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Some Fundamental Ethical Controversies

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# MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.



## I.—SOME FUNDAMENTAL ETHICAL CONTROVERSIES.

By Professor H. SIDGWICK.

THE discussion that follows seems to require a few words of excuse and explanation, on account of the triteness of the topics discussed, and the difficulty of saying anything substantially new upon them. So long as ethical thought is alive and disagreement continues on fundamental points, controversy must continue; at the same time I have no sure hope that the present profound disagreements are likely to be terminated, as similar disputes have been terminated in the progress of the exact sciences, by the rational confutation of all divergent opinions except one. Attempts at such confutation can only take one of two forms: (1) demonstration of inconsistency in the system assailed, and (2) demonstration of paradox—*i.e.*, of conflict with the common sense of mankind. The former method is often recognised as completely effective against certain parts of a system as expounded; but it is always difficult to feel sure that these parts are really vital, and that the substance of the doctrine assailed may not be so remodelled as to avoid the demonstrated inconsistency: nor may we even say that only one internally consistent system is possible to a reason-

able man ;—rather we seem able to conceive an indefinite number of internally consistent systems, and though, doubtless, all or most of these if fully worked out would involve paradoxical elements, we can rarely be sure that the paradoxes will be completely deterrent. For (2) demonstration of paradox cannot be formally cogent, unless the moralist convicted of paradox has expressly accepted Common Sense as a decisive authority ; and even in this case it often cannot be made completely cogent, owing to the amount of vagueness and ambiguity, of division and disagreement, which we find in the moral common sense of any one social group in any one age, and the amount of change that we find as we pass from age to age and from group to group. For myself, I feel bound to say that though I have always been anxious to ascertain and disposed to respect the verdict of Common Sense in any ethical dispute, I cannot profess to regard it as final and indisputable : I cannot profess to hold that it is impossible for me ever to be right on an ethical point on which an overwhelming majority is clearly opposed to me. And as I cannot admit this myself, I cannot expect any similar admission from opponents. Accordingly I should like it to be understood that in what follows confutation of opponents is not aimed at ; in fact, it is by the definite exclusion of this aim that I hope to impart a certain novelty of treatment to my familiar matter. What is aimed at is merely a diminution of the amount of misunderstanding which philosophical controversy—especially on fundamental points—has always involved. Probably, complete mutual understanding will never be reached until we have reached complete confutation of fundamental errors ; but it seems easier to approximate to the former result, since we have all experienced the interest and satisfaction of comprehending an intellectual position with which we are yet obliged altogether to disagree.

I desire, therefore, to promote mutual understanding on some fundamental points of ethical controversy : by further explaining my own view where my original exposition of it (in my *Methods of Ethics*) appears from criticism to have been incomplete ; and by pointing out where and why some further explanation of my critics' views is needed to enable me to understand them.

I. I may begin by saying that no other aim but this of removing misunderstandings, could have induced me to recur to the ancient problem of the Freedom of the Will. I have no pretension of providing a theoretical solution of this problem ; and, indeed, the first misunderstanding which

I wish to remove is one which attributes to me such a pretention. A very courteous criticism of what I have previously written on this subject (in bk. i., c. 5, of my *Methods of Ethics*) which I find in Mr. Fowler's *Principles of Morals*, pt. ii.,<sup>1</sup> concludes with this sentence: "I venture to suggest that the difficulty raised by this antinomy is not really resolved in either direction by Professor Sidgwick's argument". This is quite true; but my argument, as I conceived it, did not aim—as Mr. Fowler seems to suppose—at a *theoretical* solution of the difficulty caused by the conflict between what I called the "formidable array of cumulative evidence offered for Determinism" and the Libertarian "affirmation of consciousness in the moment of deliberate action": it aimed merely at a *practical* solution of the difficulty, by showing that for purposes of practical reasoning the two opposed arguments cannot really collide. I tried to show that, on the one hand, so far as we reason to any definite conclusions concerning the *future* actions of ourselves or other human beings, we inevitably consider them as determined by unvarying laws: if they are not completely so determined—and we cannot avoid concluding that they are not, if we accept the Libertarian proposition—then our reasoning is *pro tanto* liable to error; but the general recognition of this possibility of error can introduce no practical difference in the conclusions of such reasonings; since the most thorough-going belief in the freedom of human wills cannot be made the basis of any definite forecast as to the effects of the volitions assumed to be free. On the other hand, I tried to make clear that when we are ascertaining—according to any ethical principles and method—what choice it is reasonable to make between two alternatives of *present* conduct, it is as impossible for us to use Determinist conceptions as it is impossible to use Libertarian conceptions when we are endeavouring to forecast *future* conduct. Now, if both parts of this argument are accepted, I submit that a practical escape from the perplexities caused by the Free Will controversy—perplexities which many thoughtful persons have regarded as most gravely practical—has been completely provided: a theoretical solution has certainly not been provided, but neither has it been attempted.

I proceed to ask, then, if either part of my argument, as above summarised, is disputed. I do not find either in Mr. Fowler's, or in any other, recent discussion of the question, any reasoning directed against my contention as

<sup>1</sup> Ch. ix., pp. 330-1.

to the inapplicability of Libertarian conceptions in rational forecasts of the future conduct of human beings ; nor do I find that Mr. Fowler at least definitely denies what I have said as to the irresistible affirmation of Freedom in the moment of deliberate action. But he seems to hold that this affirmation is effectively neutralised by the "counter-argument" that "we are not sufficiently acquainted with all the springs of action and their relative force," so that "we may fairly argue that, if our experience were wider still, and we were fully acquainted with all the antecedent circumstances, every volition might be fully accounted for". And this, or something like this, seems to be the answer that Determinists generally are disposed to give when Libertarians urge the "immediate affirmation of consciousness".

Now, I contend that the completest acceptance of the hypothetical conclusion of this counter-argument can have no practical effect, unless it leads men to abstain from the effort to act rationally, and consciously surrender themselves to the play of mere impulse ; and I do not think that any Determinist will argue that his conclusion either ought to have, or does ordinarily have, this paralysing effect on the practical reason. If it does not have this effect on me, if I still attempt to act rationally, then inevitably—whatever may be the ethical principles on which I attempt to act—I cannot fail to experience the old eternal conflict between the judgment of reason and irrational impulse. And, whenever I experience this conflict, I cannot see how my actual consciousness of choosing between alternatives of conduct, one of which I conceive to be right or reasonable, can be affected by my admission of the hypothetical proposition that, "if I were fully acquainted with all the antecedent circumstances of the volition that I am about to make, it might be fully accounted for". It still remains impossible for me to regard the absence of adequate motive to do what I judge to be reasonable as a rational ground for not choosing to do it ; and it remains impossible for me to think that I cannot now choose to do what I conceive to be reasonable,—supposing that there is no obstacle to my doing it except absence of adequate motive,—however strong may be my inclination to act unreasonably, and however uniformly I may have yielded to such inclinations in the past. I do not, of course, deny that the *difficulty* of resisting vicious inclination is made greater by previous surrenders to inclination ; but I cannot conceive this difficulty becoming impossibility, so long as the consciousness of voluntary choice remains. I am quite willing to admit that this con-

viction *may* be illusory: that if I knew my own nature I *might* see it to be predetermined that, being so constituted and in such circumstances, I should act on the occasion in question contrary to my rational judgment. But I cannot conceive myself seeing this, without at the same time conceiving my whole conception of what I now call "my" action fundamentally altered: I cannot conceive that if I contemplated the actions of my organism in this light I should refer them to my "self"—*i.e.*, to the conscious mind so contemplating—in the sense in which I now refer them. The admission, therefore, that my conviction of the possibility of my acting in accordance with reason *may* be illusory is an admission that can have no practical effect: I must use, in thinking about action, the only conception of human volition that is now possible to me; and this is strictly incompatible with the conception of my choice between rational judgment and irrational inclination as predetermined.

I do not quite know how far Determinists at the present day would deny the guarded statement that I have just given of the inevitableness of Libertarian conceptions. If they do not deny it, I think that most Determinists will probably admit that my *theoretical* suspension of judgment on the question of Free Will does not prevent me from attaining a complete *practical* solution of the difficulties of the question.

But it appears that Libertarians, if I may take Dr. Martineau as a specimen, are not willing to admit this; in fact, Dr. Martineau seems to regard the position that I take up as more untenable than that of a thorough-going Determinist.

"I can," he says, "understand and intellectually respect the thorough-going determinist intensely possessed by the conception of causality that rules through all the natural sciences, and never doubting that, as a 'universal postulate,' it must be driven perforce through the most refractory phenomena of human experience. I can understand the emphatic claim of the reflective moralist for the exemption of his territory from a law which admits of no alternative. . . . But I cannot understand the intermediate mood which imagines the chasm of difference reducible to a step which, for all practical purposes, it is not worth while to bridge over or fill up." Dr. Martineau can "grant, indeed, that in drawing up an objective code of actions to be prohibited and required the two doctrines would not widely diverge in their results . . . but," he thinks, it is inconceivable that the acceptance of Determinism should not make a fundamental "difference of the dynamics of the moral life". "On such a ground," it seems to him, "you may build your mill of social ethics, with all its chambers neat and adequate, and its great wheel expecting to move; but you have turned aside the stream on which it

all depends ; the waters are elsewhere ; and your structure stands dead and silent on the bank.”<sup>1</sup>

I understand the meaning of this eloquent passage to be that the conception of the Freedom of the Will supplies a moral motive to action which is necessarily withdrawn by the adoption of the Determinist conclusion : I do not, however, obtain from it any clear idea of the precise nature of the motive that is supposed to be supplied. As I have already said, I find the consciousness of freedom, in a certain sense, inseparable from the only conception of human volition that I am now able to form ; and it is possible that Dr. Martineau may mean no more than this. But I find no practical difficulty in acting with the consciousness of free choice as above defined, while, at the same time, always reasoning on a purely Determinist basis in forecasting the future, or explaining the past actions of myself and others, and while also recognising that a reconciliation of these distinct intellectual attitudes is a speculative *desideratum* ; and I do not see in what way a speculative conviction of the Freedom of the Will would either directly strengthen the motives to do what I judge to be, on the whole, reasonable, or weaken the force of the impulses that conflict with rational judgment ;—unless it be through a certain process of theological reasoning which I do not regard as conclusive, and to which Dr. Martineau does not expressly refer.

I cannot see that the speculative belief in Free Will would alter my view of ultimate ends. If Happiness, whether private or general, be the ultimate end of action on a Libertarian view, it must be equally so on a Determinist view ; and if Perfection is in itself admirable and desirable, it surely remains equally so whether any individual's approximation to it is entirely determined by inherited nature and external influences or not :—except so far as the notion of Perfection includes that of Free Will. Now Free Will is obviously not included in our common notions of physical and intellectual perfection ; and it seems to me also not to be included in the common notions of the excellences of character which we call virtues : the manifestations of courage, temperance and justice do not become less admirable because we can trace their antecedents in a happy balance of inherited dispositions developed by a careful education.

Again, I do not see how the affirmation or negation of Free Will can reasonably affect our practical conclusions as to

<sup>1</sup> *Types of Ethical Theory* (2nd ed.), vol. ii., p. 42.

the fittest means for the attainment of any of these ultimate ends, so far as the connexion between means and end is believed to exist on empirical or other scientific grounds. I do not see how an act now deliberated on can be scientifically known to be less or more a means to any ulterior end, because it is predetermined; and, so far as in considering how we ought to act in any case we have to calculate the probable future actions of others and also of ourselves, I have already shown that our decision on the question of Free Will cannot practically affect such calculations. I admit, however, that the case is conceivably altered when we introduce theological considerations. According to the received view of the moral government of the world, the performance of Duty is the best means of attaining the agent's happiness largely through its expected consequences in another world in which virtue will be rewarded and vice punished by God: if, therefore, the belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul is held to depend on the assumption of Free Will, this latter becomes obviously of fundamental ethical importance. It is possible that this is what is really meant by Dr. Martineau in the passage before quoted; and if so, I cannot but admit that the denial of Free Will removes a rational motive to the performance of duty, so far as the reasonableness of duty is rested on the particular theological argument just mentioned. I must, however, point out that the assumption of Free Will cannot be said to be generally regarded as indispensable to the establishment of the belief in the moral government of the world, since an important section of theologians who have held this belief with most intense conviction have been Determinists.

I do not, however, wish to enter upon the theological argument at the threshold of which I have now arrived. If it is admitted (1) that the assumption of the Freedom of the Will is in a certain sense inevitable to anyone exercising rational choice, and (2) that the affirmation of Free Will as a point of speculative doctrine is only important ethically so far as it is implicated in a certain theological argument, then the misunderstandings which I am concerned to remove will have vanished.

II. In speaking of the notion of "free" choice as inseparable from the only conception of conscious action that experience enables me to form, I have restricted my consideration to the choice between the alternatives of "rational" and "irrational" conduct. It is, I conceive, this alone that concerns us, from an ethical point of view; not the possibility of merely indeterminate choice,—of what Green calls an

“ arbitrary freak of unmotived willing,”—but the possibility of acting in accordance with our rational judgment when it conflicts with irrational impulses. The phrase just used affords a transition to a second fundamental misunderstanding, which I am anxious, if possible, to clear up ;—all the more, because it is a misunderstanding among persons who are in general agreement as to the right method of dealing with particular ethical questions. According to my view, what I have just spoken of as a “ rational judgment ” on a practical question is normally expressed in the form “ X is right ” or “ X ought to be done ” ; and if the judgment be attained by deduction from a principle, such a principle is always capable of being expressed as a proposition in which the word “ right ” or “ ought ” occurs. The notion that these words have in common is, therefore, the same in different ethical systems : different systems give different answers to the fundamental question, “ what is right,” but not, therefore, a different meaning to the question. The Utilitarian, in my view, affirms that “ what is right ” in any particular case is what is most conducive to the general happiness ; but he does not—or ought not to—mean by the word “ right ” anything different from what an anti-utilitarian moralist would mean by it. Again, according to me, this fundamental notion is ultimate and unanalysable : in saying which I do not mean to affirm that it belongs to the “ original constitution of the mind,” and is not the result of a process of development : that is a question of Psychology—or rather Psychogony—with which I am not concerned : I merely mean that as I now find it in my thought I cannot resolve it into, or explain it by, any more elementary notions. I regard it as co-ordinate with the notion expressed by the word “ is ” or “ exists ”. Possibly these and other fundamental notions may, in the progress of philosophy, prove capable of being arranged in some system of rational evolution ; but I hold that no such system has as yet been constructed and that, therefore, the notions are now and for us ultimate.

I find, however, that these opinions do not seem to be shared by other writers who agree with me in adopting—with or without reserves and qualifications—the Utilitarian standard. But I find a great difficulty in making out exactly where the difference lies. Even in the case of Bentham, who uniformly aims at the most uncompromising clearness of exposition, I nevertheless find this difficulty. For instance, there is a passage in his *Principles of Morals and Legislation* (ch. i., § 10) in which he expressly controverts the opinion that I have just expressed as to the identity

of the meaning of the terms "right" and "ought" in different ethical systems. He says:—

"Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility"—*i.e.*, which has "a tendency to augment the happiness of the community greater than any it has to diminish it"—"one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may also say that it is right it should be done, or at least that it is not wrong it should be done; that it is a right action, at least that it is not a wrong action. When thus interpreted, the words *ought* and *right* and *wrong* and others of that stamp have a meaning; *when otherwise, they have none.*"<sup>1</sup>

This seems unmistakable; and we naturally infer that whenever Bentham is found using the words "ought and right, and others of that stamp," he will mean by them "what tends to augment the general happiness". But how then are we to explain the proposition found in a note to the same chapter (§ 1, added July, 1822)—*viz.*, that his fundamental principle "states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question as being the right and proper, and only right and proper, end of human action"? We cannot surely suppose that he merely means to affirm that it is conducive to general happiness to take general happiness as the sole end of action. If not, what meaning can we give to the term in the proposition just quoted, except precisely the same meaning that it would have if used in a denial of this principle by an anti-utilitarian moralist?

Bentham unfortunately cannot answer; and I do not quite know who at the present day will answer for him. I therefore turn to Mr. Fowler, whose view—though it differs importantly from Bentham's—I have a somewhat similar difficulty in understanding. Mr. Fowler expressly states that he "does not agree" with me "in regarding as ultimate and unanalysable" the idea expressed by the word "right" or "ought". His reasons for disagreeing are, as I gather, given in the following passage: "We maintain (1) that the idea of right is relative to the circumstances in which man is placed; (2) that it is explicable by the idea of good; and (3) that it is possible to discover its origin and trace its growth in the history both of the individual and of the race".<sup>2</sup> Now of these reasons—which (I ought to say) are not expressly addressed to me—only the second appears to me *primâ facie* relevant to the particular point at issue between Mr. Fowler and myself. "Relativity to the

<sup>1</sup> These last italics are mine.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers are introduced by me for convenience of reference.

circumstances in which man is placed" seems to me a characteristic of the *application* of the idea of right, but I do not see that it affects the ultimateness and unanalysability of the idea itself; it affects the answer given to the question "what is right," but not the meaning of the question. Again, as I have already said, the fullest knowledge of the origin and growth of the idea would not necessarily affect the question whether it is now capable of analysis; nor do I see that Mr. Fowler's account of its origin and growth contains anything that bears on this question—unless it be the second of the three statements above quoted, that the idea of right is "explicable by the idea of good".

What, then, does this "explication" amount to? I thought at first that Mr. Fowler's meaning must be that "rightness" is essentially an attribute of *means* not of *ends*, and really signifies that the object to which it is applied is thought to be the only fit means, or the means best fitted, to the realisation of some end, which we conceive as "good" but not "right,"—although the notion of the end may not always be distinctly present in consciousness when we affirm "rightness" of the means. This may hold, so long as we fix attention on actions as distinguished from their ulterior ends; but when we fix it on the *ends* of action, the question arises how the notion of "good" is to be defined, and whether we do not conceive "ultimate good" as the "right and proper end of human action"—to use Bentham's phrase. It seems to me at any rate paradoxical to deny that we commonly think of certain ultimate ends—or the conscious adoption of these ends—as "right": and other parts of Mr. Fowler's discussion would lead me to conclude that he does not mean to deny this. Thus he recognises (p. 227) that man has a "reason capable of comparing the ends to which his feelings impel him," and that when this comparison is made we approve (p. 231) of the "conscious choice of the greater good or lesser evil," even when it involves a sacrifice (p. 234) of "the interests of ourselves to the interests of others"; indeed he considers that it is in this conscious choice and the self-approval that supervenes thereon that "morality first makes its appearance". Again, he recognises as an element of "the process of approbation" what he calls "an act of judgment on the character" of the volition approved, besides and distinct from the mere "feeling of satisfaction" which is sometimes denoted by the word approval. I conclude, therefore, that the approval of the conscious choice of another's greater good in preference to the chooser's lesser good, is regarded by Mr. Fowler as a normal moral

judgment: and I do not see how in this judgment the notion "right" can fail to come in. For this judgment must be expressible in the proposition "that conscious choice, &c., is right," and the word "right" in this proposition cannot *mean* "conducive to greatest good on the whole," since that meaning would reduce the proposition to insignificance. In what way, then, can the idea of right, as used in the judgment of approval of the conscious choice of another's good in preference to one's own, be "explicable by the idea of good"? And if no such explication is here admissible, may we not say that the idea of right, as here applied, is "ultimate and unanalysable" in the sense in which, as above explained, I use the latter term?

III. I am the more concerned to get this point clear because the principle that another's greater good is to be preferred to one's own lesser good is, in my view, the fundamental principle of morality—the ultimate, irreducible basis to which reflection shows the commonly accepted rules of Veracity, Good Faith, &c., to be subordinate. And this leads me to a third point of fundamental importance on which it seems possible to clear away some misunderstanding: I mean what I have called the "Dualism of the Practical Reason". I am not particularly pleased with the phrase, which has a pretentious sound, and is perhaps liable to mislead by suggesting that I claim for my view a completeness of systematic construction which, on the contrary, I wish to avoid claiming; but it seemed the most convenient phrase to express the conclusion in which I was forced to acquiesce after a prolonged effort to effect a complete systematisation of our common ethical thought. Along with (*a*) a fundamental moral conviction that I ought to sacrifice my own happiness, if by so doing I can increase the happiness of others to a greater extent than I diminish my own, I find also (*b*) a conviction—which it would be paradoxical to call "moral," but which is none the less fundamental—that it would be irrational to sacrifice any portion of my own happiness unless the sacrifice is to be somehow at some time compensated by an equivalent addition to my own happiness. I find both these fundamental convictions in my own thought with as much clearness and certainty as the process of introspective reflection can give: I find also a preponderant assent to them—at least implicit—in the common sense of mankind: and I find, on the whole, confirmation of my view in the history of ethical thought in England. I admit that it is only a minority of moralists who explicitly accept this

dualism of rational or governing principles ; but I think myself justified in inferring a wider implicit acceptance of the dualism from the importance attached by dogmatic moralists generally to the conception of a moral government of the world, and from the efforts of empirical utilitarians to prove—as in Bentham's posthumous treatise—that action conducive to greatest happiness generally is always also conducive to the agent's greatest happiness.

Well, I have to acknowledge that this dualism—at least, my statement of it—does not appear to be accepted by any of the writers who have criticised my book. This naturally shakes my confidence in the view ; but it shakes it less than would otherwise be the case, because, while to some critics the sacrifice of self to others seems solely rational, others avow uncompromising egoism ; and no one has seriously attempted to deny that the choice between one or other alternative—according to any forecast of happiness based on mere mundane experience—is occasionally forced on us. I have not, therefore, seen cause to modify my view ; but I admit that I put it forward without a sufficient rational justification, so far as Egoism is concerned. This objection was forcibly urged in a review of my book (2nd edition) by Prof. v. Giżycki in the *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie* (Jahrg. iv., Heft 1), where it was pointed out that I had made no attempt to show the irrationality of the sacrifice of self-interest to duty. I will not pause to explain how the plan of my book—concerned as it was with “methods” rather than “principles”—led to this omission : I quite agree with Prof. v. Giżycki that the missing argument, if demanded, ought to be supplied ; and certainly the assumption upon which the rationality of Egoism is based has been denied by philosophers ; though the denial seems to Common Sense so absurd that a serious demand for its explicit statement is rather paradoxical. The assumption is simply that the distinction between any one individual and any other is real and fundamental, and that consequently “I” am concerned with the quality of my existence as an individual in a sense, fundamentally important, in which I am not concerned with the quality of the existence of other individuals. If this be admitted, the proposition that this distinction is to be taken as fundamental in determining the ultimate end of rational action for an individual cannot be disproved ; and to me this proposition seems self-evident, although it *primâ facie* contradicts the equally self-evident proposition that my own good is no more to be regarded than the good of another.

If the question were put to me: 'But suppose that there is no practical solution of this contradiction, through any legitimately obtained conclusion or postulate as to the moral government of the world, or in any other way: what then? Do you abandon morality?' I should answer: 'Certainly not, but I abandon the idea of rationalising it completely. I should doubtless still, through sympathy and sentiments protective of social wellbeing, imparted by education and sustained by communication with other men, feel a strong desire for the general observance of rules conducive to general happiness; and practical reason would still impel me to the performance of duty in the more ordinary cases in which what is recognised as duty is in harmony with self-interest properly understood. But, in the rare cases of a recognised conflict between self-interest and duty, practical reason, being divided against itself, would cease to be a motive on either side; the conflict would be decided by the comparative preponderance of one or other of two groups of non-rational impulses.' That is, I should lapse to the position which many utilitarians since Hume have avowedly held—that ultimate ends are determined by feeling, not by reason. Here, as I understand, Prof. v. Giżycki would disagree: he holds that, while the demand for the reconciliation of Virtue and Happiness—which he recognises as normal to humanity—is merely an "affectives Bedürfniss," the preference of Virtue or general happiness to private happiness is a dictate of reason, which remains no less clear and cogent, however ultimate and uncompensated may be the sacrifice of private happiness that it imposes. I do not deny this position to be tenable; since, even if the reality and essentiality of the distinction between one individual and another be granted, I do not see how to prove its fundamental practical importance to anyone who refuses to admit it; but I find such a refusal impossible to myself, and I think it paradoxical.

Suppose now that the reasonableness of the assumption required for the reconciliation of Duty and Self-interest—the assumption of the "moral government" or "moral order" of the world—is granted: suppose it granted that Virtue may be assumed to be always conducive to the virtuous agent's happiness on the whole, though the connexion between the two is not scientifically cognisable. The view of morality that I advocate—the systematisation of the morality of Common Sense on a utilitarian basis—does not then seem to involve any fundamental practical difficulty; though it is still liable to many doubts and disagreements as

regards details, from the inevitable imperfections of the hedonistic method. It remains, however, open to a fundamental theoretical objection, urged by Mr. Rashdall in a penetrating criticism of my views which appeared in *MIND* No. 38. Mr. Rashdall considers that the "central difficulty" of my position lies in the "assignment of a different end to the individual and to the race". He argues that if "it is pronounced right and reasonable for A to make sacrifices of his own happiness to the good of B," as this must be equally right and reasonable for B, C and D, "the admission that altruism is rational" compels us to conceive "the happiness which we ought to seek for society," not as mere happiness but as "moral happiness". The ultimate end, for the race as well as for the individual, thus becomes composite: it consists of a higher good, Virtue, along with a lower good, Happiness, the two being so related that in case of conflict the higher is always to be preferred to the lower.

Here I admit, as in a sense true, the starting-point of Mr. Rashdall's argument; I admit substantially the contention that my view "assigns a different end to the individual and to the race," though for a reason that I shall presently state, I regard this phraseology as misleading. But, granting to the full the alleged difference, I am unable to see why it constitutes a difficulty, since the individual is essentially and fundamentally different from the larger whole—the universe of sentient beings—of which he is conscious of being a part: just because he is conscious of his relation to similar parts of the same whole, while the whole itself has no such relation. I, therefore, do not see any inconsistency in holding that while it *would* be reasonable for the aggregate of sentient beings, if it could act collectively, to aim at its own happiness only as ultimate end—and *would* be reasonable for an individual to do the same if he were the only sentient being in the universe—it is yet *actually* reasonable for an individual to make an ultimate sacrifice of his happiness for the sake of the greater happiness of others, as well as reasonable for him to take his own happiness as ultimate end; owing, as before explained, to the double view which he necessarily takes of himself as at once an individual essentially separate from other individuals, and at the same time essentially a part among similar parts of a larger whole.

At the same time I am not prepared to deny that a consistent system might be worked out on the basis of such a composite End as Mr. Rashdall suggests, and I shall not attempt to prove, before seeing it in a fully developed

form, that it would be more open to attack on the score of paradox than my own. But I can give a decisive reason for not accepting it myself: *viz.*, that when Virtue and Happiness are hypothetically presented as alternatives, from a universal point of view, I have no doubt that I morally prefer the latter; I should not think it right to aim at making my fellow-creatures more moral, if I distinctly foresaw that as a consequence of this they would become less happy. I should even make a similar choice as regards my own future virtue, supposing it presented as an alternative to results more conducive to the General Happiness; and for this reason, among others, while holding the fulfilment of Duty to be ultimately reasonable for the individual no less than the pursuit of self-interest, I think it misleading to say that Virtue is an ultimate good to the individual as well as Happiness. As I have explained in my *Methods of Ethics*, bk. iii., ch. 11, § 3, I distinguish the question "whether the dictates of Reason are always to be obeyed" from the question "whether the dictation of Reason is always to be promoted"; and, while I answer the former question unhesitatingly in the affirmative, I leave the latter to be determined by empirical and utilitarian considerations.