examine the facts more carefully before acting, or that he ought to be more consistent etc. Sometimes, it is true, the assertion, "you ought to act more rationally" is equivalent to the statement, "you ought to think of your greatest good" (i.e. your ultimate happiness) but in these cases it is by no means clear whether the "ought" has a truly moral force. Certainly we think it irrational for a person to act against his own happiness just for the pleasure, say, of satisfying an immediate desire, but common sense balks at the idea that we have a moral duty to pursue our own happiness.

Before we discuss the principles of accordance with the facts and of consistency, we might perhaps glance briefly at this common sense suspicion of the notion that we can be under an obligation to pursue our own happiness.

2. It is easy to understand how this suspicion arises. In the first place common sense tends to associate the idea of duty with unpleasant tasks, so that it seems silly to say that we have a duty to pursue something which we want. But, of course, it is not at all necessary that we should only have a duty to do what we do not want to do; if it is morally right to do something then it is our duty to do it whether we wish to do it or not. Hence if it is ever right to do that which we think will be for our greatest good then it can be said that we sometimes have a duty to pursue our own happiness.

Secondly, common sense tends to confuse the question whether it is ever right to think in terms of one's own greatest good with two other questions: (a) whether one should prefer one's own happiness to that of others where there is a conflict; and (b) whether one should, in general, make the pursuit of one's own happiness the chief aim of life. One can give a negative answer to the latter two questions and at the same time consistently assert that it is sometimes right to determine a course of action by reference to the principle of one's own greatest good. Thus, on the assumption that one is entitled to a holiday once a year, or that one is entitled occasionally to a few hours of pleasure and relaxation, then it seems not only rational but also morally right to consider the various possible choices in the light of one's greatest good - to consider not only what will give the greatest immediate pleasure but also what will produce the greatest satisfaction in the long run.

Certainly if we consider the question of the application of this principle within the context of situations of this kind - that is, where the happiness of others is not directly relevant - then it seems clear enough that we consider it morally superior to organise one's actions so that one achieves the greatest possible satisfaction instead of allowing one's choices to be determined by chance factors and short-term considerations. As we have said before, the achievement of happiness - even if only for a short period - is sometimes a sign of moral worth.

II.

3. I now propose to discuss whether we have an obligation to conform to the facts.

At first glance it would certainly seem to be the case that common sense assumes that we have such an obligation. Thus we take it for granted that before we come to any moral decision we ought to examine the situation carefully to discover all the relevant facts, and, as we saw in the last chapter, even those who dispute the validity of the concept of duty in general have a difficulty in avoiding the implication that we have a duty to conform to the facts. Similarly, whenever we take part in any intellectual discussion it is taken for granted that when it is shown that our assertions are based on false judgments of the facts we shall feel under an obligation to modify or give up our point of view. Then, too, when we blame someone for allowing himself to be moved by a mere prejudice, or when we exhort people to face up to the facts it seems to be implied that we have an obligation to try to conform our actions to the facts.

When we look more closely into the matter, however, it is not so clear that these common sense statements necessarily imply that we have an obligation to conform to the facts as such. For one thing the "ought" which is used here is sometimes hypothetical only. What we are saying, in effect, is "if you don't conform to the facts then this or that will happen to you" As we have said before, common sense tends to assume that, in the long run, those who base their actions on falsehoods are bound to suffer - they are like the man who built his house on sand.

Then, too, in many cases in which we insist that a person ought to conform to the facts what we are really concerned with is some other moral issue which we are certain can be resolved if only people can be brought round to agreement about the facts. Thus if a person has based a certain moral attitude on beliefs which we know to be false and refuses either to accept the facts or to change his attitude when he is forced to admit that it was based on false judgments, our moral censure is directed not so much at the refusal to conform to the facts as such but at the motives which prompt him to retain moral attitudes which he knows are not justified. We blame him for being swayed by self interest, or for allowing his actions to be governed by pride, and so on. Where no such ulterior moral issues are involved we are much less likely to insist on the obligation to conform to the facts.

Finally -and most importantly - in all the situations in which we seem to stress the obligation to conform to the facts it will be found, I think, that there is an implied agreement among those taking part in the situation that they will abide by the facts. In other words it is ultimately a question of consistency, of remaining true to the rules or the principles which are accepted as operative in the situation. Thus, when we take part in, say, a scientific debate we are accepting by implication the rule that our arguments should be based on the facts, and if, when the debate is going against us, we assert that the facts are really irrelevant then we are open to the charge of inconsistency. In the same way, when we argue from a set of premises, accepted as

true, we are bound by the rule of consistency not to tamper with these premises in order to make any particular argument we are putting forward more plausible.

If we analyse all the cases in which we seem to be asserting that there is an obligation to conform to the facts we shall find, I think, that the operative obligation is really one of consistency. Or, to put it another way, if we have not in any sense agreed to abide by the facts then it is difficult to see how we can be obliged to conform to them. If a man decides that in some particular case he would rather act as if the facts were different from what he knows they are we may think he is foolish, that he is bound to suffer in the long run, but we could scarcely say that he is morally bound to conform to the facts. It is true that many sermons are preached against those who live in a world of make-believe instead of facing up to the facts, but the main point of such sermons is not the sacredness of facts as such but rather the bad consequences that result from a persistent ignoring of the facts. Even there it is by no means certain, as we have pointed out before, that it is always a bad thing to act as though the facts were different. An element of "make-believe" seems to be essential to all normal living.

4. The principle of consistency can also help us to solve one of the puzzling aspects of the criterion of accordance with the facts. We have stated before that this principle implies not only that it is rational to examine the facts before coming to a decision, and to act in conformity with them when they are known,

but also that it is rational to be determined by objective criteria when we are trying to discover what the facts are. In other words, we would be said to have acted irrationally if, in assessing the facts, we had been influenced by purely subjective factors.

Now the difficulty with this application of the principle of accordance with the facts is that it is relatively easy to show that what we mark off as "facts" is always in part determined by factors which might well vary from individual to individual. The common sense viewpoint here is, of course, extremely naive. The "facts" are things which impinge on us from "outside" and are as they are whether we observe them or not. The ordinary man, in holding this view, certainly grasps the point that the realm of the factual cannot be just a matter of subjective determination, but he does not realise the extent to which what we call the real is relative not only to the kind of sense organs we possess but also to the categorial modes of thought by means of which we interpret the material of sense. We come to nature with certain ready-made questions which to us seem the only proper questions; the phenomena of sense becomes the "real" only after it has passed through a framework of a priori principles which we assume to be the only true principles. Yet it is not difficult to prove that the ultimate criteria by which we order and interpret the data of sense may differ from one civilisation to another, and may change to some extent with changes in the environment or in the physical and psychological needs of man.¹ What kinds of experience

1. See C. I. Lewis, *The Mind and the World-Order* for an interesting interpretation along these lines.

we regard as real and what kinds as illusory, what evidence we are prepared to accept as valid, how much evidence we require for proof, what importance should be given to this or that causal factor¹ - the answers we give to these questions will vary according to the presuppositions we employ. Even the so-called "hard fact" - that which so asserts itself that we cannot but admit its existence - may dissolve when interpreted according to certain criteria. Physical pain, for example, would seem to be a hard enough fact but some people have denied that it is real.

5. If, then, it be granted that our judgments of the factual are always influenced by subjective factors, how can we possibly say that we have an obligation to think objectively about the facts, or an obligation to submit to the commonly accepted criteria for determining the realm of the factual?

It might be said that this is really an unimportant question since, for all practical purposes, our differences over facts are not so much due to the employment of different criteria as to existence of different levels of knowledge and to confusions over meanings of terms. The physical structure of man and his basic needs being to all intents and purposes the same all over the world, the common sense criteria of the factual is likely to be the same even in civilisations which differ greatly in their

1. Philosophies of history in the grand manner are particularly liable to the criticism that they are based on some subjective criterion of the importance of this or that causal factor. Toynbee, for instance, has obviously been influenced by his Christian beliefs in his "kinder" interpretation of the cyclical view of history. Once a historian has decided what presuppositions are valid it is astonishing how easily he is able to make the facts fit the theory.

philosophic and religious foundations. It is only in the higher reaches of thought that the question of the presuppositions underlying our knowledge of the real becomes relevant.

This, however, is not an entirely satisfactory position to take for though it is true that there is usually a very general agreement as to the criteria to be used in determining the factual we do come across instances in which there are genuine differences of opinion on this score. Thus when we discuss questions such as: "Is telepathy a fact?", or "Can people be cured of cancer by faith?" we soon find that men may have radically different conceptions of the "real" or the "possible". And it does not seem sufficient to argue, in such cases, that the criteria used by the majority are the true criteria.

Again, it might be said that our objection is misconceived since what we have a duty to do is to avoid allowing known subjective factors to influence our judgments of the facts. We cannot have a duty to reject subjective presuppositions which we do not realise to be subjective. Or, to put this point in another way: there is a very great difference between interpreting the facts according to presuppositions which we believe to be true, and taking up an attitude that we will only admit as factual whatever suits our convenience, and it is only in the latter case that the question of acting against the principle of accordance with the facts arises.

The difficulty with this point is that even when we are aware of the possibility that our judgments of the facts may

be affected by subjective factors, it is difficult to know how we should discriminate between subjective factors which are justified and those which are not. Since it is impossible to avoid interpreting the data of sense by means of pre-conceived principles how can we really discriminate between one set of principles and another? In some circumstances there might even be a justification for arguing that we should decide the facts according to our own desires - the facts are simply what we wish to be facts. In science we are accustomed to the idea that a hypothesis is "true" if it works - if we can predict the behaviour of phenomena by means of it - and some philosophers have argued that many of the fundamental common sense presuppositions have a pragmatic basis. Then, too, what are we to make of those presuppositions which we insist on believing as true even though, on our own admission, the evidence seems all against them? Many of these presuppositions which we believe "no matter what" are of a metaphysical nature or of religious significance - e.g. that the universe is controlled by a God friendly to man, that we have freewill - but presuppositions of this kind seem to be found in all departments of knowledge. Thus the scientist may accept as a matter of faith, and not merely as a useful hypothesis, the belief that the universe is a unified system the laws of which are discoverable by man. And such a belief may act as a spur when he is confronted with what appear to be insuperable difficulties. Indeed the value of these presuppositions is that - paradoxically enough - they prompt us to set about discovering ways and means of proving their truth, and in this way

increase our store of knowledge. In one sense it is true enough that in order to gain knowledge we must learn to ask Nature the right questions, but it is equally true that significant results can often be achieved by trying to "force" Nature to yield up answers to the questions we want to ask.¹

6. The way out of the difficulty is not to demand that everyone should use the criteria accepted by the majority in their judgments of the facts, but rather that they should be consistent in their use of the criteria they do adopt. In particular this means:

(i) That in the course of any particular discussion we should keep to one set of criteria. Thus if we are asserting that telepathy is not a fact - using as our criterion the principle that whatever cannot be explained "scientifically" is not a fact - we are obliged to maintain this criterion of the factual throughout the argument, or else give up the original assertion.

(ii) That if we use a set of criteria in situation A then we ought to use the same criteria in situation B which is similar in all relevant respects.

(iii) That if we define the factual in a certain way we should not deny the right to others to define the factual according to the same criteria. Thus the scientist who finds it technically useful to assume, say, that the ether is a fact cannot really deny others the right to assume, say, that God is a fact if they find it psychologically useful to do so.

1. The positivists have criticised beliefs of the "no matter what" kind on the ground that they are usually formulated in such

In respect to the presuppositions which we refuse to accept as false no matter how much evidence is brought forward against them, what can be required of us is, first, that we state clearly on what grounds we hold them to be true, and secondly, that we do not shift these grounds in a way that conflicts with the principle of consistency, or deny to others the right to use the same arguments in defence of their presuppositions. Thus if a person claims that the truth of a certain presupposition is grounded in an a priori intuition he cannot then proceed to argue as though this presupposition is an explanatory hypothesis of the type of all scientific hypotheses - i.e. formulated to account for a certain number of observed facts, and on the basis of which further facts can be predicted. It is when "no matter what" beliefs are interpreted as though they were explanatory hypotheses that they are exposed to the criticisms which positivists and others bring against them.

7. Thus while it is, I think, true that we are not under an obligation to accept any given statement of fact no matter how self-evidently true it may seem to everyone else, we can only escape from this obligation by being prepared to maintain our own criteria of the factual in a consistent manner, as described above. Even if our only criteria^{ry} is one of convenience - a fact is a way that it is impossible to falsify them. While this is true it does not seem to me to follow that propositions stating these beliefs are without significance. They play too important a part in human thought for us to dismiss them as meaningless. Rather it would seem as though the positivist's criterion of significance is too narrow (See above).

whatever we wish to be a fact -then we cannot consistently deny to others the right also to apply the same criteria if it suits their convenience. And, as often as not we would find that we suffered most from the employment of such an arbitrary criterion of the factual. And the same applies with any other freakish criteria that we might employ -the task of maintaining the criteria consistently would usually prove too great. Sooner or later we would find ourselves "slipping in" a more common sense criterion in order to get us out of difficulties.

In making this point we are assuming, of course, that the normal man will feel under an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency. It is this which we shall have to consider now.

III.

8. Prima facie there certainly seems to be a case for saying that we do have an obligation to try to conform to the principle of consistency. If we confront a person with some inconsistency in an argument he has been propounding or with an inconsistency between his moral belief and practice we expect that he will feel under an obligation to try to do something about it. Before we can take this for granted, however, one or two possible criticisms have to be met.

First, it might be said that consistency for its own sake is not an ideal which we are under any obligation to pursue. When we say that we are under an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency what we really mean is that we are

under an obligation to try to achieve some good which can only be obtained if we do conform to the principle of consistency. Thus we say that someone ought not to chop and change their principles of action so much because it makes it very difficult for others who have to deal with them; or we say that someone ought to give up one or other of two contradictory beliefs which he holds to be true because, in the long run, he is bound to suffer if he doesn't.

It is in line with this criticism that common sense should stress practical inconsistencies rather than theoretical inconsistencies, for the bad effects of the former are more apparent than those which result from inconsistencies in the theoretical field. Of course, in principle, common sense accepts the notion that it is a "good thing" to make one's beliefs consistent with one another or to give up an argument that is self-contradictory; moreover common sense is aware that the whole process of reasoning is ultimately dependent on our conforming to the principle of non-contradiction - but, for all that, common sense tends to be suspicious of the person who is too much concerned with consistency, and is inclined to take the line that so long as a person is happy in holding certain beliefs then it does not matter very much if they are not consistent with one another. It is only when such beliefs are likely to lead to actions of which we disapprove that we try to use the principle of consistency as a weapon against the person holding them.

In reply to this criticism we should note that while

it may be true of the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency, as it is of other obligations, that we would not consider ourselves bound by them if it could be shown that no good, or more harm than good, resulted from our fulfilling them, yet it is quite misleading to say that what we mean when we assert that we have an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is that we "ought to bring about a certain result which we consider good". It is surely clear enough that when, say, a person is confronted with a contradiction in an argument he has been putting forward and immediately feels obliged to modify or give up the argument he is not thinking in terms of any particular good that will result from his action. The presence of a contradiction is in itself sufficient to cause the feeling of obligation. No doubt there are circumstances in which we do take circumstances into account, or consequences into account before deciding whether, in fact, to conform to the principle of consistency, but the same can be said of all obligations, and this assertion in nowise contradicts our previous assertion that the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency cannot be analysed into any other moral obligation or combination of moral obligations.

A second criticism of the obligation of consistency follows on from what has just been said. It might be said that there are many situations where we are confronted with an inconsistency of some kind and where we definitely do not think we are under an obligation to do something about it.

This criticism can be dismissed in a few words. It rests

on a confusion between what Ross has termed "prima facie duties" and our actual duty in a particular situation. It may indeed be the case that in some particular situation our actual obligation will be to ignore some inconsistency which has arisen and to put all our energies into some other task which has a prior claim, but to say this does not deny that there is a prima facie obligation to conform to the principle of consistency.

9. When we state that we have an obligation to conform to the principle of consistency this cannot be taken to mean either that we have an obligation to think consistently or an obligation to achieve consistency since in both these cases the task may be beyond our power. A person cannot force himself, for instance, to think consistently if he is constitutionally incapable of pursuing a long chain of reasoning. Similarly we may be aware that there is a contradiction between two beliefs which we hold to be true and yet be unable either to find a way of reconciling them or of giving up one or other as untrue. The Christian, for example, is unable to reconcile God's omnipotence with the existence of undeserved suffering. If he is honest he admits that there appears to be a contradiction and that he can find no solution of the problem. He usually finds a way out by saying that "if he knew more" then the apparent contradiction could be resolved.¹

1. It should be noted that when the Christian states that if we knew more about God and His purposes we would realise that there is no real contradiction he is, in effect, stating that one or both of his beliefs: (a) that God is all powerful and all wise and good; (b) that men suffer unjustly - are false. And in fact when Christians do make some kind of intellectual attempt to solve the problem they usually do so by modifying in some way one or other of these beliefs. Either they try to show that all suffering is deserved, or else they argue that

The obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is properly interpreted to mean only that, whenever we are confronted with a contradiction in our beliefs then we have a prima facie obligation to try to resolve the contradiction in some way or other. It is not necessary to expand this in detail since we have already covered this ground in Chapter IV, but there is one point which should be discussed briefly and that is whether we can be said to have an obligation to try to relate beliefs which seem to be unconnected as well as an obligation to try to resolve inconsistencies of which we are aware. We noted before that the desire to achieve system could be regarded as a positive expression of the principle of consistency, and there is no doubt that some feel a compelling urge to try to relate their various beliefs into a satisfyingly coherent system. But it is doubtful whether we have, in fact, an obligation to try to achieve system as such. It is true that we often criticise a person for keeping his beliefs in "water-tight" compartments - we criticise, say, the scientist for keeping his scientific views quite apart from his religious views - but we usually do so only when we think there is an inconsistency between one set of beliefs and another which we think he ought to have examined.

God is not omnipotent in the sense that He can do anything at all.

From this point of view, then, we cannot strictly say of two opposing beliefs that they can both be shown to be true if only we had greater knowledge. From a common sense viewpoint such a statement is quite meaningful, but for philosophical purposes the statement needs to be given greater precision. This, however, is often an extremely difficult thing to do without involving ourselves in making assertions which take us further than we had intended. The Christian who tries to make some tentative statement towards a solution of the problem of evil usually finds himself committing some heresy.

Though, however, it may not be the case that we have an obligation to try to link up our beliefs into a coherent system, it is true, I think, that the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency includes not only the notion that we ought to try to resolve any contradiction of which we become aware, but also the notion that we ought to examine our beliefs carefully to see if there are any important inconsistencies in them. And nowhere does this seem more important than in respect to the fundamental assumptions on which we base our actions or the fundamental assumptions by which we seek to explain our experience of the world. But, of course, once we do this we are inevitably led on to attempt to achieve some kind of systematic unity, especially if we discover that there are inconsistencies between various assumptions which we had hitherto taken for granted. The fact that, at this level, it is probably impossible to achieve a satisfying unity does not absolve us from the task of trying to do what we can to remove, at least, the worst inconsistencies in our fundamental beliefs.

10. Now we made the claim in the last chapter that the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is an obligation which is accepted as binding by all men, and we indicated there that this could be asserted with some confidence because it was an obligation which seemed to have its source in reason. We must now deal with this point in some detail.

The idea of obligatoriness itself cannot be derived from reason, unless we define reason in some rather unusual way. Given, however, that all men understand the notion of duty, and have

the capacity to experience the state of being under an obligation -and this seems a reasonable assumption - then what things we think it our duty to do or to refrain from doing will depend on the way in which we are influenced by environmental and constitutional factors. A child who has been trained to treat animals gently is more likely to feel some sense of obligation towards animals than a child who has been trained to believe that animals are brutish creatures with little or no capacity to experience pain as we understand it. Similarly a person of acute sensibility and of a highly sympathetic nature will very often be aware of obligations which the average man may not even understand let alone be aware of. But while men differ in the strength and range of their feelings and emotions either by nature or as a result of their upbringing they are alike in the fact that they are able to reason, though, of course, the degree of ability varies from individual to individual. To reason however is, in effect, to be subject to certain principles and in particular to the principle of non-contradiction - we would not be able to reason at all if we were unable to appreciate the constraining power of the principle of consistency. Or, to put the point in a different way: it is inconceivable that a person who "possesses" reason could be confronted with a contradiction, say, in an argument he is propounding and not immediately feel that he ought to do something about it. This being so it does not seem too extravagant to say that the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is closely tied up with reason - that just as

we would not have an obligation to do certain things unless we were first capable of experiencing certain emotions, so we would not understand the obligation of consistency unless we "possessed" reason.

11. There are two possible arguments against this point of view. The first is this: if the obligation of consistency is a "product" of reason then there ought to be a close correlation between the degree of strength of our reasoning ability and the power with which we are affected by the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency - but is there, in fact, a close correlation between the two? Is it not the case that the man of high intelligence is sometimes quite unscrupulous in his use of reason whereas the man of very average intelligence may nevertheless be greatly concerned with the problem of resolving any inconsistencies of which he is aware? Then, too, a person may worry about inconsistencies in one particular field of knowledge or action and not be in the least concerned about inconsistencies in another field of knowledge or action.

This criticism rests on a confusion between two points: First, whether the awareness of a contradiction necessarily gives rise to the notion that the contradiction ought to be resolved; and second, whether, in fact, a person will always try to resolve a contradiction when he realises that one is present. It is only the first of these two questions with which we are really concerned here and the point which we have made is that the very "heart" of reason is to be found in this sensitivity

to the presence of contradiction — in this feeling that the contradiction must be resolved. Any being who "possesses" reason will know what it is to experience this "oughtness" in the presence of contradiction. It is another question altogether whether, in any given case, he will actually try to do something about it. This would depend on many factors — whether there was some other prior obligation, the strength of competing desires, the training one had received in the formative years, and so on. It is indeed possible that there is, in fact, a very loose correlation between the degree of intelligence and the strength with which the obligation to consistency affects one — on the whole highly intelligent people seem to be worried more by inconsistencies than those of poor intelligence — but it would be extremely difficult to prove the point one way or the other. The appearance of a close relation may be due to other factors — for example, to the fact that children of good intelligence usually receive a more thorough training in subjects in which reasoning and the more severe intellectual disciplines play an important part. However that may be the question is quite distinct from the first one mentioned above.

The second criticism is this: the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is not grounded in reason as such; if we are looking for a source of the obligation then we find it in the practical sphere — in our general sense of obligation to the community. We realise that the welfare of the community depends on our general reliability and on the fact that our

conduct in any given situation is more or less predictable; thus arises the notion of an obligation of consistency, a notion which has been, as it were, "carried over" into the sphere of logical reasoning from the field of action. This seems to be the point which C.I. Lewis is making in the following passage: "If we inquire what it means to be rational, the reply is likely to be given in terms of our tradition of western thought, by some reference to inference and logical validity. But perhaps we should do better to consult our own sense of ourselves, and we should then find an answer in terms of our capacity for foresight and the direction of our action by it ---- rationality in this sense is not derivative from the logical, rather it is the other way about. The validity of reasoning turns upon and can be summarised in terms of consistency. And consistency is, at bottom, nothing more than the adherence throughout to what we have accepted, or the non-acceptance now of what we shall later be unwilling to adhere to." 1.

Apart from the difficulties always attendant upon all attempts to explain something in terms of its supposed origins, we may note the following objections to the above criticism.

(a) It seems to be suggested in the above interpretation that what we mean when we say we ought to conform to the principle of consistency is "that we ought to conform for the sake of some good which will result". We have already criticised this interpretation; all we need say here is that though it may often be the case, in the practical sphere, that we have in mind the consequences of our action when we consider whether we have an obligation to act consistently, it is rarely true that we think of consequences when we are confronted with a contradiction in the theoretical field - or not immediately anyway. The fact of contradiction is, in itself sufficient to give rise to the obligation.

1. An analysis of Knowledge and Valuation, p.480.

(b) It is not certain whether an absolute and clear distinction can be made between the "practical" and the "theoretical", so far as this particular issue is concerned. Whether it is a question of a self-contradictory argument, or of inconsistencies between two beliefs, or of an inconsistency between the assumptions underlying our actions in situation A and the assumptions underlying our actions in a similar situation B, the impact of the principle of consistency seems the same - we are confronted with the same moral obligation.

What sometimes confuses us here is that we do not differentiate clearly, within the so-called practical sphere, between the situation in which we are confronted with an inconsistency between two or more assumptions on which we had been basing our actions, or an inconsistency between what we say we believe and what our actions seem to indicate we believe, and the situation in which we simply do not "live up" to our beliefs. - in which, through lack of "will-power" or because of strong temptations we fail to carry out the policy of action we believe in. In both these kinds of situation we tend to say that a person is acting inconsistently or being inconsistent but as we have pointed out before it is only in the first type of situation that the question of an obligation of consistency is relevant.

(c) While it is no doubt true that, from the common sense point of view, the obligation to conform to the principle of consistency is most important in those cases in which "practical" issues are involved, we cannot infer from this that

the source of the obligation is to be found in the practical sphere rather than in the theoretical. All that we can infer from such a statement is that, in general, the average man is more concerned with the practical problems of daily living than he is with knowledge for its own sake. And this preoccupation with the "practical" often seems to affect his moral sensitivity to the problem of inconsistencies in the theoretical field. A person of unquestioned moral integrity so far as his relations with other people are concerned may often, for instance, be quite careless about applying the principle of consistency to his religious or political beliefs, or about applying it to his handling of the facts in general. Intellectual integrity is a comparatively rare thing, and without doubt this is in part the result of a lack of emphasis on this aspect of moral behaviour in our educational system.

12. In one sense, however, the above criticism -viz. that the source of the obligation of consistency is to be found not in reason but in the "practical sphere" -does give a good emphasis, and that is that it tends to stress the fact that the principle of consistency is not merely an intellectual tool by means of which we are able to solve problems, but is a moral principle of very great practical importance. We have already noted that critics of the traditional view of moral obligation tend to overlook the fact that they themselves assume that we have an obligation to conform to the facts and to the principle of consistency. But it is true also that there has been a general

tendency to underestimate the importance of the obligation of consistency. This obligation is presupposed in all arguments; by means of the principle of consistency we are able to check on the validity of our moral intuitions; progress in knowledge often turns on the awareness of contradiction and on our feeling under the necessity to do something about it -but more than this, the stability of society in some measure rests on the faithfulness of its members to this principle. One has but to reflect on the matter to realise the chaos that would ensue if men did not recognise any obligation to try to conform to the principle of consistency. But, then, if they did not recognise the obligation they would not be men in the normal sense of that term -they would not be rational beings.

C H A P T E R X.THE RELEVANCE OF THE CRITERION OF THE GREATEST
GOOD TO THE PROBLEM OF MORAL ACTION.I.

1. We have accepted the principle of the greatest good as one of the common sense criteria of rational action, and we have already discussed the application of this principle in the field of desires. Now, just as we say that a man acts rationally if he chooses that course of action which will give him the greatest pleasure or bring him ultimate happiness, so it would seem to be in line with common sense to say that when we are considering what our duty is in any given situation we ought to choose that course of action which we think will produce the greatest good (whatever we may mean by that expression). Certainly it seems paradoxical to say that the morally right action might be one which we think will produce less good than some other action which it is within our power to do. And this interpretation of the common sense position is borne out by the fact that when the average man is asked to say what he means by a "morally right action" his first answer is often some variation of the utilitarian formula: - a right action is one which produces the greatest good, or the greatest good of the greatest number.

Philosophers, however, have sometimes questioned the common sense view on this matter (or rather, what appears to be the view of reflective common sense) and have put forward various

arguments to show that the principle of the greatest good is not really relevant to the discussion of what constitutes our duty; or, that if it is in some sense relevant it is nevertheless not valid as a criterion of "rightness". It is therefore of some importance to show whether, and to what extent, the common sense view can be justified. If it cannot then we are faced with the problem that one of our criteria of rationality is not applicable to a very wide and important area of human action.

II.

2. The first argument that we must consider is that we cannot define "right" in terms of our principle. To quote Ross: "Being right means being an act productive of the greatest good producible in the circumstances" - Is it not plain on reflection that this is not what we mean by right, even if it be a true statement about what is right.¹

How important is this point in so far as our main problem is concerned? When we say that "right" cannot be defined in terms of consequences we are simply stressing the fact that we do not necessarily come to regard a certain course of action as right as a result of working out its possible consequences, nor do we necessarily think of the consequences of an act when we assert that it is right. As Ross puts it: "It seems clear for instance that when an ordinary man says it is right to fulfill promises he is

1. The Right and the Good - Sir David Ross, p8.

It is to be noted that we do sometimes mean by "right", productive of good consequences - e.g. when our choice is, as we say, between two evils, or when the situation is so complicated that we cannot be guided by one of the accepted moral axioms. To say this however does not entitle us to define "right" in utilitarian terms.

not in the least thinking of the total consequences of such
¹
 an act.

But we can admit this, and yet at the same time assert, without contradiction, that an ultimate criterion, if not the ultimate criterion, of rightness is to be found in the principle of the greatest good. In other words, even though we may not always, or even mostly think of consequences when we judge a certain action to be right nevertheless we would cease to regard it as the right action if it could be proved that, in the circumstances, it would produce less good than some other action. Whatever other characteristics a right act might possess it at least must have the characteristic of being productive of the best possible consequences in the circumstances. If we do not often actually base our actions on a calculation of such consequences - as we do not, for instance, in nearly all cases in which we keep promises, tell the truth, refrain from stealing, and so on - it is because we take it for granted that, on the whole, these prima facie right actions will produce the best consequences.

3. Even this statement of the position would be disputed by some. It might be held, for instance, that while it seems self-contradictory to say that a right action might not produce any good or might produce more evil than good, it is nevertheless not self-contradictory to say that an action is right even though it does not produce the best possible consequences. And in support of this we can bring forward examples

which show that we sometimes think an action right even though we are fairly sure that it will not produce the greatest good in the circumstances. Thus:

In a shipwreck there is only room for one more person in the last lifeboat, and two men are left waiting for a place. One is a scientist, specialising in medical research in which field he has already made important discoveries. The other is a young man of very average intelligence and poor moral character. The captain knows that it would be better for the world in general if the scientist were spared rather than the young man but nevertheless feels with complete conviction that what he ought to do is to ballot for the place, and thus give each man an equal chance.

In reply to this point we can raise the following objections:

(1) It must not be assumed that what we intuit as right, while placed in the moral obligation situation, is necessarily right. Critics of the intellectual approach to moral questions - i.e. that we can come to know what is our duty by a process of reasoning in which we apply general rules to particular situations, - have tended to overestimate the value of "on the spot" decisions, and have consequently "played down" the influence of external factors on such decisions. We shall come back to this point shortly but here it is sufficient to point out that in a case such as we have instanced above the captain might well have been unduly influenced by customary morality (the code expected of him), or by a sub-conscious awareness of the difficulties which any alternative course of action would have involved - and if he had been able to reflect afterwards "in a cool moment" he might well have realised that what seemed certain at the time was really by no means clear and straightforward.

(ii) We might put the same point another way by saying that if the consequences of our action, or what we think will be the consequences could be observed as clearly as the immediate factors in the situation then our decision as to the right course of action might well be different. Thus if the captain could have been confronted with some vivid representation of the consequences of sparing the scientist's life the emotional impact might have been sufficient to offset the force of the emotive factors present in the immediate situation.

(iii) We need not, however, concern ourselves with these conjectures for it is true to say, I think, that in every case in which we allow ourselves to be determined by some moral intuition, even when it appears that in so doing we will not produce the greatest good, we do afterwards, if criticised, try to justify our action by claiming that "in the long run" it would be justified in terms of consequences. This justification takes many forms:

(a) Sometimes we say that it is so difficult to foresee all the consequences that it is safer to weigh up the issue in terms of known short-term factors and thus allow ourselves to be determined by the accepted rules governing such a situation.

A variation on this theme can be summarised as follows: It might seem probable that course A will produce the best consequences but there are so many chance factors which may upset our calculations that it is wiser to ignore the question of consequences and trust to the usual rule followed in such circumstances.

Now it is obvious that these arguments do not

necessarily imply that the principle of the greatest good is not a criterion of rightness; they merely assert that in some cases it is wiser to be guided by certain accepted rules as to what should or should not be done in situations of a certain kind than to attempt to assess the consequences of alternative courses of action.

(b) We may justify following the stock response in situations where it seems probable that an unusual course of action might produce the better results by arguing that it is essential for the welfare of society that the validity of the usual principle of action be upheld. In other words, we are really saying that though the unusual course of action seems to be the one which will give the best results nevertheless "in the very long run" the best consequences will result from a rigid adherence to the accepted rules.

Thus we sometimes think that it would be better for everyone concerned if we humanely ended the life of dangerous lunatics, but this apparently reasonable proposition is usually countered by the argument that the principle of the sanctity of the individual is too important in the life of a society for
1.
any exceptions to be allowed.

Hume, as we all know, used this argument to defend acts of justice which, in themselves, were contrary to public interest:

"Though in one instance the public be a sufferer, this momentary ill is amply compensated by the steady prosecution of the rule, and by the peace and order, which it establishes in the community" (op.cit., B. 497.).

(c). We sometimes defend actions which seem not to be for the general good on the grounds that we have faith that ultimately the action will justify itself in terms of consequences. For obvious reasons this argument is usually developed within the context of some religious faith which guarantees that the right consequences will result from actions based on faithfulness to certain immutable moral principles. Thus those who argue that there are certain "absolute" moral principles which hold under all circumstances, irrespective of the apparent consequences, nearly always fall back on "faith in God" or faith in a "moral universe" to justify their adherence to these principles in circumstances where, to ordinary common sense, they produce the wrong result. For instance the pacifist who claims that it is wrong to take human life under any circumstances always has difficulty in presenting a reasonable case for his point of view unless he calls in "divine aid". Even when a person has lost his belief in a God, belief in the moral nature of the universe lingers on and affects his attitude to moral questions. He tends to have a superstitious fear of breaking any of the "moral absolutes" in which he has been brought up even when his common sense tells him that he ought to. The conscientious youth, faced with a situation in which it seems right that he should tell a lie, feels that the whole moral structure of things is crumbling - he feels that the universe ought to be such that¹ truth-telling will always produce the right consequences.

1. In this connection it is, I think, significant that utilitarianism as a moral creed was most widely accepted in the last century among those who, in some degree or other, had broken away from

It seems to be the case then that on reflection we do always try in some way or other to justify our moral actions in terms of their consequences even though there might have been no thought of consequences when the action was done. And this means, in effect, that we do regard the principle of greatest good as a criterion of all right actions.

III.

4. A further attack on the principle of greatest good might be made on the grounds that it is a purely formal criterion -that in fact it is not a criterion which we can use in determining what we ought to do.

This criticism takes several forms. The first is that it is not a practicable criterion because it is impossible to calculate with any accuracy what the consequences of our actions will be. Even if we could estimate the immediate consequences and decide with assurance that one particular course of action was the right one we could never be certain that the "long-range" consequences would not show our decision to have been wrong.

In answer to this point we should note first that most exponents of utilitarianism have readily granted that there are enormous difficulties in the task of calculating consequences, but they have nevertheless insisted that the attempt must be made. And, indeed, if we state the case clearly we shall realise

orthodox Christian belief. Once we have ceased to believe that our "on the spot" intuitions are the voice of God we seem inevitably to be attracted to some form of utilitarianism.

that our obligation can never be to assess the full consequences of alternative courses of action, but simply to try to weigh up the consequences so far as we can predict them. Our decision might well prove to be the wrong one, but in so far as we make an effort to assess the consequences then our duty has been done. The same point can be made, of course, about intuitions of rightness which are experienced in the actual moral obligation situation. We can never be certain at the time whether the intuition was a genuine moral intuition or not, but it is our duty to be guided by it nevertheless.

This point having been made clear, we should note that there are many situations - and often of the most important kind - where we have no choice but to attempt to base our decision on a calculation of consequences. In other words, the situations are such that there seems no possibility of our being guided by some direct intuition of rightness.

(a) Sometimes there is a clash between two or more basic axioms of morality. We are faced, say, with a choice between telling the truth or keeping a promise, and we have no clear¹ intuition as to which should be preferred.

1. It is interesting to note here that though there are many duties which seem self-evident - promise keeping, telling the truth etc. - there is much difference of opinion as to the relative strengths of these duties - as to their order of importance. No doubt we usually think of the duty to preserve human life as having precedence over other duties, but even here it is possible to think of circumstances in which we might think it right to give some other duty a priority over the duty to preserve life. And when we come to consider the other "prima facie" duties we do not seem to have any clear intuition as to their order of importance.

(b) Sometimes the situation is so complex that there is no chance for any one intuition to dominate the field. Thus, except for the "absolute" pacifist or the "absolute" patriot the problem of what to do or rather of what one ought to do in the event of war breaking out is so baffling that it seems ridiculous to try to solve it by waiting for some clear intuition. If one does try to do so the odds are that one will simply be motivated by whatever factor happens to be most influential at the time.

In a complex situation like this one can of course decide that no rational methods of enquiry are possible and that therefore the only thing to do is to follow the conventional course of action. On the other hand one may decide that the only sensible thing to do is to work out which of the various alternatives seems to offer the best chances of at least producing more good than evil. Inevitably, in trying to analyse the various possibilities the issues have to be simplified and only fairly short-range considerations taken into account, but this may still seem preferable to leaving the matter to be decided by convention.

1. In the last war for instance most people who made any attempt to justify their participation in what amounted to mass slaughter did so on the ground that even national annihilation was preferable to a Nazi dominated world. No doubt this simplified the alternatives and glossed over some very big moral problems, nevertheless it was a method of approach which commended itself to most thoughtful men. It is impossible to say how we possibly arrive at the conclusion that a Nazi world would be worse than national suicide - actual calculation would seem to play very little part. It would seem, ironically enough, to be a question of intuitions or "hunches" - but, if so, it is an intuition about consequences, about matters of fact, and not a moral intuition.

(c). Another case in which it is necessary to calculate consequences before we can know what we ought to do is where the rule of action which we think it right to follow in certain circumstances is conditional on certain results being obtained. If the results are not obtained or if they fall below a certain minimum then we are no longer bound by the rule. Thus, in the field of diplomacy, it might be thought right, in the interests of peace, to pursue a policy towards a certain nation which it is thought will tend to make it cautious in undertaking military adventures. The diplomatic experts, however, keep a constant watch on the effects of their policy so that the moment it ceases to have the desired effect and, say, results in the suspected nation re-arming more vigorously, it can be scrapped or modified.

Many of our duties fall into this class.

These then are some of the types of situation in which it seems necessary for us to attempt to calculate consequences in order to know what is the morally right course of action. There is one more point to note, however, and that is that the decision to scrap the utilitarian method is itself often based on a calculation of consequences. Thus, after we have made some disastrous attempts to base our moral actions on the principle of the greatest good, irrespective of whether this led us to act contrary to the accepted maxims of society, we may examine these maxims anew and come to the conclusion that, on the whole, actions based on them produce the best consequences. In coming to

such a conclusion, however, we shall perforce have used the very method we are seeking to discredit, for it is by no means self-evident that the various *prima facie* duties will in fact always bring about the best consequences if fulfilled.

5. The second main criticism of the principle of the greatest good as a practical criterion of rightness is that we cannot come to know what is the morally right thing to do by a process of argument, and in particular by a process in which we try to apply some general formula to particular situations. We can only know what we ought to do by an act of apprehension made in the actual situation itself.

This point of view has been most forcibly argued by Prichard in his paper, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?"

Thus: "The sense of obligation to do, or the rightness of, an action of a particular kind, is absolutely underivative or immediate" ----- "The negative side of all this is, of course, that we do not come to appreciate an obligation by an argument, i.e. by a process of non-moral thinking, and that, in particular, we do not do so by an argument of which a premise is the ethical but not moral activity of appreciating the goodness either of the act, or of a consequence of the act." ----- "If we doubt whether there is really an obligation to originate A in a situation B, the remedy lies not in a process of general thinking, but in getting face to face with a particular instance of the situation B and then directly appreciating the obligation to originate A in this situation."

There are really several points involved here, each of which requires separate treatment.

In the first place, there is a specific criticism aimed at the use of formulae which have a reference to an end. It is said that we can only have an obligation to do some action or to refrain from doing some action; that we can never

have an obligation to aim at something or to try to achieve some end. And this argument is thought to apply to the instances in which we use the principle of the greatest good as a criterion of rightness.

Yet, from a common sense point of view, it seems sensible enough to say that so and so feels that he is under an obligation to help to bring about the kingdom of God on earth, or that so and so feels it his duty to try to overthrow the Communist regime. No doubt, in actual practice, these very general obligations merely provide a kind of moral framework within which particular duties to do this or that are laid upon us, but nevertheless it does not seem nonsensical to talk of our having such obligations and indeed they may exercise a strong influence on our conduct in particular situations.

Moreover, if we cannot have an obligation to try to bring about certain consequences how are we to decide what we ought to do in those circumstances in which there is a clash between *prima facie* duties and no clear intuitive guidance is forthcoming. Of course, in these situations, our obligation is always in the last analysis an obligation to do some particular thing, but in so far as this obligation is based on a calculation of consequences then there is an implied obligation to help bring about these consequences.

Two objections are raised against this interpretation of the common sense position. The first is a logical one. It is said that if we have an obligation to bring about a certain

state of affairs this is tantamount to saying that "something ought to exist" or "something ought not to exist", which is, strictly speaking, nonsense. As Prichard puts it: "For we can no more either think or assert of something which we think does not exist than it ought to exist than we can think or assert anything else about it. Of what does not exist we can think and assert nothing at all"¹.

This point, though sound, is not really very important. It indicates merely that the common sense way of describing the situation is too loose. We can get round the difficulty by saying that when we state that something ought to exist we really mean: (a) Such and such a state of affairs if it existed would be good; (b) therefore we ought to try to achieve it.

Or, if we still find this too loose we can always state it in the negative form: This state of affairs is bad, therefore we ought to try to change it, or we ought to try to abolish it. Thus we might say of some slums: these ought to be abolished and modern flats put in their place.

If it be asked how we derive a moral ought from the statement that such and such a state of affairs is bad, the only reply we can give is to say that we in fact do. Just as the sight of a man torturing an animal gives rise to the feeling that we ought to stop him, so the sight of slums gives rise to the feeling that we ought to do whatever is in our power to have them demolished and better housing put in their place.

1. Moral Obligation, p. 93.

The second objection is more important. To quote

Prichard again: "The general conclusion reached is that there cannot be anything at which we ought to aim in action, the ground for this conclusion being that to aim at something is to have the desire of it as our motive and there cannot be an obligation to have a certain motive" 1.

This point is elucidated in another passage: "But by 'aiming at something X' or 'having X as our aim' we mean 'having X as our purpose', and by, 'having X as our purpose' we mean 'having the desire of X as our motive', i.e. being moved to act by the desire of X, so that the statement, 'I ought to aim at X' will mean, 'I ought to be moved to act by the desire of X'. The question therefore arises: Can a statement of this form be true if the term 'ought' be used in the moral sense? And the answer seems to have to be 'no', on the ground that a moral obligation is by its very nature a moral obligation to perform some activity, and that therefore there cannot be such a thing as a moral obligation to be moved by a certain desire, since whatever our being so moved may be, it is not an activity." 2.

In answer to this criticism we may make these two points. First, the statement, "having X as our purpose" does not necessarily mean, "having the desire of X as our motive". It is often the case that we think we ought to try to achieve some end but have no desire to do so. Thus a young Christian doctor, after listening to a missionary describing the poverty and misery of the masses of India, may feel it his duty to make it his chief aim in life to help relieve this misery. Yet when he contemplates what is involved in making such a vow he may find that he has no desire to go to India and devote his life to the poor there. Nevertheless he considers it his duty to do so.

Of course it is true that, in some sense, the general purpose - i.e. the relief of misery - must attract him, but the same could be said of any obligation. The knowledge that something is right is, in itself, a motive to action. And this leads me to the

1. Moral Obligation, p135.

2. Passim, p 129.

next point.

Even if it were true that the statement, "having X as our purpose" meant "having the desire of X" as our motive" this would not necessarily preclude the possibility of our having a moral obligation to aim at X, unless indeed we think it impossible to have a moral obligation to do something which we, in any case, desire to do. It is true that we cannot have an obligation to desire any particular end any more than we can have an obligation to think that any particular action is the right action; it is also true that we cannot tell anyone else that he ought to aim at some end - but all this is quite consistent with our holding that it is possible both to desire some end and at the same time to think that we have a moral obligation to try to achieve it. The Christian desires perfection; he also thinks he has an obligation to seek perfection.

6. The above criticism was aimed specifically at those arguments in which we try to discover our duty by considering the consequences of our actions or by thinking of some end which we think we ought to try to bring about.

We can attack the principle of the greatest good as a practical criterion of rightness, however, on the general score that it is never possible to know what we ought to do by arguing from general principles of any kind. We can only know our duty by an act of apprehension in the actual situation.

It is sometimes said, for example, that if we could discover some formula by which we were able to tell which acts

were right then it would be possible for a person completely lacking in a "moral sense" to know what is right.¹ But this is ridiculous, in the same way as it is ridiculous for a person who lacks any aesthetic sense to try to differentiate between good and bad paintings by means of some general rules.

In answer to this point it can be readily admitted that there can be no substitute for the final act of moral comprehension -there is no logical leap from the presentation of a number of facts or the presentation of a number of arguments to a moral conclusion. But to admit this is not to deny that some general thinking about moral questions may [not] be of help to the person who has a "moral sense" and therefore some experience of what it means to be under an obligation. Just as it is the person who takes art seriously who usually studies the theoretical principles of art, so it is the person who takes the moral problem seriously who tries to discover the "deeper" moral intuitions which underly the concrete intuitions of particular situations. Carritt suggests that one reason, or rather a chief reason for the attempt to discover some general formula of rightness is "a desire to escape the trouble of using our moral judgment",² but in most cases the reason is to be found rather in the puzzlement which arises when we first discover that the simple rules we had been taught as children are not sufficient.³ When, for instance, we are faced with some of the desperate moral problems

1. See E.F. Carritt, *Ethical and Political Thinking*, p 11.

2. *Passim* -p.11.

3. Sometimes the reason is a philosophic one: the desire to introduce coherence into what seems to be a chaos of particular intuitions.

which are the inevitable concomitant of a war situation we quickly discover that no clear guidance can be expected from the common sense rules of morality; nor do we usually receive any guidance from "immediate intuitions" when we place ourselves in the situation. Under circumstances such as these it is often the person who has given some thought to the general principles of morality who is able to make some kind of moral sense of the situation.

(11). It might be granted that general thinking about moral principles can assist us in coming to a decision in a particular case, but, it might be said, we cannot find out what we ought to do simply by applying some general principle. General principles - e.g. the utilitarian criterion of rightness - are too rigid to apply en bloc to every moral obligation situation, and when we allow ourselves to be guided by them we tend to act against our own conscience - we refuse to take notice of any intuitions, apprehended in the situation, which run counter to them. In other words our ultimate guide must be the deliverance of conscience at the time when action is required of us.

This is a point of view which has much to commend it, and we shall return to discuss it shortly, but two warning notes need to be made immediately. First, if we are to contend that the knowledge of what we ought to do is the product of an immediate act of apprehension then it is difficult to see how we can dispute the claim to have apprehended some absolute rule of

conduct which is often made by people. Thus a person may claim that he knows it is wrong to take human life under any circumstances, and hence to this extent be able to anticipate exactly what he ought to do, or at least what he ought not to do in certain circumstances. He would know, for instance, that he could never take part in warfare. Or again, a person may assert that he knows that some authority, say the Pope, ought always to be obeyed, and he may claim that this is an act of moral insight. The good Catholic knows exactly what he ought to do given certain circumstances, and though in many cases the teachings of his religion are simply taken for granted, nevertheless in so far as his conduct ultimately rests on a moral insight - namely, on the insight that the Church ought to be obeyed - then it is difficult to see how we can deny that he is acting in a moral manner.

Secondly, though we may agree that the attempt to apply general formulae to particular moral situations often results in solutions which do violence to the "natural" moral apprehensions, yet it is equally true that all the evidence points to the dangers of allowing ourselves to be guided only by the deliverance of conscience at the moment of impact of the situation. What we intuit as the right thing to do is very often simply what we have been conditioned to intuit; or what may seem like a moral apprehension may, on reflection, prove to be only a quasi-moral feeling. In other words, we do not come to any particular situation with, as it were, an "empty" mind; we come to it with certain moral assumptions which, in many cases, will simply be the

assumptions of the society in which we have been brought up and which we may have accepted quite uncritically. To ignore this obvious fact in stressing the "immediateness" of moral knowledge is to shut the door on any attempt to introduce some kind of rational control over our moral actions.

7. Though it may well be true that the ultimate data of morality are to be found in the immediate moral intuitions which we apprehend in this or that particular situation, the rational man cannot be satisfied to let the matter rest there. His awareness that the intuitions of one man may differ from those of another in the same kind of situation; that the deliverances of his own conscience may conflict in a bewildering way; that he has often mistaken in the past, feelings of a quasi-moral character for genuine moral insights - all this will lead him to search for more abiding moral principles which will introduce some stability and coherence into the moral life. Even if he is not concerned to build up an elaborate theoretical system of morality, he will be moved, as a rational being, by the obligation of consistency to eliminate as far as possible the most blatant of the inconsistencies. In order to be able to do this he will need to reflect on the particular intuitions apprehended in actual concrete situations, and on the moral axioms accepted by the society in which he lives, in order to find out whether there are more fundamental moral principles in the light of which the particular intuitions or particular axioms can be analysed and tested. It is in this context that one must consider the use of the principle of the greatest

good.

We have seen that it is implied in the common sense use of the term "right" that an action cannot be right unless it has, at least, the characteristic of being productive of the greatest good in the circumstances. If it can be shown that some action, thought to be right, will not produce the greatest good then it seems self-evident that it is not actually the right action. Here then is a principle by means of which, it would appear, we could construct some kind of stable moral system, acceptable to all. It might be objected, however, to this that, quite apart from the enormous practical difficulties of applying the criterion, the principle itself is only acceptable to all because it is purely formal in character. We ^{might} all agree, in theory, that it is rational to do the action which we think will produce the greatest good, but as soon as we enquire what we mean by the "greatest good" then all agreement vanishes; for some the greatest good will be the happiness of a certain privileged section of humanity, for others the greatest good will be found in the creation of a society where certain values, say of beauty and truth, will reign supreme, for others again, the greatest good will be in the saving of souls for the next world. And though it may be the case that some particular interpretation of the "greatest good" will represent the majority opinion, yet it does not seem likely that one would get any more agreement about the "greatest good" than one does about the validity of particular principles of morality.¹

1. The common sense meaning of the greatest good is probably found

This criticism is just -and it is, of course, easy to see why. For, in giving content to the idea of the "greatest good", we have to rely on the intuitions of particular experiences and on the particular rules which we accept as true for our material. If, for instance, we accept the principle of equality as binding then in our idea of the greatest good the notion of equality would of necessity play an important part. For a Nazi, on the other hand, the idea of equality would presumably play little or no part in his conception of the greatest good.

But though we must accept the fact that we will not necessarily achieve objectivity by using the principle of the greatest good this does not mean that it does not have an important part to play, as complementary to the principle of consistency, in rationalising our moral behaviour. We saw in the last chapter how the principle of consistency could be used to help iron out differences over the facts and also differences in moral valuations. In the same way we can use this principle to help us achieve a more stable and coherent pattern of moral behaviour. The starting point of any attempt to do this is found in those situations where we are aware of some inconsistency: say, a clash between a particular intuition and a more general principle; or a clash between the moral intuition in one situation and the intuition in a situation of a similar kind; or

in the formula, "the greatest good of the greatest number", or more precisely, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". This is sometimes qualified by the principle of perfection: i.e. the greatest happiness of the greatest number consistent with the attainment of the highest degree of perfection possible. But the idea of happiness is the dominant one.

a clash between two prima facie duties. The attempt to resolve such inconsistencies forces us to try to find more fundamental intuitions by which to guide our actions, or to try to discover which, among the more general principles of morality accepted by us, are the principles we accept as basic and which are derivative. Thus a man who has regarded the infliction of corporal punishment as wrong on the grounds that it is wrong to inflict pain on another person in cold blood may be forced to realise that there are some circumstances in which it is right to inflict pain deliberately. He is then forced to find some other reason for the strong, and apparently, moral feelings of revulsion which he experiences at the thought of corporal punishment; and in searching for an adequate moral reason he may be led far afield into considerations about the differences between men and brutes, or about the nature of personal relations, and so on. In the same way a person, reflecting on situations in which there has been a clash between two prima facie duties - say, the duty to tell the truth and the duty to help someone in distress - may come to the conclusion that he must always tell the truth, whatever the consequences; or again, he may decide that each situation must be judged in terms of which course of action will lead to the least suffering to those immediately affected. But whatever the decision his understanding of the moral problem will be deepened, and his knowledge of what things really have supreme value for him will be clarified.

By this means then the reflective man, starting with concrete situations and accepted principles, will tend to

form the conception of a moral ideal based on a few basic moral principles. Thus he might form the idea of an ideal society in which all men will be treated as of equal importance, and will receive equal opportunities to develop their potentialities and to seek their happiness; and his general conception of what he ought to do will be based on an examination of the means by which such an ideal might be achieved.

Such ideals, then, give content to the principle of the greatest good, so that when we are in situations in which it is necessary to think of consequences in order to know what our duty is, we tend, if we have thought reflectively about moral problems at all, to calculate them within the context, as it were, of such an ideal. The Communist weighs up all issues in the light of his conception of the classless society, the Christian thinks of the Kingdom of God or of what the ideal Man would do in similar circumstances.

We may not, of course, come to our idea of the "greatest good" by the means I have suggested - i.e. by applying the principle of consistency to concrete moral decisions and to accepted moral principles. We may accept our idea of the "greatest good" from some authority, or take it for granted as a result of childhood training. But the method which commends itself as the rational one is surely the method outlined above.

8. It is not suggested that we can deduce from any such ideal detailed principles of action to cover all possible situations, or that, in any sense, such an ideal can be a

substitute for the moral intuitions apprehended in particular situations. The function of such ideals is first, that they help to introduce some coherence into the moral life, and secondly that they often provide an impetus to action when the performance of a particular duty seems irksome. The good Communist, bored by the endless round of committee meetings, is spurred on by the thought of the final goal. At this level desire and duty come together.

In saying that these formulations of the "greatest good" help to introduce coherence into the moral life I am not thinking so much of the construction of any theoretical system as of the fact that if we take time to reflect in general on the moral life - to ask what our vocation in life ought to be, or, what things we value most, and so on - then we are more likely to come to each particular situation prepared with some general policy of action which, in itself, will often help to clarify puzzling moral issues. The man who relies, for moral guidance, entirely on the accepted moral principles of society or on the utterances of conscience at the time of decision is likely to be quite baffled when, as often happens, a particular moral problem cannot be solved by any rule of thumb methods or by clear and precise intuitions of "rightness". Only the man who has given some thought to the more general moral problems has a chance of coming to a rational decision in such circumstances.

The dangers inherent in formulating general lines of action are obvious. But to argue that we ought not to prepare any general structure of moral principles for fear that we shall

pre-determine what we ought to do in this or that situation, and thus usurp the function of conscience is to overlook the fact that it is equally dangerous to trust entirely to the guidance of the moral intuitions apprehended when we are "face to face" with the actual situation. No doubt, in the last analysis, the moral man must be guided by what his conscience "tells" him he ought to do here and now in this particular situation, but it is surely wise to provide some check on the non-moral factors which influence the judgments of conscience. And this can only be done by some such process of general thinking about moral questions as has been described above.

On the whole the best balance is struck, perhaps, by keeping the periods of general reflection on moral principles to a minimum so that the free response of the conscience to each new situation is not inhibited by an unwieldy theoretical structure of thought. But it seems necessary, nevertheless, - if we are to exert any kind of rational control over our moral behaviour - that there should occasionally be times when we try to discern some coherent pattern in the innumerable utterances of conscience at work in concrete situations.

Note. In saying that it is only when we are "face to face" with a particular situation that we can know whether we have an obligation to do this or that, it is, I think, overlooked that there are many instances in which we should think it necessary to anticipate the situation by trying to imagine what we should do if the situation confronted us. Thus, in war time, most thoughtful people probably ask themselves how they think they ought to behave to the enemy if he should occupy their country. It is probably impossible to give a final answer to such a question, and actual experience of the situation may show that we had been quite off the mark in our theorisings; nevertheless it would, I think, be considered irrational not to give some thought to the question beforehand.

H A P P I N E S S A N D D U T Y .I .

1. I propose to discuss in this chapter certain problems that arise in connection with the possibility of there being an "absolute" conflict between one's happiness and the course of duty.

 We have stated, at the beginning of this essay, that ultimately all good reasons for action fall under one or other of these two heads: either we do something because we think the action will enable us to satisfy some desire (and, in particular, enable us to achieve happiness), or else we do something because we think we are morally bound to do it. These motives are accepted, in principle, by common sense as being equally valid reasons for action. The problem arises, however, whether they ever come into conflict in such a way that if a man does his duty then he is bound to lose all chances of happiness for himself. If such a conflict can occur then we seem to have a conflict within the concept of rational action itself, so that we are left without any clear guidance as to what we ought to do. What criterion of rationality should we use, for instance, in determining what we ought to do in the event of such an absolute conflict arising?

3. The common sense position in respect to this problem is somewhat ambiguous. In general common sense thinks that where there is a conflict between happiness and duty a person ought to choose the course of duty, but though it might condemn a person for thinking of his own interests rather than of his duty we do not, as we have noted before, say that he has acted irrationally - especially if he was likely to suffer considerable hardship by acting dutifully.

Then, again, though we often expect a person to be prepared to lose his life in the cause of duty (e.g. in warfare) we recoil from the thought that the person so sacrificing himself will not in any sense be rewarded for his virtue. Consequently there is a very widespread belief that the wicked really do suffer, in the long run, for their sins, and that the righteous gain their reward. Often this belief is clearly part of a religious belief, but even where it is not overtly religious, one suspects that it is unconsciously based on religious assumptions. Thus people sometimes say that though the wicked man may prosper outwardly yet his conscience will worry him so much that he won't be able to enjoy his material prosperity. Since there is no very clear evidence that this is inevitably the case, one must assume that the belief is largely based on a more fundamental belief as to the moral nature of the universe.

The obverse of all this is the belief, often expressed, that if there is no God, if there is no guarantee that justice will ultimately be done, then all morality falls to the ground, and we cannot expect people to sacrifice themselves for duty's

sake, unless their own natural instincts prompt them to do so. (e.g. a mother sacrificing herself for her child).

II.

3. Before dealing with the specific problem of the possibility of an absolute conflict between duty and happiness, it might be as well to summarise some of the points which can be made in respect to the relations between happiness and duty. In doing so we shall clear the way for the main issue.

(i) It is not inevitable that happiness and duty should conflict or that the "man of duty" should inevitably suffer for his dutifulness. It is often the case that we want to do what we know we ought to do, and indeed some men may find real happiness in devoting their lives to some moral end which they think they ought to pursue. Moreover, if environmental conditions are favourable we may never actually be placed in a situation where we are called upon to sacrifice a great deal for duty's sake. A politically conscious person, living in a peaceful, well-ordered society, is not likely to suffer for his political convictions to anything like the same extent as a person living in a revolutionary situation.

(ii) Though it is true that we ought to do what is right irrespective of the consequences to us personally, this does not mean that our own happiness should not be taken into account, as one factor among many others, in assessing what is right. In principle that is, one has, other things being equal, as much right to

happiness as anyone else. No doubt, for obvious reasons, the moral man will, in practice, not take his own happiness into consideration when trying to decide what is right, but there may well be circumstances in which it is right in practice as well as in principle to assert one's claim to be taken into account. The over-meek and humble man who is prepared to allow others to "use" him for their own advantage may finally decide, in the interest of justice, and for the sake of the moral health of those exploiting him, to assert his own rights. And a claim of this kind, made by such a person, can often be highly effective.

(iii). There are conceivably circumstances in which we may consider it our duty to make our own happiness our chief moral aim. Thus a person imprisoned under severe conditions, involving solitary confinement, might think that it was his duty to show his gaolers that his "spirit could rise above adverse circumstances".

(iv) We might be said to have a duty to try to minimise the number of occasions on which we do what is right from a "sense of duty" - i.e. without really desiring to do the action. It is true that we cannot, by an act of will, make ourselves desire this or not desire that, but there are various psychological techniques which can be employed whereby we can come to persuade ourselves that we like doing something which formerly we found distasteful.

In the same way we may find that too great a concentration on duty and on the problem of doing our duty is having a

deleterious effect on our character, so that even when we do what is right we are unable, often, to produce the good intended. And we may decide, in consequence, to relax our vigilance somewhat and give a rather freer rein to our desires, or at least to those desires of which we morally approve..

(v). On the other hand the person who has concerned himself too much with the problem of his own happiness may finally conclude that it is only by doing his duty and by concentrating on the problem of his obligations in general that he has any chance of happiness. As Reid puts it: "And as no man can be indifferent about his happiness, the good man has the consolation to know that he consults his happiness most effectually when, without any painful anxiety about future events, he does his duty". 1

We cannot infer from this, however, either that happiness will necessarily result from such an emphasis on duty, or that a person will necessarily be unhappy if he does not make duty central. This point, of course, raises the main issue of this chapter, but here we may make this observation, viz., that while a good man (i.e. a man of fine moral sensibility) would no doubt find it impossible to be happy unless he gave full and proper attention to the performance of his duties, it seems equally true that a person of less acute moral sensibility, or whose conscience has been "dulled", might well achieve happiness in spite of, or even because of his constantly neglecting his duty. Because we find it hard to believe that the wicked will not in some sense be punished for their sins we tend to assume that

even if he is not punished in another world he will at least suffer the pangs of remorse in this. But common observation tends to show that while there are some sins which even the most callous will feel uneasy about, it is possible for the man, whose conscience is "dulled", to think almost exclusively in terms of his own interests and yet suffer no pangs of remorse. And if he is fortunate in external circumstances and has the capacity to "lose himself" in pursuits of various kinds then it is likely that he will have a better chance of achieving happiness than the man of greater moral integrity.¹

III.

4. We must now deal with the problem of an absolute conflict between duty and happiness. And first of all we need to define more carefully what we mean by "absolute conflict".

That duty and desire can come into conflict is an accepted fact of everyday experience and raises no particular problems except to those who are concerned to deny the validity of the concept of duty. It is only when the demands of duty are such that we think all possibility of happiness is denied to us if we submit to the demands that we can talk of an absolute or irreconcilable conflict between duty and happiness. Thus a person

1. In discussing the question whether the "wicked" inevitably suffer for their sins we sometimes confuse two points: first, whether the wicked always feel pangs of remorse; and second, whether the wicked lose all chance of happiness through becoming self-centred. In respect to this second point we need to make a distinction between "being selfish" (in the sense of putting one's own interests before that of others) and "being self-centred" (in the sense of being preoccupied with one's own states of mind). The selfish man need not necessarily be

may know that he faces the certainty of imprisonment for life if he decides to champion a cause he thinks just; or, worse still, he may know that his whole family will suffer irremediable disaster.

The problem then is: what is the rational thing to do in circumstances like these? The problem is particularly acute when the circumstances are such that if we decide not to do our duty our moral lapse will either not be discovered or else will be excused by public opinion. Sometimes a person is forced to do his duty by fear of public disapproval. Though he dreads the consequences of doing his duty, he fears still more the shame of public obloquy so that the dutiful course of action really represents the lesser of two evils. But the position is very different if a man knows that he will have the sympathy of the public if he refuses to do what he knows to be right. This sometimes happens, for instance, when there is a conflict between the actual obligation and a *prima facie* "natural" obligation. (Thus a man may decide that he ought to allow his children to be tortured rather than give information to the enemy. But public opinion would support him if he decided that the price of duty was too great). And if one wants a good illustration of the difficulty with which we are concerned in this chapter, one has only to imagine a situation like the one we have just described -

"self-centred". He may have many interests which "take him out of himself". Actually the man who is too preoccupied with questions of duty is more likely to suffer from "self-centredness" (in the sense described above).

that is, where a person stands to lose everything by fulfilling an obligation which, so far as the public is concerned, he could safely ignore.

5. It is to be noted that our problem does not arise if we assume the existence of God -or, at least, a God as defined by Christians. The Christian religion guarantees that, ultimately, the dutiful man will be rewarded, and though this assurance leaves many problems unsolved (notably, the problem of undeserved suffering) these problems are not such that we need discuss them here. It is when we have no assurance of divine sanctions that the problem arises, for, as has been so often pointed out, it is impossible to prove on empirical grounds that there is any inseparable connection between the performance of duty and the experience of happiness. The most we could hope to prove is that, on the whole, the "good" man tends to be more happy than the "bad" man; and even this proposition can only be plausibly maintained if we confine our attention to those well-ordered societies in which wise laws are supported by the vast majority of the population and rigidly enforced by the police.

6. The issues raised by the possibility of an absolute conflict between happiness and duty are sometimes taken to be fundamental to the whole question of the validity of the notion of duty itself. It is thought to be a contradiction at the very heart of morality if, on the one hand, we argue that we ought to do what is right (or, are morally bound to do it) and, on the other, we state that there is absolutely no guarantee that justice will

be done by way of rewards and punishments to those who fulfill their obligations or do not fulfill them. In particular, we are distressed when we see others suffering for duty's sake while those who have neglected their duties get off scot free.

This is the point of view taken by Sidgwick in the well-known last chapter of *The Methods of Ethics*. To quote: "I find that I undoubtedly seem to perceive, as clearly and certainly as I see any axiom in Arithmetic or Geometry, that it is right and reasonable for me to treat others as I should think that I myself ought to be treated under similar conditions ---. But --- I do not find in my moral consciousness any intuition, claiming to be clear and certain, that the performance of duty will be adequately rewarded and its violation punished. I no doubt feel a strong sentiment, apparently inseparable from the strictly moral sentiments, prompting me to hope and long that it may be so: nay more, my moral reason declares that it ought to be so - where, of course, "ought" is not used in a strictly ethical sense, but expresses the need that Practical Reason feels of obtaining this premiss, if it is to be made consistent with itself. For, if we find an ultimate and fundamental contradiction in our apparent intuitions of what is Reasonable in conduct, we seem forced to the conclusion that they were not really intuitions after all, and that the apparently intuitive operation of the Practical Reason is essentially illusory." 1.

This way of looking at the problem, however, though relevant, is not the aspect which we wish to discuss here. The point Sidgwick is making has been discussed before, in Chapter VII where we considered whether the idea of duty "made sense" in a world that seemed indifferent to all moral values. What we wish to discuss here is the problem of a conflict between two reasons for action, both of which are accepted as being, in themselves, ultimately good or satisfying as reasons for action. In other words we are taking it for granted that we do regard the duty motive as valid, and our problem is simply to find some

1 P. 467.

acceptable criterion which will enable us to decide between the claims of duty and happiness if they should clash.

7. It does not seem possible to discover such a criterion, for we seem to have listed all the possible criteria of rationality and none of them would seem to be applicable to this situation. We might tackle the problem, however, by asking whether one or other of these fundamental reasons for action is, in some sense, more fundamental than the other - or, more strictly, whether one seems by its very nature to have a precedence over the other. Once we put the question in this way we see straightaway that there can only be one answer, viz., that the motive of duty has a prior claim over all motives of desire including the desire for happiness. In other words, once we are really convinced that some course of action is the morally right course then we know immediately that it ought to be taken, irrespective of the consequences to us personally. This being so, though there may well be a conflict between duty and happiness in the sense that if we do our duty then we shall lose our chance of happiness, we cannot say that there is any contradiction within the concept of rational action itself. This would only be the case if the claims of duty and the claims of happiness were equally balanced, so that we would have to admit that there was no rational method of deciding between them. But no one who has had experience of a serious conflict between duty and happiness can doubt that, in the context of such an experience, the road of duty is the one that ought to be taken. And the term "ought" here carries with it

not only the weight of moral authority, but also the authority of "intrinsic reasonableness" We approve of the right action, and of the doing of the right action, with our "whole being".

8. This may seem, however, too easy a way out of the difficulty, or rather, it may seem as if we have underestimated the seriousness of the problem, the intransigent nature of the conflict. The following comments may therefore be of some help as supplementary to what has been said above.

In the first place, it is important to note that when we question the rationality of sacrificing our happiness for the sake of duty it cannot be the sacrificing of happiness per se which is called in question. It is by no means true that we regard it as necessarily irrational for a person to sacrifice his own happiness for the sake, say, of the happiness of others. There are many situations, indeed, in which we might think it irrational for a person to be concerned with his own happiness -e.g. when the welfare of our children is at stake. We may "rebel" against a world in which it is sometimes necessary for a parent to sacrifice everything for the sake of his children, but we do not question the rationality of the act of sacrifice. We think it entirely "natural" that a parent should put the interests of his children before his own.

This being so, what we must be questioning when we demur at the thought of sacrificing happiness for the sake of duty is the idea of duty itself. We are saying, in effect, that while we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of our

children, or our friends, we do not see why we should be asked to sacrifice our happiness for the sake of "cold" duty.

And this brings us to the next point.

9. In making this distinction between what we may call "natural claims" (i.e. the claims of children, friends etc.) and the claims of duty we are, I think, falling into the error which we discussed before: viz. of supposing that the main difference between desire and duty is that desire comes from "within", as a free expression of our nature, whereas duty is imposed against our will from "without". We may, as it happens, desire to do what, it is asserted, we ought to do, but this is irrelevant to the question of the nature of duty. The essence of duty is that we are bound to do it whether we wish to or not, and it is this "authority over us" which we do not like. We do not mind sacrificing ourselves for our children because that is something we are glad to do, but we resent being "forced" to sacrifice ourselves for duty's sake.

We have already commented on the fallacy of this way of thinking about duty (see ps 217(f)) so that we do not need to repeat the arguments here. Sufficient to say that when we do an action because it is the right action, and for no other reason than it is the right action, then the action is an entirely voluntary one. It is as much an expression, a free expression, of our nature as any desire could be.

What tends to confuse us here, as we noted before, is that the notion of duty becomes "mixed up" not only with ideas of external sanctions, but also with concepts of right which

we ourselves are unable to give full hearted consent to. Thus we do not always agree with the moral conceptions upheld by the community in which we live, and yet fear to act contrary to them. And this fear is not merely a fear of the punishments which society can impose; it is a much more complex thing than this, the psychological analysis of which would take us far afield into questions of an anthropological and religious nature. The point we wish to make, however, is that the notion of duty is often viewed in the context of those particular duties which we feel to be imposed on us from without.

10. When we talk of an absolute conflict between happiness and duty, it is necessary to make a distinction between the situation as it was before the particular obligation confronted us and the situation as it is once we know that we have the obligation. Now there is no question that instances do occur in which it would be correct to say that the emergence of a particular obligation had ruined all prospects of a person's gaining happiness. Hence, the person concerned, comparing the situation as it now is with the situation that existed before the emergence of the obligation, could say, fairly enough, that had it not been for the demands of duty he might well have achieved happiness.

But once the situation, the moral obligation situation, has arisen then the moral man must think only within the context of that situation - he must adjust himself to the new facts which have arisen, including the fact of his being under a moral obligation. And when he does this - when he ceases to pine for the "old state of affairs", and addresses himself whole heartedly to the new

situation -then he might well conclude, if he is tempted to ignore^{331.} his obligation, that it is the lesser of two evils to do his duty - that, in other words, he would suffer more by ignoring his duty than by doing it. And the more a person is impressed by the rightness of the action which he thinks he is obliged to do, the more he will feel that, in the given situation, his own good also is best served by doing his duty. The man of dull moral sensitivity will not, of course, come to such a conclusion; but, then, for him the problem of an absolute conflict between duty and happiness hardly arises as a practical possibility.

It is not then contradictory to say, on the one hand, that the claims of duty can deny us the possibility of happiness, and on the other, to say that it may be for our greater good to do our duty rather than to ignore it. The first statement is true if we regard the conflict between duty and happiness from a point of view external to the moral obligation situation; the second is true from the point of view of the person placed in the moral obligation situation. In this connection it is worth noting that the problem of the conflict between duty and happiness tends to weigh most heavily on us when we witness the sacrifice of some other person in the cause of duty rather than when we ourselves are called upon to make some considerable sacrifice for duty's sake. And the reason for this is, I think, that when we observe another person's sacrifice we do so, as it were, from the outside - we do not place ourselves imaginatively in the situation as it confronts him. Actually, if we could view the matter imaginatively we would realise that the problem of the dutiful man suffering

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for righteousness' sake is much less acute than the problem of the suffering which is inflicted willy nilly on the good and the bad, the innocent and the guilty. The dutiful man voluntarily places himself in the way of suffering; but the other kind of suffering is imposed indiscriminately.

11. We have stated that one of the common sense criteria of rationality is the principle of accordance with the facts. When we were dealing with this principle before we noted that while it is usually in our interests to conform to the facts there are occasions when we can safely ignore the facts, or when it may even be in our interests to act against the facts. One of the facts which men have tried to ignore or to explain away is the fact of moral obligation, and some have been very successful in their efforts to do this - especially in the sphere of action. It is relatively easy to "dull" the conscience to the pin pricks of duty; it is much more difficult to establish a philosophical theory which will satisfactorily explain away the concept of duty. But even from the purely practical point of view it is doubtful whether we can ever completely ignore the fact that we are moral creatures, capable of being roused to action by the thought of what is right. Certainly, the man of reasonably active conscience cannot ignore this fact; when he comes to think about his happiness the fact of moral obligation is a fact which he ignores at his peril - it is a fact to which he must learn to adapt his desires, as he learns to adapt them to other brute facts.

The claims of duty need not, as we have said before, over-ride our desires to the extent that we lose all chance of

happiness -it depends on circumstances whether we are ever faced with an absolute conflict between duty and happiness. But the possibility always exists of such a conflict arising, and to that extent we need to be prepared psychologically to meet its demands. In the meantime we have one clear moral duty which must appeal to all who are concerned with the issues which have been raised in this chapter :viz. the duty to help create a state of affairs where the occasions on which an absolute sacrifice of self-interest is called for are reduced to a minimum.

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