HUMANISM AND MORAL THEORY

A Psychological and Social Enquiry

R. OSBORN

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Freud and Marx

Psychology of Reaction

Philosophy for the Ordinary Man

Humanism and Moral Theory

A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL INQUIRY

BY

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Ruskin House

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

MUSEUM STREET LONDON

First published 1959

Printed in Great Britain
in 12 on 13 pt Bembo type
by Jarrold & Sons Ltd
Norwich

For Sally

THE central problem of our times is sometimes put as follows. Man has made enormous technical progress by means of the knowledge and power that science has given him. Yet he seems unable to use this progress for his own happiness. Inevitably certain questions pose themselves that reflect man's perplexity. What *ought* man do in the face of his problems? Which is the *right* way to happiness? Is the kind of knowledge that science brings a *good* thing? What, in any case, do we mean by such terms as 'ought', 'right', 'good', and 'happiness'?

No one can view the literature on ethics in which answers to these problems are suggested without considerable bewilderment. There are a number of paths of inquiry, well-trodden over the centuries, leading to a variety of conflicting answers. The writer on ethics, seeking for his own answer to the problems of ethics, runs a grave risk, in following down one or other of these paths, of becoming entangled in a diversity of argument and opinion. It may be worth while, therefore, to turn aside from these well-trodden paths, to explore a little on one's own, to seek to reach one's own conclusions. And this I shall try to do in this book.

I shall look for an interpretation of ethics in humanist terms, an interpretation which does not go beyond the bounds of human life for its criteria of good and bad, right and wrong, yet avoids the difficulties of relativism that the rejection of absolute, extra-human standards seems to involve. I am going to see, in other words, whether we can get something of the meaning of such terms as 'good' and 'right' from a consideration of the psychological and social conditions in which these terms come to be used. Now many writers on ethics insist that the question 'what do ethical terms mean?' is quite distinct from the question 'how are these terms used?' They point out that while there may be fairly general agreement about the use of these terms, there is

widespread disagreement about their meaning. Thus one modern writer says: 'Differences between philosophers about the general theory of ethics are remarkably great; but experience shows that very wide philosophical differences are quite compatible with striking agreement as regards the kind of action judged right or wrong.'[1]

Nevertheless, there seems something queer to me about this—that people should roughly agree as to what things or actions to call good or right and yet differ widely as to what good or right means, and one of the aims of this book is to make sense of this situation.

My inquiry falls into two parts. First, an examination of the psychological and social factors that seem to me to be relevant for a humanist theory of ethics and, second, a discussion about the meaning and definition of ethical terms.

On the psychological side, I shall inquire into the kind of relationships existing between such factors as our feelings of obligation and duty, and the general development of psychological life. We shall need to consider the way in which children are introduced to ethical notions and learn to say 'good' and 'bad' of things. This will involve a consideration of Freudian theory which, in my opinion, has made some of the most important contributions from the psychological side to the elucidation of ethical notions. We shall find, too, that there has been a considerable amount of research in child psychology which bears upon our inquiry.

On the other side, the complex of personal and social relations that influence the formation of ethical notions will be examined. We shall discuss the way in which social influences are transmitted to the child, particularly in relation to the kind of feelings to which the term 'moral obligation' is applied.

With these psychological and social considerations as a background, we shall go on to discuss the kind of theoretical procedures by which writers on ethics seek to discover the meaning of ethical terms.

[1] A. C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (Kegan Paul), p. 22.

When we turn to books on ethical theory we find that logical analysis plays an important part in the formulation of their theories. A good book on ethics is a model of closely reasoned argument, and the process by which writers on ethics attempt to refute one another's theories is largely a process of seeking to reveal logical inadequacies in one another's works.

Yet it is difficult to say that one writer on ethics is more logical than another, or is unable to appreciate the logical distinctions made by another, and one is forced to the conclusion that the wide differences in ethical theory are not necessarily related to differences in logical skill. I am not suggesting that we can dismiss these differences as solely due to differences in the psychological make-up of the writers. The careful reflection that characterizes work in ethical theory, the systematic logical analysis with which alternative theories are examined, make it unlikely that one could establish any obvious correlation between some aspects of a writer's psychological make-up and his ethical theory. Differences in ethical theory may result from the very complexity of ethical problems, the many aspects which any ethical problem presents, the varying emphasis which different writers place on this or that aspect. None the less, as we shall see, the selection of those aspects of ethical problems appearing of primary importance to any writer may have a close relation to his own intuitive approach, the background of experience that has helped to shape his outlook.

A general outline of the approach of this book, then, is as follows.

Chapter I is concerned with an account of work in child psychology, particularly in relation to the growth of moral consciousness.

In Chapter III, after a general introductory chapter on the use of psychology for ethical theory, I outline those aspects of Freudian theory important for ethical theory. My purpose is to show the kind of complexities involved in psychological development in general, and the development of moral consciousness, in particular. The Freudian theory is presented, not as a finished answer to the problems involved in the development of moral

consciousness but rather as an example of the kind of approach that psychology is making to this problem. In our consideration of Freudian theory, we shall stress the social aspects of psychological development, aspects that Freudian theory tends to neglect; and this will bring us to a general consideration of the relation of social experience to moral thinking. Chapters IV and V will, therefore, consist of a broad consideration of the part social experience plays in the development of the individual in relation to his moral consciousness.

In Chapters VI and VII we turn to the more philosophical aspects of our inquiry. Our aim here will be to use the psychological and social considerations of the preceding chapters to formulate a humanist theory of ethics, an objective theory the criteria for which lie within human life.

Beginning, then, with the problems presented by the contrast between the divergencies in ethical theory and the agreement as to the kind of things and actions to which to apply ethical terms, this book goes on to discuss a number of psychological and social problems which seem relevant for the development of a humanist theory of ethics. I propose now to conclude this introduction by saying what I think such a theory of ethics should do.

It must, I think, begin with the fact that ethical terms, in some form or other, are used by most people as though they relate to special kinds of situations: as though, that is to say, there is a special class of facts to which they refer. It may, of course, be argued that this belief in the objective reference of ethical terms is the product of confused thinking, but this does not affect the fact that the belief is widespread. Nevertheless, I shall argue that there are important psychological and sociological considerations supporting this belief in the objective reference of ethical judgements. As the question of the objectivity of ethical values is of central importance for ethical theory, I propose to say something of the sense in which I think the term 'objective' is applicable in ethical theory.

The term 'objective', in its widely accepted sense, is used to denote that a judgement or opinion states something that may be

true or false—something, that is to say, that is not dependent upon our feelings but is descriptive of a state of affairs that is so, whatever we feel about it. Such a judgement may, of course, contain some reference to our feelings or express them through the tone of voice in which it is uttered, but its primary function, as a judgement, is to indicate a state of affairs and not our feelings. A judgement, for example, that it is raining is objective if it describes a state of affairs that is so whatever the person making the judgement may feel about the weather. He may not desire rain and feel annoyed when he sees it fall. But he makes the judgement 'it is raining' whenever certain conditions are present. He may utter this phrase in a tone expressive of his annoyance, but if he were asked how he knew it was raining he would give an account of these conditions and not refer to his feelings of annoyance, as a source of his knowledge.

In the same sense, for an ethical judgement to be objective it must purport to tell us something about the subject-matter of the judgement whatever the feelings of the person making the judgement may be. By contrast, an ethical theory that denies that ethical judgements have objective reference asserts that such judgements express or describe something about the persons making the judgements. They may assert that such persons have, or tend to have, certain kinds of feelings or, as in the theory put forward by some logical positivists, that such judgements are not statements about feelings but are themselves expressions of those feelings. We shall consider these subjectivist views later. I mention them here only to underline the sense in which I am using the term 'objective'.

To sum up. A humanist theory of ethics[1] must be consistent with the general belief in the objective reference of ethical terms and suggest criteria for this objectivity within the framework of human experience. It must also suggest an explanation of the contrast between the widespread agreement as to the kind of

[1] A distinction is sometimes made between ethics and morals to the effect that ethics is concerned with problems of the meaning of moral terms such as 'good', 'right', etc., while morals is concerned with the actual moral notions and practices of people. In this book, largely concerned with problems of meaning, 'ethics', 'ethical theory', 'moral theory' are used interchangeably.

actions and objects to which ethical terms are applicable and the wide diversity of theories concerning the meaning of ethical terms. These are the tasks I shall attempt in this book.

In the preparation of this book I have received much valuable advice. In particular, I wish to express my gratitude for the kindness and patience shown to me by that great humanist philosopher, the late Professor G. C. Field, and Professor S. Körner of the University of Bristol, and for the helpful comments of Dr J. Bronowski and Mr Stefan Themerson, who read the typescript.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

The Background of Moral Consciousness

THE importance of research into child psychology for ethical theory lies in the extent to which the moral outlook of the adult is influenced by feelings and attitudes which, arising in childhood, are prolonged into adult life. Psychological development is not a simple, direct process by which one stage succeeds and replaces another. At all stages of development, elements of previous stages persist, exerting, as we shall see, an important influence on the behaviour of the individual. And this, we shall find, is true of the development of moral consciousness.

During the present century considerable attention has been devoted to the problem of child psychology. Psychologists have devised techniques for studying the child in the nursery, the school, the home, the laboratory, and the streets. In this chapter I propose to outline some of the work of child psychology, particularly where it bears directly upon the problem of moral development. I shall confine myself, as far as possible, to a factual description of the methods used, leaving theoretical considerations until later chapters. As moral development is part of the general psychological development of the child, I have felt that a brief account of these methods in general would serve both to indicate the character and quality of the work being done in child psychology and to provide a background against which we can examine the particular aspects of child development which concerns us in this book.

Studies of child psychology first took the form of day-to-day

recordings of the doings and sayings of individual children. They were compiled by parents and other adults who took an intelligent interest in the development of the children, jotting down notable incidents in the course of this development. An early example of such child biographies is that of Dietrich Tiedeman who, in 1787, made detailed records of the development of his son from birth to three years of age. One recording, for example, notes the development in the child of a distinction between the self and the not-self and reads: 'The boy did not beat or scratch himself with his hands as frequently as before; so it seemed that painful, oft-repeated experience had taught him to draw some distinction between himself and foreign bodies.'[1] This early observation of the development in the child of a distinction between the self and not-self has received confirmation in later studies of children, particularly those of Gesell, Buhler, and Valentine. We shall later see its importance in the theory of psychological development.

Other pioneers of the study of child psychology by means of patient recording of biographical details are Preyer, Moore, and Shinn. Shinn's *Biography of a Baby*[2] is an exceptionally thorough record of the development of the author's niece during the first year of life. More recent accounts are those of Stern[3] and Valentine[4] who found in the growth of their own children rich material for observation and record.

The scientific value of such biographical accounts is, of course, limited. They are observations made by interested adults who, however objective their intentions may have been, cannot have wholly escaped being influenced by their preconceptions. In any case, we cannot know that they were not biased, and we must, therefore, regard these biographical studies as interesting and delightful studies of individual children, constituting a beginning of the systematic study of child psychology.

A step towards more systematic study occurred when psychologists began to keep records of groups of children. Charlotte

[1] D. Tiedeman, *Observations on the Development of Mental Ability of the Child*, trans. C. Murchison. Ped. Sem. 1927.
[2] M. Shinn, *Biography of a Baby* (Univ. Press; Berkeley, 1909).
[3] W. Stern, *Psychology of Early Childhood* (Allen & Unwin).
[4] C. W. Valentine, *Psychology of Early Childhood* (Methuen, 1942).

Buhler[1] and her associates in Vienna, for example, made a detailed and continuous study of sixty children, recording for twenty-four-hour periods the movements of the children, their reactions to food and other stimuli, the length and character of their sleep. These studies were made in the children's own homes, or the institutions in which they lived, as Buhler believed that laboratory methods introduced artificial factors into the child's environment, which destroyed the spontaneity of their behaviour. Her studies of the social behaviour of infants, in particular, have important relevance for our inquiry. She notes in the development of social behaviour stages which she calls (*a*) the socially blind, (*b*) the socially dependent, and (*c*) the socially independent:

'The socially blind infant behaves in the presence of another child as if nobody was present; he looks at the other without any emotion, he takes toys, plays and moves without any regard for the other child; . . . he is neither impressed nor interested in the other's presence or activities. The socially dependent, on the contrary, is deeply impressed by the other's presence and activities; he can either be inhibited or else stimulated by the other's presence. . . . The socially independent child is one who, though aware of the other's presence and responsive to his behaviour—yet does not seem dependent on him, is neither intimidated nor inspired. . . .'[2]

In this country Susan Isaacs has published detailed records of the children in her school in Cambridge, notably of their intellectual and social development. One comment of Mrs Isaacs, in particular, is of importance for the student of moral development. She writes:

'When a number of such young children are brought together in a given place, but left free to play and move about as they wish, they do not at first constitute a group in the psychological sense. They behave simply as a number of independent persons, each mainly concerned with his own immediate ends, whether or not

[1] C. Buhler, *From Birth to Maturity* (Kegan Paul, 1931).
[2] C. Buhler, 'The Social Behaviour of Children', *Handbook of Child Psychology* (Clark Univ. Press), pp. 391–431.

these ends cut across or chime in with the pursuits of others. The direct attitude of any given child to any or all of the others may be friendly or hostile; but even when he is friendly he will not look upon the other children as ends in themselves, but always as means to serve or an obstacle to hinder his own particular interests.'[1]

Mrs Isaacs observes that, as the child begins to take account of others and becomes aware of reciprocal relationships, moral considerations begin to affect his behaviour. To this we shall return.

A general picture of child development has been presented by the American Society for Research in Child Development. In a collection of monographs covering a number of aspects of child development, such as emotional adjustments, language development, social activity, the Society gives a comprehensive review of research done in America. Infancy, it states:

'in terms of research findings is predominantly (a period) of change; change from diffuse activity to adaptive activity, from meagre stimulus-response functioning to integrated responses in the light of total situational aspects. . . . In the pre-school period the child acquires a capacity for more social attitudes. He learns to co-operate more readily, to respect other property rights in some small measure, to lead or follow a leader as the occasion demands.'

In the main, the foregoing account of studies of child psychology has been concerned with the work of psychologists who have observed children at home, in the school, in institutions—in environments, that is to say, in which the children may be counted upon to behave with varying spontaneity. Considerable laboratory work has also been done, notably by Arnold Gesell. Gesell has been particularly interested in studying the maturation of behaviour patterns in children and has compiled standardized norms of development for each month of the child's life from birth up to three years. Gesell has taken great pains to reduce the artificiality of the experimental method to a minimum. His

[1] S. Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children* (Routledge, 1933), p. 213.

nursery school in the Institute of Human Relations at Yale is equipped with one-way vision screening by which the observer may observe and record children's behaviour while remaining himself unobserved. Records and films of every aspect of child development have been compiled, based upon many years' detailed observation of thousands of children. On the child's moral development, Gesell writes:

'A child is not born with a weak ethical sense which becomes stronger as he grows older. He is born with certain dispositions and potentialities, which are under progressive organization from day to day and month to month. As early as the age of six weeks the child smiles by himself. An egocentric smile! At eight weeks he smiles back at the beaming face of his mother—a responsive social smile, which relates to someone else! At twelve weeks he spontaneously initiates a similar smile. In this simple sequence we already glimpse the dynamic which governs the growth of the ethical sense. There are three phases to this fundamental dynamic which repeats itself again and again with ever-widening elaborations as the spirals of development ascend: (*a*) intrinsic-self phase, (*b*) social-reference phase, (*c*) reciprocal self-and-social phase.'[1]

From the above studies, which are chiefly concerned with the social development of children, we pass to a consideration of the growth of moral consciousness, of the child's ideas of right and wrong, good and bad. The Swiss psychologist, Piaget, has made some investigations into the relationship between the social development of the child and the growth of moral consciousness which have an important bearing on our inquiry, and I shall conclude this chapter with an account of his investigations as published in his work *The Moral Judgement of the Child.* Piaget was not so much concerned to inquire into the forms of moral behaviour practised in home or school. His object was to find out how children thought about moral issues; what kind of moral judgements they made.

He questioned, and held conversations with, a large number of

[1] A. Gesell and F. L. Ilg, *The Child from Five to Ten* (Hamish Hamilton, 1946), p. 404.

children from the Geneva and Neuchâtel schools. He began with an analysis of the rules of a game to find out in what sense children found these rules obligatory, how their attitudes towards the rules changed as they grew older. He then passed to an inquiry into the ideas which children form about the specific moral rules laid down for them by adults; in particular, their ideas on telling lies. And, finally, he examined the notions arising from the relationships children had with one another with a view to discovering the kind of ideas of justice which governed these relationships.

Piaget had no illusions about the difficulties of his method. He knew how easily one can, quite unwittingly, make a child say what one wants it to say.[1] But Piaget's approach to the children, the form and character of the questions asked, the manner of asking them, went a long way to overcoming these difficulties. None the less, as Piaget himself points out, the best safeguard against misinterpretation of the children's replies and conversation is for investigators in other countries to apply these methods to children in varying social circumstances.[2]

Piaget selected the game of marbles for his investigation, a game which, he says, 'contains an extremely complex system of rules, that is to say, a code of laws, a jurisprudence of its own'.[3] To understand child morality, he argues, we need to begin with an analysis of such facts as these. We need to know how children respond to the rules of their own games; how they come to respect them. Ordinarily, the moral rules which the child is expected to respect come to him from adults. In games of a simple social kind, the rules are handed down from children to children;

[1] Even this tells us something important about the child's mind. For it tells us what the child thinks the adult expects him to say and, in relation to moral questions, it tells us what the child thinks the adult thinks about these questions. So that the child, in giving the answer he thinks the adult wants, reveals the direction of his own thoughts, his interpretation of the adult attitude to moral issues.

[2] E. Lerner has done similar work in the neighbourhood of New York ('The Problem of Perspective in Moral Reasoning'). His findings fit in well with Piaget's researches. My own researches in a school in Izmir, Turkey, also confirm Piaget's findings. I was particularly well placed to question Turkish children about the game of marbles because they genuinely believed me as a foreigner to be ignorant of the game, and were eager to teach me how to play.

[3] J. Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gabain (Kegan Paul, 1932), p. 1.

they are elaborated by children, older children teaching them to younger. It is true that even before the child begins to play with other children his parents have subjected him to a number of rules of conduct. Hence the elaboration of rules by children themselves is bound, in some way, to be influenced by the experience of rules imposed upon them by their parents. None the less, in relation to these games, adult interference is reduced to a minimum and, in questioning children about these rules, one may be assured of a larger measure of spontaneity in the children's replies than if we were to question them concerning those rules directly imposed upon them from above.

Piaget's objective in regard to the rules of marbles was simple enough. He wanted to know first how children observe the rules at each age and level of mental development and, second, what kind of attitudes they take towards the rules. The method of questioning the children for the first part of this objective was as follows. The questioner showed some marbles to a child and said, 'You must show me how to play. When I was little I used to play a lot, but now I've forgotten how to. I'd like to play again. Let's play together. You'll teach me the rules and I'll play with you.' It is important to appear completely ignorant of the game, to make some mistakes in order that the child can correct you. When the game is over, you ask who has won and why. Thus, says Piaget, by playing one's part in a simple spirit, allowing the child to feel a certain superiority at the game, the child is put at his ease. In fact, he says, many of the children become so absorbed in the game as to treat the questioner as one of themselves.

The second part of the interrogatory requires more delicate handling. Its purpose is to discover the attitude of the children towards the rules, whether they think the rules are unalterable or new rules could be introduced and have the same force as the old; whether the child thinks the rules have always been so, or were different in the time of the child's parents and grandparents; what the child thinks was the origin of rules; whether they were invented by grown-ups or children.

In this part of the questioning, in particular, there is great

danger of suggesting the answer to the child. The child has no ready-made beliefs concerning the origin or force of rules but, says Piaget, if one bears in mind that the main thing is to grasp the child's mental orientation, the ideas which he puts forward are indices of his basic attitudes.

Piaget found that four stages could be broadly discerned in the application of the rules as distinct from the consciousness of them. In the first stage, which covers children up to the ages of two and three, one cannot speak of rules in the collective sense. The child handles the marbles, picking them up and dropping them, putting them into holes, as a consequence of motor habits. The second stage begins when the child does some of the actions associated with the game, such as bowling the marbles, in imitation of older children without, however, playing a complete game. He plays by himself, apparently to amuse himself, so that a number of children playing together play on their own. 'This dual character', says Piaget, 'combining imitation of others with a purely individual use of the examples received, we have designated by the term *egocentrism*.'[1]

Between seven and eight years, there appears a third stage called by Piaget *incipient co-operation*.[2] The players now try to win, but ideas about the rules of the game are still somewhat vague. The children are beginning to see the need for rules, and in any particular game some agreement is reached as to procedure. The final stage, between eleven and twelve years, is that of the codification of rules. There is, says Piaget, remarkable concordance in the information given by children of these ages belonging to the same class at school concerning the rules and possible variations of the game. Every detail of procedure is known and the code of rules strictly observed.

These are not cut-and-dried stages but broadly indicate the kind of progression that occurs in the observance of the rules of the game.

[1] Some psychologists disagree with Piaget as to the age at which co-operative tendencies are displayed. This, however, does not affect the main findings of Piaget concerning a development process in moral ideas, which may vary from child to child in different social conditions.

[2] J. Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, p. 16.

The progress of the development of consciousness of the rules is more difficult to discern. During the first stage, we saw, one can hardly talk about rules at all. In the second stage, of egocentrism, rules appear to the child as sacred and inviolable, intended to last for ever and resulting from the superior wisdom of their parents.

In the third stage, rules are no longer looked upon as arbitrary but rather as the product of mutual consent. They must be respected but may be altered if there is general desire for their alteration. This type of consciousness, says Piaget, coincides with a genuine observance of the rules. At first, rules appear as obligations imposed by older children upon younger and are associated by younger children with the commands of adults. But with the development of co-operation the rules cease to appear as externally imposed and obedience to them becomes a matter of spontaneity. 'The peculiar function of co-operation', says Piaget, 'is to lead the child to the practise of reciprocity, hence of moral universality and generosity in his relations with his playmates.'[1]

The interesting fact is noted by Piaget that children about the age of eleven to thirteen are more rational and democratic in regard to the rules of their games than are many adults in regard to social and political activities. His explanation is that since such games as marbles are usually dropped at the age of thirteen to fourteen, children of eleven to twelve have no seniors. They are free, that is to say, from the pressure of older children imposing their views by virtue of their prestige. Hence they become conscious of their autonomy much sooner than they would if the game of marbles lasted till the age of eighteen. With adults, one generation presses upon another, and men live in the shadow of authority. Piaget's analysis of the rules of the game of marbles thus shows a transition, in children, from a belief in the inviolability of the rules to a belief in the rules as conventional devices to achieve a maximum of co-operation, devices which must be respected but which may, with general agreement, be altered. The belief in the inviolability of the rules results from the

[1] ibid., p. 63.

constraint exercised by older children on the younger together with the duties imposed by adults.

From the analysis of the rules of games, Piaget turned to a more direct study of the child's conception of moral values. His first task was to analyse the way children evaluate given pieces of behaviour, particularly where clumsy actions are concerned. For clumsiness plays a large part in the life of a child in arousing the anger, often unjustifiable, of adults. His procedure was to tell the children stories in which two kinds of clumsiness occurred, one in which considerable damage resulted from an unavoidable accident, or following a well-intentioned act, and the other in which the damage was slight but resulted from an ill-intentioned act. Thus a child would be told about a little boy who is called in to dinner. He goes into the dining-room behind the door of which is a chair. On the chair is a tray with fifteen cups on it. The boy could not have known that the chair was just behind the door and, as he goes in, the door knocks over the chair and the fifteen cups get broken. The other story tells of a boy who tried to get some jam from a cupboard while his mother was out. The jam was too high and he could not reach it. But while he was trying to do so, he knocked over a cup which broke.

The child to whom the stories are told is asked whether the two children in the two stories are equally guilty, or, if one is naughtier than the other, which one. Here is an extract from Piaget's questionings and the answers he received from a child of six.

'Have you understood the stories? Let's hear you tell them. *A little child was called in to dinner. There were fifteen plates on a tray. He didn't know. He opens the door and he breaks the fifteen plates.* That's very good. And now the second story. *There was a child. And this child wanted to go and get some jam. He gets on to a chair, his arm catches a cup, and it gets broken.* Are those children both naughty, or is one not so naughty as the other? *Both just as naughty.* Would you punish them the same? *No. The one who broke fifteen plates.* And would you punish the other one, more or

less? *The one who broke fifteen plates, two slaps. The other one, one slap.*'[1]

From these stories Piaget obtained the following results.

Up to the age of ten some children take into account the intentions behind the accidents but most evaluate the guilt wholly in terms of the damage done. The notion of objective responsibility, as Piaget calls this latter evaluation, diminishes as the child grows older, and he did not find a single definite case of it after the age of ten. There seem, therefore, to be two processes of conception of responsibility, not absolutely successive, but indicating a development from a view in which motive is disregarded and material consequences are all-important; to one in which motive becomes the most important consideration.

It is not difficult to understand why the young child evaluates acts according to their material results. Parents tend to display more anger over extensive than over slight damage, irrespective of the intentions of the child. The young child who has not yet established reciprocal relationships with other children, who is, in Piaget's phrase, still egocentric, accepts the rules imposed by adults as categorical obligations. 'It is', says Piaget, 'when the child is accustomed to act from the point of view of those around him, when he tries to please rather than to obey, that he will judge in terms of intentions!'[2]

Piaget's second line of inquiry is in relation to the child's notions concerning telling lies. A lie, for many young children, is a form of 'naughty word'. The child tends not to distinguish between swear-words or indecent expressions he is forbidden to use, and the lie. From Piaget's questions and the answers he received, it seems clear that the children knew that a lie consisted in not speaking the truth. The frequency of the definition of a lie as a naughty word seems, says Piaget, to indicate that, for the child,

'to tell a lie is to commit a moral fault by means of language. And using naughty words also constitutes a fault committed by

[1] J. Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, p. 121. [2] ibid., p. 133.

means of language. So that for the little child who really feels no inner obstacle to the practice of lying, and who at six years old still lies more or less as he romances or as he plays, the two types of conduct are on the same plane.'[1]

Piaget also found that a large number of children tended to evaluate the degree of naughtiness of the lie according to the greater or lesser likelihood of the lie being believed. These children were told two stories, one about a child who came home and told his mother that he had seen a dog as big as a cow, and another about a child who told his mother that his teacher had given him good marks at school when the teacher had given him no marks at all. His mother, however, had been pleased and rewarded him. Here is one of many examples given by Piaget. After the child repeats both stories he is asked which is the naughtier child.

'*The one with the cow.* Why is he naughtier? *Because it isn't true.* And the one of the good marks? *He is less naughty.* Why? *Because the mother would have believed, because she believed the lie.*' (Piaget comments: 'This is not a slip. We have met with many cases of children of six to seven who measure the naughtiness of a lie by the degree of its incredibility to adults.')

For the child, we saw, material consequences tend to outweigh motives. This is often so in regard to lies. Thus a child who dropped twelve eggs on his way home and said a dog jumped up at him is considered to have told a worse lie than a child who dropped only one egg in similar circumstances.

The young child's attitude towards lies is thus in line with his attitude towards clumsiness, characteristic of what Piaget calls the 'moral realism' of the egocentric child, a realism which takes small account of intention or motive. The constraint imposed by adults, the rule that one must not be clumsy, one must not lie, are reflected in the child's evaluations. The child is 'realistic' or 'objective' in the sense that actual results as they manifest themselves to adults, rather than intentions, determine his scale of values. He tends to believe that lies are wrong because they lead

[1] J. Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, p. 138.

to punishment by adults. Many children answered Piaget's questions concerning lies to the effect that if lies were not punished they would not be naughty. Hence the lie which is believed and does not lead to punishment is not considered naughty.

At about the age of ten to eleven children begin to take intentions into account in their evaluation of lies. This is the stage at which children begin to develop relationships of reciprocity with one another. They cease to be egocentric and begin to think and act as social beings. The child begins to value truth-telling as his relationships with others develop, as co-operation and reciprocity acquire importance in his life. 'One must have felt a real desire to exchange thoughts with others', Piaget writes, 'in order to discover all that a lie can involve.'[1] The ten-year-old answers that it is naughty to tell a lie 'because you can't trust people any more'.

We have briefly considered Piaget's work concerning the moral development of children because of its importance for our inquiry. We have seen that children's ideas concerning right and wrong are influenced, at first, very much by the weight of adult authority. Before the child has developed co-operative feelings towards other children and has entered into reciprocal relationships with them, he exhibits what Piaget calls 'egocentrism', the kind of attitude so admirably described by Susan Isaacs. With the development of co-operative tendencies occurs a change in the child's moral outlook. He ceases to see right and wrong as expressive solely of the commands and wishes of adults; he ceases to measure the wrongness of an act in terms of the amount of punishment it may invoke. He begins to see acts as right or wrong in terms of intentions directed towards other people, as expressive of social relationships.

Let us now summarize this chapter and see what relation it has to our main argument.

Our object has been to stress the importance of the work in child psychology for moral theory. Our account of child psychology has shown a process of development in which children begin

[1] ibid., p. 147.

to distinguish the self from the not-self, the inner world from the outer world, and establish relationships of co-operation and reciprocity with one another. Some indication of the extent and thoroughness of work in child psychology has been given. Patient and detailed observation has built up over the past fifty years an impressive mass of reliable information concerning the social development of children. In particular, we have seen how Piaget's work has shown the growth of moral consciousness to be correlated with the growth of co-operative tendencies; the replacement of egocentricity by sociality. Our task now is to express these findings in psychological theory, to show how this developmental view of moral consciousness forms part of general psychological theory.

CHAPTER II

Psychology and Ethics

IN childhood, then, the basis for moral thinking is laid as part of a natural maturation process in which the child learns to take into account the needs and interests of others. In this, and the following chapter, I wish to consider matters on a more theoretical level, and so we turn to a consideration of the part psychological theory can play in the shaping of a humanist theory of ethics.

It is, of course, sometimes objected that ethical questions cannot be answered in psychological terms; that there is an important distinction, as we have already noted and will discuss in more detail later, between the question 'what do ethical terms mean?' and the question 'what psychological factors are involved in ethical thinking?' Nevertheless, I think that psychological considerations bear importantly on one task we have set ourselves, namely, to suggest explanations for the wide diversity of 'meanings' attached by moral philosophers to ethical terms. Such a task is of basic importance for any theory of ethics seeking to be comprehensive and I do not see how psychological considerations can be excluded in attempting it.

The point is well made by Nowell-Smith in his book *Ethics*. Referring to the controversies 'between objectivists and subjectivists, deontologists and teleologists, libertarians and determinists', he writes:

'Nor could the issues be settled wholly by logical argument; for they are partly matters of individual psychology. We must ask what "we" mean by a certain word; but we do not all mean the same thing and, if we did, it would be impossible

to understand why it is that, in a philosophical dispute, which is concerned with the meanings of words that are the common property of everybody, the points made by the protagonists on each side seem to their opponents so absurd, tenuous, and far-fetched.'[1]

Moreover, I do not think moral philosophers do exclude psychological considerations in the formulation of their ethical theories. What happens is that they make assumptions about the psychological background of moral thinking which may be quite out of touch with current research and knowledge on the subject. This has been stressed by Professor MacIver is respect of one important aspect of psychological research, in these words: 'In the light of the recognition of unconscious motives the whole traditional theory of moral responsibility needs overhauling; but no moral philosopher undertakes this.'[2]

There is, no doubt, some justification for the reluctance of writers on ethics to make use of the findings of psychology. Psychology is still very much in the stage of becoming scientific. It is scientific in intention rather than a science in fact. The field of psychological research presents the spectacle of a bewildering variety of schools of thought. There are wide differences of approach and interpretation, even wide differences of definition of the subject-matter of psychology. To a large extent, this variety is a measure of the complexity of the subject-matter, the fact of the many-sidedness of mental life. The writer on ethics, seeking guidance on the psychological aspects of moral life, may well withdraw from this situation with dismay.

None the less, he would be unwise to withdraw completely. For while psychology may still be a long way from establishing a claim to be considered fully scientific, the general effect of the work in many fields of research has been to destroy the belief that introspective data is all that we need to have in formulating theories about mental life. The writer on ethics is, therefore,

[1] P. H. Nowell-Smith, *Ethics* (Pelican), p. 315.
[2] A. M. MacIver, *Proceedings Aristotelian Soc.*, Vol. XLVI, 1945, pp. 205–6.

bound to accept, at least in principle, that theories about moral thinking can no longer be satisfactorily formulated in terms of immediate data presented to him by his own introspections. It is no longer enough, as I shall argue later, to examine the contents of one's own consciousness with a view to ascertaining what one has in mind, what one *means*, when one uses this or that ethical term. The writer on ethics must build upon what psychological research has to offer, scanty and speculative though it may seem, developing a theory of ethics which recognizes, at least in principle, the part played by psychological factors in the development of moral notions.

This, perhaps, is the most one can expect at the present stage of psychological science. We may accept, in principle, that a large part of the meaning of moral notions relates to psychological factors about which our knowledge is still slight. In that case, we can only formulate moral theory in broad, general terms which relate such matters as moral consciousness and behaviour to psychological and social factors, leaving the detailed working out of these relationships to further psychological research.

The broad view of the relationship of moral notions to psychological and social life does not, therefore, stand or fall with the validity of any particular psychological or social theory. A philosophical approach can do little more, at this stage, than make general reflections concerning this relationship. Hence, the psychological and sociological discussions which follow are designed only to provide tentative suggestions as to the kind of framework within which moral theory can work.

I propose to say in broad terms what I think is relevant for our inquiry, reserving a more detailed exposition until the following chapter. In that chapter I shall consider the bearing of the school of psychological research which has done more than any other to throw light upon the growth of moral consciousness, namely, the school of psycho-analysis.

In general terms, we turn to psychology for some account of the relationship between men's mental life and the world in which they live. Men's mental life, their thinking, willing,

wishing, learning, etc., does not take place as a series of isolated events, but as events expressive of complex interpersonal and social relationships. Psychology is a study of the interplay of man's mental life and the external world, the world, for man, of society.

In this interplay men develop their moral notions. We have already seen something of the growth of moral notions in the preceding chapter. The transition from egocentricity to sociality is a process which can be empirically observed. One does not need to be a psychologist to know that children acquire their standards of behaviour from their parents and teachers; that they begin life as bundles of relatively unco-ordinated impulses and develop through a phase of self-centredness to more social and other-regarding attitudes. We turn to psychological science for some guiding thread in this process of development, for an interpretation of it, for an account, in short, of the factors which are involved in the emergence of moral consciousness.

CHAPTER III

Psycho-analysis and Ethics

WE turn now to a consideration of psycho-analytic theory. Psycho-analysis, I think, has done more than any other school of psychology to tackle the problem of the development of moral consciousness. My aim is to use it to provide a theoretical framework for the discussions of the two preceding chapters. I shall use it, i.e. as an illustration of the way in which psychological theory can help to answer certain problems of moral theory, particularly the problem of the wide divergencies in the meaning and definition of moral terms.

But first some general comments on psycho-analytic theory are necessary. Psycho-analysis suffers from a defect which it shares with many other psychological theories. This is the tendency to hypostatization, to represent, in substantive form, what might be more accurately represented in verbal form. Thus terms such as 'will', 'desire', 'memory', which form part of the language of many books on psychology, seem to suggest that there are entities corresponding to them. For the psychologist, however, they represent convenient, shorthand ways of referring to modes of activity of the organism. Psycho-analytic theory is presented in a terminology which falls short of the precision and clarity ideally required of scientific theories. Nevertheless, there is justification for the queer terminology of id, ego, super-ego, and so forth in which psycho-analytic theory is presented. Freud has always stressed that they are no more than mental constructions, concepts, by which complex mental processes may be symbolized. They enable us to distinguish aspects of mental life which seem to have markedly different characteristics. The psycho-analysts claim that

their concepts perform an analogous function to the concepts of waves, electrons, energy, used in physical science, linking together otherwise disparate aspects of human knowledge and experience into meaningful patterns. I think we must accept the assurance of the psycho-analysts that their concepts are not intended to represent actual entities within the mind, but to provide a working method of dealing with complex psychological activities. Whether the activities to which these concepts apply do in fact occur is a matter for scientific inquiry. The choice of symbols, in the sense of convenient, shorthand terms by which to refer to these activities, is a matter for psycho-analysis itself.

In his *Introductory Lectures*, Freud acknowledges that his conceptions are sometimes 'crude', but defends them on the grounds that, like Ampère's manikin swimming in the electric current, they are useful aids to understanding, 'and, in so far as they do assist comprehension, are not to be despised'.[1]

The importance of psycho-analysis for moral theory lies first in its general theory of unconscious mental processes, and second in its concept of the super-ego. These we shall consider in turn.

The theory of unconscious mental processes was, at first, the subject of strong criticism. In particular, it was said to involve a contradiction in terms. But the weight of evidence accumulated in its favour has largely silenced the criticisms and it is now generally recognized that the term 'mental' needs extending to cover unconscious as well as conscious processes.[2]

None the less, the theory of unconscious mental processes still needs considerable clarification, towards which discussions in

[1] S. Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (Allen & Unwin, 1923), p. 250.

[2] The evidence comes from a number of sources among which are (1) post-hypnotic phenomena, manifested when a person performs an act after emerging from a hypnotic state which was suggested to him while in that state. He will, when performing the act, sometimes days and weeks after hypnosis, seem to have forgotten what took place during hypnosis and yet faithfully obey the suggestion. He may, e.g. open a window at a certain time and offer, as an explanation, that the room felt stuffy. The suggestion giving rise to his behaviour seems to be active on an unconscious level. (2) The solution of problems appearing in consciousness when one has occupied one's thoughts with other matters, or gone to sleep, seems to show that mental processes concerned with the problem are active although we are not conscious of them. (3) Slips of the tongue, pen and many other everyday errors point to an interference in conscious intentions by unconscious tendencies.

philosophical circles have made important contributions. I have in mind, in particular, Professor C. D. Broad's careful analysis in his book *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*.

Professor Broad makes a number of suggestions for the amendment of phrases referring to unconscious processes which, he suggests, may help to clarify their meaning. Thus he suggests that, in some senses of the term unconscious, 'inaccessible' would be a less confusing term. 'An experience is accessible when it can be remembered by normal means. It is inaccessible when it can be remembered only, if at all, by special technical methods.'[1] Professor Broad objects to the phrase 'unconscious desires' on the grounds that we cannot be unconscious of what we desire. He prefers the less misleading term 'unrecognized needs' for unconscious desires. For past experiences and innate tendencies not accessible to introspection which may influence conscious behaviour, Professor Broad suggests the term 'inaccessible traces'. He develops an interesting argument to the effect that some alleged cases of unconscious desires or emotions are really cases of careless or dishonest introspection. We ignore or misdescribe an emotion or desire, he suggests, if it is one which offends our conscious standards. But we must know, in some sense, that the emotion or desire is there in order to ignore or misdescribe it. And the desire to ignore repugnant desires comes to be ignored or misdescribed also for, he contends, it would be unflattering to our self-respect to acknowledge that we had a desire to ignore unpleasant experiences.

That people do deliberately turn their minds from unpleasant desires or emotions, do consciously pretend that they do not possess them, is, of course, true. But there is considerably more to it than that. Can one say, e.g. that a soldier who during the war developed a form of paralysis which kept him from the firing line was deliberately avoiding the firing line—that he was quite aware that he had a desire to avoid the enemy from which he had

Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* abounds in delightful examples of such interference. (4) Psycho-analysts and other schools of therapy claim that, by means of their techniques, experiences long forgotten, but still active, have been brought to consciousness, a process of revival playing an important part in therapeutic practice.

[1] C. D. Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* (Kegan Paul, 1925), p. 362.

consciously averted his attention? Or can one say, in the case of an amnesia, that the victim is pretending not to know what he appears to have forgotten? These are extreme cases, but they illustrate the point that the process of ignoring a wish or desire does not necessarily result from dishonest or careless introspection.

The real importance of the work of psycho-analysts, says Professor Broad, is 'that they have shown that many inaccessible traces or groups of traces do not rest idly'. They 'are liable to produce various bodily and mental disorders'. The psycho-analysts, he continues, 'have devised several new technical methods for making inaccessible traces accessible. . . . These are great achievements; and it is a pity to create prejudice against them by ignorant pontifications about "The New Psychology".'[1]

It can be said, I think, that while Professor Broad's suggested amendments to psycho-analytic terminology do, in many respects, add clarity, they do not diminish the importance of the claims made concerning the influence of unconscious elements in mental life. To speak of 'unrecognized needs' which influence our desires or 'inaccessible traces' which 'do not rest idly' but exert an influence upon conscious behaviour, is to acknowledge the existence of elements in our psychological life not immediately given in introspection, which no study of moral theory can afford to neglect. The importance of this will become clearer when we discuss the limitations of introspection as a method of determining what one means when one uses certain moral terms.

We turn now to the Freudian concept of the *super-ego*, central for understanding the Freudian contribution to moral theory. But first I must mention two other concepts with which it is closely related, namely, the *id* and the *ego*.[2]

The *id* is the Freudian term for the instinctive, impulsive aspects of mental life, wholly unconscious and seeking immediate and unconditional satisfaction. Its main importance for our study is

[1] C. D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (Kegan Paul, 1925), p. 388–9.

[2] The concepts of the *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*, were introduced by Freud to supplement those of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious as less suggestive of particular regions of the mind and more suggestive of mental activity.

that is represents psychological life at its most primitive level, irrational and a-moral, the link between man and the rest of the animal kingdom. In his picture of the *id* Freud was strikingly anticipated by Plato who, in a passage in *The Republic*, gives a vivid description of the 'wild beast in us' that might have been written by a psycho-analyst today. He describes the pleasures and desires that 'bestir themselves in dreams, when the gentler part of the soul slumbers and the control of reason is withdrawn'. The 'wild beast in us', he says, then 'becomes rampant and shakes off sleep to go in quest of what will gratify its own instincts'.[1]

It can readily be seen that an unrestricted *id* would soon land its owner into difficulties; for reality does not easily grant the satisfaction of our desires. We have to learn to defer their satisfaction until favourable circumstances occur.

In early childhood, some modification of *id* impulses begins to appear, partly due to the impact of external circumstances and partly due to the maturation of conscious, rational qualities of mental life. This modification of the *id* Freud called the *ego*. It restrains and controls the demands of the *id*, seeking satisfaction for them on a reality level. In its relation with outer reality the *ego* is conscious. But in its relation to the *id* it remains very much under its domination. It originates within the *id*, said Freud, chiefly to find means in outer reality by which the impulses of the *id* may be safely satisfied.

'On the whole' [he wrote], 'the ego has to carry out the intentions of the id; it fulfills its duty if it succeeds in creating the conditions under which these intentions can best be fulfilled. One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotive energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations between the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go.'[2]

[1] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Oxford, 1951), p. 290.
[2] *New Introductory Lectures*, pp. 102–3.

The ego, then, is born in the early years of life when external reality begins to make itself felt as something capable of frustrating the desires of the child. At this period the child is bound to the parents by strong emotional ties. Being yet weak, the child's ego is unable to cope effectively with the id impulses. It needs an additional source of strength and finds it in the guidance and authority of its parents and other adults.

At first, the parents' guidance and authority are exerted as external influences in the child's behaviour, but a process develops in which the attitudes of the parents, their standards of behaviour, are incorporated into the child's mind. The process is an extremely complex one, somewhat analogous to that of imitating the standards of a person one fears and respects, but occurring on an unconscious level. Freud speaks of this process as one of introjection, of internalizing, so to speak, the authority and influence of the parents and other adults. These internalized attitudes of the parents are what Freud calls the super-ego. The super-ego is thus a modification of the ego when the ego is too weak to confront the problems and demands both of the id and external reality alone. It is a kind of mental representation of the parents and other adults within the mind, a representation, Freud insists, endowed with the exaggerated qualities which parents appear to have to the child mind, qualities of omniscience, of severity; the qualities, in short, of an unquestionable authority.

The Freudian theory of the super-ego may, at first sight, seem to give a queer picture of the development of mental life. The notion of the ego identifying a part of itself with the parents and other adults, modelling itself upon the exaggerated picture of parental authority as it occurs in the child mind, may seem like some fantastic piece of mythology. But what, after all, is it saying? It says that, in some manner not yet understood, the influence of the parents and other important adults in the child's life persist as the child grows and play a determining part in his adult behaviour. We may, if we wish, think of the super-ego as the sum of the mental 'traces' (to use Professor Broad's term in this respect) left through the child's experience of parental and

other forms of authority, traces not accessible to normal introspection yet able to influence behaviour in a variety of ways. The concept of the super-ego is required to account for the persistence into adult life of childhood standards, the compulsive character of much behaviour out of harmony with conscious standards. It helps to account for the astonishing things people sometimes feel impelled to do, from the Nazis who felt it an obligation to persecute the Jews to those terrible incidents in religious and political history performed from a sense of duty. The Freudian theory of the super-ego asks us to accept that many, if not most, adults carry around with them as an integral part of their psychologies, patterns, traces, modes of behaviour which belong to the uncritical stage of their childhoods and which continue to exert a compulsive influence in adult life. That people are responding to childhood patterns of thought is, I think, when one reflects upon much political and social behaviour, the most charitable comment one can make upon it.

I have been concerned here only with a general characterization of the super-ego. Details concerning its development, its sources in the psychological life of the individual, its relation to innate patterns of behaviour, are matters for psychological research. There is a number of important points concerning the super-ego on which psycho-analysts themselves differ. For our purpose, it is enough to indicate the value of the concept in accounting for some of the psychological factors involved in moral judgements. How it does this we shall shortly see. But first I wish to make some general comments on psycho-analytic theory as a preliminary to considering its relation to ethical theory.

Let us see, in broad outline, the kind of picture of mental life presented by Freudian theory. If we forget the special terminology in which Freudian theory is presented, we get a picture of dynamic interplay between mental life and the external world in which mental life undergoes modification in the process of adaptation to the facts of the external world. What Freud refers to as the ego are qualities of consciousness, of growing detailed awareness of external reality and a capacity to harmonize inner needs with

outer possibilities of satisfaction. That this kind of development in mental life takes place is, I think, a matter of everyday observation. That children learn to adapt themselves to the demands of external reality, and display a growth of rational qualities, is a fact of human development which needs no emphasis. The Freudian contribution is to point out the extremely complex pattern of development which this involves. If the transition from the irrationalities and dependence of childhood was a simple matter of acquiring rational, adult self-dependent qualities there would be no need for psycho-analytic research.

Where Freudian theory opens itself to criticism, I think, is in the kind of relationships it depicts between, broadly speaking, the conscious aspects of mental life and those which are predominantly unconscious. Psycho-analytic theory is sometimes presented as if the ego is exclusively an instrument for serving unconscious aims and is incapable of asserting any independent control over them. In non-Freudian language, it sometimes appears as though Freudian theory asserts that our rational selves are completely dominated by emotional and irrational ends, serving only to find outlets for emotional drives in the external world which do not conflict too openly with currently accepted standards. The growth of rational and conscious qualities of mental life, in this interpretation, involves no qualitative stage in mental growth. The conscious mind is merely an extension of an unconscious substratum, probing for permissible channels for expression of unconscious tendencies.

It is, of course, true that men are much less rational than they like to think themselves, that they do tend to use their conscious qualities in the service of irrational ends.

One has only to reflect how science has so often been used for destruction and death to realize how much reason is the slave of unreason. But the existence of a science of psychology, and psycho-analysis in particular, is an indication that this enslavement is not complete. The slave who is unaware of his slavery, who accepts it as a natural thing, will always be a slave. The first condition of revolt against any form of slavery is the recognition

that slavery exists. This is true of the servitude of our rational selves to irrational ends, of the ego to the id. When men realize, as they are beginning to realize, that their rational selves serve irrational ends, they are taking the first steps to end this servitude.

It is worth recording that Freud, while stressing the weakness and dependence of the ego, did not take a wholly pessimistic view of its relation to the id. In one book he rebukes those psycho-analytic writers who make too much of the weakness of the ego, and stresses its potentialities for psychological control. He writes:

'At this point it is relevant to ask how I can reconcile this acknowledgement of the might of the ego with the descriptions I have given in *The Ego and the Id*.[1] In that book I drew a picture of the dependence upon the id and upon the super-ego which revealed how powerless and apprehensive it was in regard to both and with what an effort it maintained its superiority over them. This view has been widely echoed in psycho-analytic literature. A great deal of stress has been laid on the weakness of the ego in relation to the id and our rational elements in the face of daemonic forces within us; and there is a strong tendency to make what I have said into a foundation of a pyscho-analytic weltanschauung. Yet surely the psycho-analyst, with his knowledge of the way in which repression works, should, of all people, be restrained from adopting such extreme and one-sided views.'[2]

In contrast, Freud envisaged the freeing of the ego from its irrational bondage to the id. The strengthening of the ego he describes as 'reclamation work'. 'Where id was, there shall ego be', he wrote.[3]

In spite, then, of the pessimistic character of much of Freud's writings and the tendency for psycho-analytic theory to present human nature as basically unalterable, there is a recognition of the qualitative character of ego development. Writers like

[1] S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (Hogarth, 1936).
[2] S. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (Hogarth, 1936), pp. 28–9.
[3] S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* (Hogarth, 1932), p. 92.

Fromm[1] and Horney[2] are reformulating analytic theory in ways consistent with the view that rational life displays qualities not reducible to the id impulses from which it grew. 'The key problem of psychology', wrote Fromm, 'is that of the specific kind of relatedness of the individual towards the world and not that of the satisfaction or frustration of this or that instinctual need *per se*.' The 'specific kind of relatedness' of man to the world is displayed in his social consciousness, in the development of a sense of reciprocity and co-operativeness. This consciousness of relatedness with others, of the togetherness of mankind, manifests itself early in childhood, as we have seen. Unfortunately it is not entirely free from the irrational influence of super-ego and id processes. Social consciousness for the most part is still a weak force in human life, a force easily exaggerated.[3] Its weakness is evidenced in the confusion on problems of personal and social relationships, the conflicts within society, the susceptibility to propaganda of an emotive kind. The unfortunate fact is that our modern world is very much the kind of world one might expect from people largely dominated by irrational tendencies. Any social and political thinking must begin, I think, from the perception that men and women in many important aspects of their psychologies have failed to transcend the habits and modes of thinking of childhood.

The development of the conscious, rational qualities of the ego, we have said, is, in part, a response to the exigencies of the external world. We need now to consider in more detail the

[1] E. Fromm, *Man for Himself* (Routledge, 1949).

[2] K. Horney, *Neuroses and Human Growth* (Routledge, 1951).

[3] This exaggeration, I think, is a weakness in Sherif and Cantril's otherwise excellent work, *The Psychology of Ego Involvements*. In a section highly critical of Freudian theory, they quote from Piaget's studies of children to rebut Freud's views concerning the persistence of super-ego influence in adult life. Piaget showed, as we have already noted, that children's moral development passes through a stage of uncritical acceptance of adult standards to a stage in which the child begins to evaluate critically the codes he is expected to obey. But Piaget is careful to point out that children of about eleven and twelve are often more rational than adults. In respect of their games they tend to have no seniors (boys stop playing marbles, e.g. at about fourteen) and are therefore free from the pressure of authority, the prestige of older boys. But most adults find themselves in situations in which authority tends to revive the uncritical responses of childhood. Hence the evidence of the rationality of boys of eleven and twelve cannot be used to rebut the theory of the persistence of super-ego influence into adult life.

character of the conscious aspects of mental life as a preliminary to considering the specific character of moral consciousness.

Consciousness is an indefinable term in the sense that, to say what we mean by it, we either have to use a synonym such as 'awareness' or to describe patterns of behaviour which we say 'being conscious' involves. We may say that a man who is conscious is not asleep, that if you ask him a question he gives you an answer, that his actions have a certain character of deliberation, that he turns round if someone calls his name, and so on. We can go on to specify the kinds of actions and circumstances which we generally associate with being conscious. But this, I feel, is not a highly satisfactory process. I do not think there is any way of avoiding an acknowledgement of the indefinability of consciousness and our account of it must therefore assume that we know what it is to be conscious. Consciousness is a special kind of relation between the individual and the external world. It is a specific form of mental activity by which the individual pays attention to the outer world. The process of growing up involves the individual becoming increasingly aware that in the external world his wishes are not automatically granted. The impact of the external world as something independent of him, and which can frustrate his wishes, is a factor in the development of consciousness. One can imagine that for a creature living in a relatively unchanging environment, endowed with an innate pattern of behaviour of a stereotyped kind, consciousness would not play an important role. For so long as the environment remained fairly constant the creature would be able to adapt itself to its environment and cope with simple variations. But with an organism in highly complex and varying environments, such relatively fixed patterns of behaviour would be inadequate. A heightened sense of external reality would be required, a degree of attention to what is happening outside the organism which a relatively constant environment would not require. In a word, consciousness. Our own bodies afford an excellent example of the fact that consciousness seems bound up with a changing complex environment. For there are a number of automatic adjustments continually going on

within us which require no conscious attention. But when something disturbs their smooth working, when, that is to say, their normal environment is disturbed, they affect our consciousness. Thus the automatic processes of digestion go on largely outside our consciousness. But let us eat something which disagrees with us, which provides, in other words, a disturbing factor to our inner environment, for which the regular patterns of adjustments of our digestive processes are inadequate, and we soon become acutely conscious that something is amiss.

But it is not enough to speak of consciousness as relating man to the external world. For man, the external world is not just the physical objects of his geographical environment—the mountains, trees, land, and so forth. For man has interposed between himself and external nature a complex social environment. Social groupings, from the most primitive to the most complex, regulate the lives of their members by codes of behaviour, traditions, laws, etc.—by a complex web of social relations. The individual is born into a society with a pre-existing pattern of life to which he is expected to conform. The demands of the society in which he is born, the kind of behaviour to which he is to conform, are transmitted to him through the family, the school, the church, and so on. The influence of adults, by example, punishment, encouragement, subjects the growing mind to a stream of social stimuli. The young child has a pattern of social life impressed upon him until it becomes part of him. The child at first, we have seen, has very little sense of his own being as a separate individual. He does not readily distinguish between self and not-self. As Piaget expressed it: 'The younger the child the less sense he has of his own ego.' The child's awareness of himself as a person grows with the awareness of the external world. 'Ego formation, then', writes M. Sherif, 'starts with the facing of external reality. The child meets resistances in his surroundings. In adapting to external reality he has to distinguish between himself and external things.'[1]

In the social character of consciousness we shall, in later chapters, seek the key to moral consciousness. We traced in Chapter I the

[1] M. Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms* (Harper, 1936), pp. 164–5.

transition in the child's mind, from egocentricity to sociality, the growth of reciprocal relationships. Moral consciousness is a special form of social consciousness, a consciousness of the need for co-operative effort, for truth-telling, kindness, and other social practices on the desirability of which writers on ethics are agreed and without some degree of which no society can long survive.

Unfortunately, moral consciousness in its social aspects is overlaid by its irrational super-ego heritage. And this brings us back to the importance of Freud's super-ego concept in accounting for some, at least, of the forms which moral consciousness may take.

The super-ego, we have seen, is formed in the uncritical period of child dependence upon the parents and other adults; hence the adult's views of what is right or wrong tend to be shaped by feelings deriving from unconscious mental patterns acquired in childhood. The concept of the super-ego enables us to account for the dominance of traditions and customs which seem to have lost rational justification. The habit of obedience to the authority of childhood days expresses itself in the inability to shake oneself free from outworn but long-standing social and political institutions. The super-ego is thus the earliest form of moral authority. It is the psychological source of that sense of compulsion which expresses itself in a feeling of 'oughtness'.

I am not suggesting that we can reduce the facts of moral consciousness to the operation of the super-ego. The process of psychological development, we have seen, is a process of outgrowing the dependence and weakness of childhood, of acquiring a sense of reciprocity in our relations with others and standards of behaviour based upon this reciprocity. The formation of the super-ego occurs during the period of childhood dependence, when the ego is weak and needs strengthening by identification with the parents. The outgrowing of this dependence involves the transition from super-ego morality to ego morality. The compulsions of the super-ego are replaced by the sense of obligation to others, which characterizes the recognition of reciprocity in human relations.

Here, then, we see the path of the development of the specific qualities of moral consciousness, a path which we have traced with the aid of psycho-analytic theory. Moral consciousness is bound up with the growth of consciousness in general, consciousness not merely of an external world, but of a world of other people, a social world. This social consciousness is blurred by the persistence of qualities of mental life belonging to the childhood stage of their growth, particularly in respect of super-ego factors.

It is possible that the super-ego is an avoidable psychological development, or, at worst, one that need not be long lived. It may be a development that only takes place in a society in which there exist much economic insecurity and social conflict. For the family is an important social unit. It is the focal point of economic and social influences which, transmitted through the parents, play upon and shape the child's psychology long before he takes his place in the world as an adult. It is not improbable that many parents visit upon their children the sins of our modern civilization. Freud's theories are largely based upon studies of European and American society of the past fifty years or so, and we cannot safely argue that the kind of mental development occurring in such a society follows a pattern innately determined. There is some evidence from anthropological sources that mental development, particularly in respect of the super-ego, does follow a different pattern in different societies. Margaret Mead's studies, in particular, seem to show that where relations between parents and children differ from those in our society, the kind of super-ego development discernible in our society does not occur.[1]

We can now see something of the kind of psychological factors

[1] M. Mead, *The Primitive Child* (Clark Univ. Press).
In Samoan society, e.g. children are looked upon as nuisances and kept as far away as possible from adults. Small girls watch over them continuously and they, not the children, are punished for any infringement of the adult's peace. Children learn, 'If I am to be let alone to stay where I like, I must keep quiet and conform to the rules', not, 'If I am to get a reward and avoid punishment I must be good'. The keeping of social rules seems to be a matter of expediency and no guilt feeling develops in this setting. The Iatmul Society of New Guinea seems also to provide a setting in which guilt feelings do not develop, but for different reasons. Self-assertiveness is strongly encouraged in children and Iatmul children learn, 'If I do not assert myself, I get nothing; if I anger people I get slapped'. In Balinese Society, children are brought up to accept passively the shaping of their behaviour by others and learn to associate cultural conformity with gentle acquiescence.

responsible for the variety of interpretations of moral experience, despite the wide agreement concerning the things which are deemed good or bad, right or wrong. If we accept the thesis that moral consciousness may be influenced by unconscious factors forming part of a complex process of psychological development, and that in this process these factors may receive differing emphasis in the lives of different people, we can, at least, make sense of these differences in interpretation. The writer on ethics who rejects the theory that moral consciousness presents him with only the more accessible aspects of the experiences which have formed this consciousness, will, of course, consider that he can arrive at his theories of moral life by careful analysis of his own introspections. But if he takes into account the considerable evidence which psychology has amassed concerning the influence of unconscious processes, his theory of moral consciousness will be enriched.

The Freudian theory of unconscious processes may be in error in many important respects. But it is right in its stress upon the important part played by unconscious processes in shaping our conscious life. And even if wrong in its particular interpretation of the relation of unconscious to conscious processes, it provides an indication of the kind of comprehensiveness which can be achieved by moral theory enriched with psychological knowledge. Thus, let us consider those moral theories which make duty and obligation central features of moral experience. The stress which Kant, e.g. places on the categorical imperative, the conflict between the demands of duty and the desire for pleasure, must relate, in an important sense, to Kant's own psychological life. We may assume, I think, that Kant was introspectively aware of the unconditional character of the categorical imperative that he did not arrive at the concept of it by a process of deductive reasoning alone. That the demands of the categorical imperative, in some respects, present themselves in the form of an opposition to our feelings is acknowledged by Kant. He wrote:

'For all inclination and every sensible impulse is founded on feeling, and the negative effect produced on feeling (by the check

on the inclinations) is itself feeling; consequently, we can see *a priori* that the moral law, as a determining principle of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling which may be called pain; . . .'[1]

But there are writers on ethics who find this insistence upon the categorical nature of 'ought', particularly as expressed in its conflict with desires, to be unconvincing. And I think we may assume that this is partly so because they do not share, to the same extent, the imperative nature of the experience which has led Kant and others to their theories of moral obligation. The psychologist, I think, is entitled to call attention to these differences in experiences, and to show how modern psychological theory, with its emphasis upon the unconscious source of much conscious experience, can provide the beginnings of an answer to the problem which these differences involve. The almost total refusal of writers on ethics to take into account psychological knowledge concerning the activities of unconscious processes makes them dependent upon the results of their own introspections for experiential data, and they are bound to accept the feelings of certainty and convincingness with which this data is presented, as sufficient in themselves.

If psychologists are right about the existence of unconscious processes, the experience, in consciousness, of categorical imperatives requires a different interpretation. We are bound to ask whether the quality of absoluteness, of imperativeness, may not relate to urgent processes occurring at an unconscious level. The Freudian theory of the super-ego, for example, while it may be disputable in many of its aspects, is an indication of the kind of compulsion which gives rise in consciousness to a sense of obligation, of an imperative nature. We cannot afford to ignore the fact that our consciousness is responsive not only to events occurring outside us but also to a complexity of events occurring within us. Psychological development varies in all of us, the emphasis which this or that aspect of mental life receives will affect the character of our introspective data. The man who cannot think of duty or right conduct except in terms of opposition to

[1] I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Abbott (Longmans), p. 165.

desire has developed psychologically, in a different way, with different emphasis, from a man who finds no difficulty in associating the good with the desired. The latter introspectively finds no conflict between the two. And if they are philosophers, they will find logical arguments to support their convictions.

In Chapter I we saw something of the kind of practical research going on in child psychology. In this chapter we have been concerned with more theoretical considerations. Let us now see how these two chapters tie up.

The general picture which emerges from research in child psychology is that there appears to be a process of development varying in degree from child to child, but showing a fairly regular pattern, in which an egocentric phase is succeeded by a phase in which the child begins to take others into account in his thinking.

In the egocentric phase the child conforms with social rules, but, as we saw, it is an uncritical conformity. The rules are associated by the child with the commands and wishes of adults. The morality of the child, at the egocentric stage, is the morality of the super-ego. But, with the development of co-operative, other-regarding tendencies, of sociality, as we have termed it, the conformity of the child to the rules takes on a more spontaneous and critical character. The child begins to obey the rules, not so much because they are imposed upon him by adults, but because he sees their necessity in the co-operative and reciprocal relationship he has with others. The morality of the super-ego is replaced by the morality of the ego; the rules of conduct which he formerly obeyed through submission to the authority of others, internalized in the form of the super-ego, can only now exact obedience in terms of his own acceptance of their rational import.

This, of course, is an idealized picture of moral development. It is, unfortunately, true that the transition from super-ego morality to ego morality is rarely a smooth, uncomplicated process. Moral thinking tends to be influenced by both super-ego and ego consideration. Nevertheless, the transition to adult life is a transition to a phase where ego-considerations begin to play an important part in moral thinking. The compulsions of the super-ego tend

to be replaced by an awareness of obligations, a recognition of reciprocal relations with others. This awareness of obligations may retain some of the compulsive qualities attaching to super-ego influences, but it would be a mistake to seek to reduce it entirely to these influences. Ethical thinking is a genuine qualitative development arising in men as they become more social in their thinking, as egocentricity is replaced by sociality.

Freudian theory thus provides a theoretical framework for the practical researches of child psychology, pointing to the psychological factors involved in moral development.[1] But these factors, we shall see, require the stimulus of social experience for their arousal and growth. In succeeding chapters I shall argue that the emergence of moral thinking in men is an expression and consequence of their social interrelations. We pass, then, to a consideration of the background of social life from which moral thinking and practice emerge.

[1] In this chapter I have used Freudian theory to show one way in which psychology tackles the problem how moral thinking and practice develops in human beings. The problem of moral behaviour is part of the general problem of learning, the problem, i.e. how behaviour comes to be modified through experience. Moral behaviour poses special problems for learning theory as, especially in its developed forms, it is difficult to fit into the framework of existing theories of learning. In the early stages of moral behaviour we can largely account for the learning of the use of moral words and their application to particular situations, in terms of the need to win the approval of parents, the need to secure their love and avoid their disapproval or punishment. And this fits in well with most learning theories, whether in terms of need reduction, or conditioning. The difficulty begins, as Professor James J. Gibson points out in a paper on 'Learning Theory and Social Psychology', when the reinforcement process (i.e. the rewarding or punishing of acts) 'no longer needs to be initiated by another person but can be aroused by a concept of, or an attitude toward, one's own act'. In that case, the child develops the capacity to evaluate its own acts, perhaps to feel guilty about it or self-approving. There is, so to speak, an internal process of reinforcement about which we know very little and which, in Professor Gibson's words, finds a 'lively dramatization' in Freud's super-ego, a dramatization which 'is easier to criticize than to supplant'. The matter becomes more complex still for learning theory when the child performs acts which yield primary satisfactions only to someone else, when, i.e. his acts are other-regarding. (*Experiments in Social Process*. Ed. James Grier Miller.)

CHAPTER IV

The Social Basis of Ethics

WE have been concerned chiefly, so far, with the psychological factors involved in moral attitudes and judgements. Our task now is to consider the social aspects of man's life which give rise to the use of ethical terms. I have argued that the development of moral consciousness is bound up with the growth of conscious, rational aspects of mental life. The sense of obligation characteristic of moral consciousness is, I have suggested, a qualitative development of mental life, in which the compulsions of the super-ego are transformed into moral feelings of obligation. The sense that we ought to do certain things is qualitatively different from the compulsive stresses set up by the super-ego; it is an indication of the rational influence of ego considerations. I stressed the social character of man's rational and conscious life, particularly his moral life. Morality, I suggested, is a specific form of social consciousness, of awareness of our relatedness to others without which society would be impossible.

In this and the following chapter we shall consider more closely the part that social experience plays in shaping moral consciousness.

The first point I wish to argue is that morality does not, in some way, pre-exist society, but has meaning and relevance only within it. And this, I shall try to show, carries the implication that men are only fully human within society; that society, so to speak, is the milieu in which the human animal becomes transformed into the human being. I shall contend that to think of the human individual apart from society is to think in terms of a misleading abstraction; that the individual is a social being, his qualities of

individuality, his distinctiveness, his rationality, his morality, develop through social experience. That this is central for this book will become clear as this chapter develops. Our first task is to reject any theory of society that regards it as a device by which individuals, otherwise free and equal, or naturally endowed with the qualities of human life that they display in society, regulate their interrelations. That is to say, we must reject any theory which regards society as something into which individuals enter, bringing with them their human qualities.

The classic form of such theories is exhibited in the main social contract theories. I do not intend to consider them in any detail but only to indicate some points relevant for our discussion of the social basis of ethical theory. All social contract theories, it seems to me, build upon the assumption that, in some sense, individuals can be conceived as completely human, possessing, that is to say, all the defining characteristics of human beings apart from society; and that society is an artificial arrangement arising in a particular set of circumstances. The propounders of the social contract theories differ as to what constitutes the specific qualities of human nature, but they seem to agree upon this point, namely, that human beings either enter into society fully constituted as human beings, or, at any rate, may be conceived of as possessing all the characteristics of human beings apart from society, whether or not there ever was a pre-social state in which they lived.

For Hobbes, e.g. man is a creature naturally guided by his self-interest. The initial pre-social condition of man (or the condition in which man would exist if we imaginatively strip him of social relations) is pictured by Hobbes much along the lines it was pictured by Glaucon. In a natural state, men are in constant conflict with one another. Every man's hand is against his fellow's. But in that state, men are relatively equal in strength. No man is so weak as not to constitute some measure of danger to others and no man so strong as not to fear other men. In such a state there is no law, no right, no security, and man's life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.[1] Society is formed when men see, by

[1] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Blackwell, 1946), p. 82.

reason, that their self-interests are best secured within an ordered social life and that, to keep the peace and maintain a secure existence, they must take steps to safeguard their social life against the irruptions of their own natural self-interest. Their compact to keep the peace requires a 'power to keep them in awe and to direct their actions to the common benefit'. Such a power belongs to the sovereign whose task it is, through his unquestioned authority, to guarantee them the security they seek. This power may not be challenged. The sovereign, who takes no part in the compact, is above the law, and all his acts are consented to in advance by the community, so long as he is able to extend to it his protection.

Locke's picture of pre-social man differs considerably from that of Hobbes's. For Locke, pre-social man is a more amiable creature, peaceable by nature and with no hostile feelings to other men. Men enter into society for the sake of certain practical advantages which accrue from social organization, by which they are enabled to enjoy more fully their natural rights to life, health, and happiness. Society provides an impartial body which decides upon differences arising from time to time among men. For, however peaceable they may be by nature, there are times when passions may lead them astray. Moreover, while the generality of men may be peace-loving, there are always a few men more aggressive than the rest who may, if uncontrolled, disturb the peaceful enjoyment of the rights of the majority. Society, for Locke, is thus an arrangement by which men secure their peace and assure impartial considerations of disputes. Men, by nature, free, he says, 'join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living, one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it'.[1]

Rousseau's social contract theory differs radically from that of both Hobbes and Locke. While he speaks of man in a state of nature as an egoist, thinking only of himself and obeying no one but himself, he sees society as the means by which men achieve

[1] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government in Social Contract* (O.U.P., 1948), p. 81.

their freedom and their full human stature. Thus he writes: 'To the benefits conferred by the status of citizenship might be added that of Moral Freedom, which alone makes a man his own master. For to be subject to appetite is to be a slave, while to obey the laws laid down by society is to be free.'[1]

Rousseau, as Sir Ernest Barker points out, 'was a romantic caught in the toils of a classical conception . . . in which he had dressed himself but in which he did not believe'.[2]

The ideal society for Rousseau is one in which 'the whole strength of the community will be enlisted for the protection of the persons and property of each constituent member, in such a way that each, when united to his fellows, renders obedience to his own will, and remains as free as he was before'.[3] The contract into which men enter (or which is implied) in society holds good when every member of the community submits himself with all his rights to the whole community. In making this submission, the conditions are the same for all, and hence no one has any interest in making these conditions harder for anyone else.

Rousseau's theory of the social contract is bound up with his difficult concept of a general will, the will a man has as a citizen or social being and through which the common interest of all is expressed. It is never quite clear what Rousseau means by the general will, but in places he seems to be expressing through it a social conception of the origin of morality which marks his theory clearly from the other social contract theories. Where Hobbes and Locke seem to be saying that in society men lose some of their freedom, Rousseau says that, in submission to the general will, men gain their freedom. His view is summed up in the phrase, reminiscent of Kant, that 'Obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty'. And he describes the changes which take place in man when he enters society as follows:

'It (society) substitutes justice for instinct and gives to his actions a moral basis which formerly was lacking. Only when the

[1] J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Gerald Hopkins (World's Classics), p. 263.
[2] Sir Ernest Barker, *Introduction to Social Contract* (World's Classics).
[3] J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 255.

voice of duty replaces physical impulse and the cravings of appetite, does the man, who till then was concerned solely with himself realize that he is under compulsion to obey quite different principles and that he must now consult his reason and not merely respond to the promptings of desire.'[1]

I do not propose to give any detailed criticism of these theories; for in the course of this chapter I shall try to substantiate a view of the social nature of man which in itself makes social contract theories untenable.[2] They present, in a clear-cut, unmistakable form a point of view regarding the relation of the individual to society, which, in a more sophisticated form, still exists today. Any view which tends to picture the relation of the individual to society as basically one of opposition and regards society as essentially a limitation upon, rather than the condition for, human freedom, has the main defects of social contract theories. The idea that human nature or human psychology can be considered apart from society; that society, in some sense, is an expression of human psychology, is similarly a form of social contract theory. This point is made by the American sociologist G. H. Mead, who writes:

'The differences between the type of social psychology which derives the selves of individuals from the social process in which they are implicated and in which they empirically interact with one another, and the type of social psychology which instead derives the process from the selves of the individual organisms involved in it, are clear. The first type assumes a social process or social order as the logical and biological precondition of the

[1] ibid., p. 262.

[2] An examination of these theories would need to do more than refute them on the ground that there is no historical evidence for a pre-social state of man. For each theory is saying, in effect, that this is the way human nature would show itself if social restraints were lifted. There is a certain psychological truth in the pictures of Hobbes and Rousseau which is lacking in Locke's. In place of the pre-social level of individual development, the egocentricity of the unsocialized child would roughly correspond with the egocentricity of the natural man of Hobbes and Rousseau. In other words, it is not a case of egocentric men entering society, but egocentric children *growing* into society. Locke's picture of 'natural man', however, is far too rationalistic, and is more a testimony to Locke's own admirable qualities of character than to his psychological or historical insight into the development of man.

appearances of the selves of the individual organisms involved in that process or belonging to that order. The other type, on the contrary, assumes individual selves as the presuppositions, logically and biologically, of the social process or order within which they interact. (This is) analogous to the differences between the evolutionary and the contract theories of the state as held in the past by both rationalists and empiricists.'[1]

I am not suggesting that writers who tend to think of the individual and society as somehow opposed poles do not acknowledge the important influence of social relations in shaping the outlook and behaviour of the individual. But they tend to see the social relations in which the individual lives as external to his individuality, exerting an environmental pressure rather than being the essential condition for his individuality.

This point may be made more clear by considering more closely the relation of the individual to society.

What is an individual? We may use the term, in a physical sense, to indicate sheer distinctiveness, or separation, of one thing from another. This stone is not that stone; this tree, not that tree. They are sufficiently distinct from one another to be referred to separately. Their individuality consists in their detachment from one another. On a biological level, we think of animals as more individualized than others to the extent that they exhibit a greater degree of self-determination. The more an animal can make use of its environment for its own ends and display a pattern of responses which differentiates it from other animals, the more sensitive its adjustments to its environment, the more individualized it is.

In human society, we speak of individuality when we wish to refer to the varied differences which occur among men, the range of abilities, interests and tastes which distinguish one from another. No two people develop their potentialities in quite the same way, and in that sense they are individuals. Individuality implies that a person is not merely a member of a social group, automatically

[1] G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, 1948), p. 222.

reproducing in his behaviour the habits and responses typical of the group. It implies a degree of autonomy, of criticality. It does not necessarily imply that his behaviour differs radically from his fellows: that he is eccentric, but his conformity or non-conformity is the response of a person able to arrive at decisions on rational grounds. But how does individuality develop? In the psychological section of this book we saw how the child begins to distinguish between itself and others, begins to develop a sense of individuality, on the basis of its growing awareness of others. The human individual brings with him at birth a physiological structure, a nervous system, a relatively large brain. But he cannot rise to human individuality without the stimulus of society, the experience which results from the network of social relations which is society.

The individual who is isolated from his fellows, who for some reason has, from an early age, been deprived of social experience, may have the brain, the physiological structure of a human being. But his humanness is stunted without the stimulation of his fellows. He remains an animal with a large brain—a human animal. It is social experience which transforms the human *animal* into the human *individual*; social experience which transforms egocentricity into rationality; social experience from which the concepts of morality emerge.

This stress upon social experience for the development of individuality finds a measure of empirical support from the examples of children who, for some reason or other, were deprived of the social experience normal for individual growth. There are a number of recorded cases which seem to indicate the primacy of social experience in the full development of human life. I propose to mention some of them here. They will supplement the more general considerations which I have advanced in support of the contention that man's rational and moral qualities emerge in social life.

The first two examples are given by Professor Kingsley Davis in his book, *Human Society*, and are of two children who lived for the first six years of their lives in isolation from normal human

contacts. These cases were investigated personally by Professor Davis. The first is of an illegitimate child, Anna, whose grandfather caused her to be kept in an upstairs room. The child received care enough to keep her barely alive. She had no friendly contacts, and received no instruction. When she was found at the age of six she could not walk, talk, or show any intelligent reactions. She was immobile, expressionless, indifferent to everything; was believed deaf and possibly blind. After four years of help and training she was able to follow simple instructions, string beads and repeat a few phrases. She died at the age of ten and a half. The second case was another illegitimate child named Isabelle. Her mother was a deaf-mute who lived with the child in the seclusion of a dark room. When the child was discovered by the authorities, she was six and a half years old. At first it was thought that she was feeble-minded, but she reached the normal level of childhood by the time she was eight and a half. It is probable, suggests Davis, that her mother had not been unkind to the child, in the sense of direct harshness and lack of affection, and it was relatively easier for her, than for other cases, to cover the years of socialization that had been lost.

'Both cases' [comments Professor Davis], 'and others like them, reveal in a unique way the role of socialization in personality development. Most of the human behaviour we regard as somehow given in the species does not occur apart from training and example by others. Most of the mental traits we think of as constituting the human mind are not present unless put there by communicative contact with others. No other type of evidence brings out this fact quite so clearly as do these rare cases of extreme isolation.'[1]

[1] Kingsley Davis, *Human Society* (Macmillan, 1950), J. A. L. Singh and R. M. Zingg have collected a number of interesting reports of children who had been abandoned by their parents in India, or who had been lost, and had lived in a wild state for a period of their childhood. Some of these children they claim were reared by wild animals, but the evidence for this seems highly inconclusive. Nevertheless, their reports show that where children have lacked the early influence of social contacts it is extraordinarily difficult to bring them to a normal standard of human behaviour. In cases, e.g. where the children seemed to have been lost, or abandoned, around the age of three and not recovered until they reached the age of nine or ten, they do not learn to talk and make very little progress towards normal social behaviour. In cases, however, where the period of isolation is relatively short, considerable progress

A celebrated case was reported by the French psychologist, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard in his book, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron.*[1] In 1799 a child of eleven or twelve was seized in the woods of Cann by three sportsmen. He had been seen some years before, completely naked, seeking acorns and roots to eat. After escaping once, he was brought to Paris in September 1800. Parisians, no doubt with Rousseau's noble savage in mind, looked forward to seeing the boy's astonishment at Paris. But he seemed to notice nothing. He was more like an animal in a menagerie than a noble savage. His senses were dull, his eyes expressionless and wandering. The French psychologist Pinel pronounced him an idiot.

Nevertheless, Itard, a pupil of Pinel, believed that it might be possible to help the child grow into a normal individual. He devoted himself to the child's education, seeking to awaken his sensibilities, extend his range of ideas, and encourage the use of speech. His success was negligible; the years of social experience lost by the child were too much for Itard. In Itard's account of his endeavours, one gets glimpses of the starved humanity of the child. On one occasion, Itard expressed his despair over his failure to awaken the child's mind. 'Unhappy creature,' he cried, 'since my labours are wasted and your efforts fruitless, take again the road to your forests and the taste for your primitive life.'[2]

The point of these examples, then, is to underline the role of social experience in the development of human individuality. It is not just that social experience acts as an external stimulus to an inward, psychological development which would occur anyway. It is that this psychological development, in which other-regarding tendencies replace egocentricity, can only occur in a social milieu. The characteristics which mark human beings from the rest of the animal kingdom, which distinguish them qualitatively, develop

towards normality (using the term to indicate a general ability to take one's place in the community in which one lives without being a 'passenger' or a person needing special attention) is made. One wolf-boy of India who was discovered at roughly the age of four and could not therefore have been isolated for long, at discovery sat like a dog, snarled and ate raw meat. But he responded well to care and training, went to school and eventually became a policeman.

[1] J. M. C. Itard, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, trans. George and Muriel Humphrey (The Century Co., New York, 1932).

[2] ibid., pp. 94–5.

through social experience. This, I think, is particularly true of man's rationality.

An important distinction needs to be made between rationality and intelligence. An intelligent act is an adaptive act, an act by which an organism meets an unusual or complex situation with an appropriate response. Thus the chimpanzee using a stick to draw in the banana beyond the reach of his hands is acting intelligently. His action is appropriate for the achievement of his objective. In this sense, of selecting appropriate means to achieve desired ends, we can speak of intelligent burglars, or murderers.

But while we may acknowledge that a burglar or a murderer has, in this sense, displayed intelligence, we do not usually wish to say that their behaviour is rational. On the contrary, we may regard their behaviour as highly irrational. In other words, we tend to recognize a distinction between intelligent and rational behaviour, a distinction which is not arbitrary, not a matter of definition, but which corresponds to actual differences which we detect in human behaviour. The difference, I am suggesting, which is implicitly recognized in all rejections of the identification of intelligence with rationality lies in the social relevance of rationality. Rationality is part of that psychological development which we discussed in Chapter I, where the egocentricity of the child is replaced by the social, other-regarding tendencies of the adult. Rationality, I am suggesting, involves a recognition of a relationship with others, a sense of the way men's lives are bound together, and displays itself in the capacity to take into account requirements other than one's own, to think in terms which include one's fellows, to think universally.

The development from egocentricity to sociality, then, lies at the base of rationality, a development which results from the stimulus of social experience. Rationality implies communicability. When we speak of man as a rational being, we are saying that he is a communicating being, a being able to discuss problems with his fellows, to see things from points of view other than his own.

The social nature of rationality is a point to which we shall return in our consideration, in the next chapter, of some aspects

of Kant's ethical theory. It is enough here to stress the point that the individual becomes rational as he begins to direct his thoughts outwards to others and see himself in relation to others. Rationality is not a quality of mental life which would grow, through some process of maturation, in a person isolated from social experience. It emerges through social experience. Rationality is the process by which men go beyond their immediate self-interests and think universally, i.e. for all men. It is the rationality of men which gives rise to their moral thinking.

I have stressed, in this chapter, the social nature of individuality and argued that man's rational and moral life is expressive of this social nature. The truly social man does not necessarily accept the pattern of social life as he finds it. He is aware that it may contain many irrational, and therefore unsocial, features—features which conflict with the full development of human individuality. But he does not make the mistake of regarding society as essentially opposed to individuality. He examines the pattern of social life to see where adjustments may be made in order the better to permit of the co-operative and reciprocal relations without which society cannot exist. Because men are not wholly rational in their psychologies, they tend to be dominated, at times, by unsocial characteristics. They tend to lose sight of their need for one another, and seek to pursue their own egocentric ends.

This process becomes more marked as society becomes more complex, as the relations between men become increasingly less direct and obvious. 'The Great Society', as Graham Wallas termed it, has replaced the smaller, more intimate social groups in which men knew who their neighbours were. Relations between men and men appear as relations between men and things. The impersonality of the market regulates their lives. The togetherness of men is lost in the anonymity of complex and indirect relationships and society is atomized. Morality, in an important sense, is an attempt to recover this lost togetherness. It is with this that the writer on ethics should begin. The practice of morality is the practice of neighbourliness. To make the world our neighbour is the injunction of all great moral teachers.

CHAPTER V

The Good and Society

SOCIETY has been defined as 'the web or tissue of human interactions and interrelations'.[1] It is the totality of social relations in which men live. These social relations express the way men do things together, the codes and institutions and rules of conduct which regulate their behaviour to one another. Different societies have different social relations, different ways of regulating the lives of their members. Society is not some super-organism existing over and above these relations. It is a term used to include every kind and degree of relationship entered into by men, direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious, co-operative or antagonistic.

While the task of the sociologist is to account for the variations in social relations, the causal factors involved in social change, our main interest lies in the more permanent features of social life, those which stimulate the growth of moral consciousness, which give rise to the notion of the good in society.

Here we return to the contrast between the diversity of ethical theory and the relatively widespread agreement as to what things and actions to describe as good, right, and so on. This agreement in the use or application of ethical terms, as distinct from their meaning, seems to transcend national and cultural barriers. Westermarck, e.g. writes:

'When we study the moral rules laid down by the customs of savage peoples we find that they in a very large measure resemble the rules of civilized nations. In every savage community homicide

[1] M. Ginsberg, *Sociology* (Thornton Butterworth).

is prohibited by custom, and so is theft. Savages also regard charity as a duty and praise generosity as a virtue, indeed their customs relating to mutual aid are often much more exacting than our own; many of them are conspicuous for their avoidance of telling lies.'

Ginsberg says much the same thing. The codes of conduct, he writes: 'are strikingly similar in all known cultures. . . . Everywhere we find the elementary needs of mutual loyalty and co-operation provided for in the working rules of life.'[1]

In other words, moral terms are universally applied to those principles and circumstances of life which make for social cohesion, which enable men to live peaceably with one another; principles, as one writer put it, 'for the conduct of men as men'.[2]

But is it enough to point to the common requirements of all societies for mutual loyalty and co-operation to account for the existence of moral notions? Is there not a sense in which members of a society may exhibit these qualities and yet the society itself, considered as a whole, may be considered lacking in moral character? A band of robbers, or a nation whose members are united in a common belief in their superiority to other nations and their right to dominate them, may exhibit mutual loyalty and co-operation to a high degree. This surely points to the fact that, whatever we may mean by such terms as 'good' and right', it must involve something more than such characteristics of social life as loyalty and co-operation.

To the problem of meaning I shall return in the next chapter. My argument here is that moral consciousness involves a consciousness of our relatedness to others on a rational level. But, as we have seen, the development from egocentricity to sociality in which rationality expresses itself, may be limited and stunted. Moral consciousness may, so to speak, stop short at the boundaries of a group or nation. It is a common feature of our daily lives that

[1] M. Ginsberg, 'The Problems and Methods of Sociology', in *The Study of Society* (Kegan Paul), p. 436.
[2] R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (O.U.P.), p. 162.

people show kindness to their families and immediate friends, but tend to regard the stranger in the next street as none of their business. Even within a country, with aggressive intentions towards others, people may behave to one another on a relatively high moral level. We may, of course, make the mistake of too closely identifying the ordinary run of people with their political leaders whose policies may be hampering the full expression of their moral consciousness.

It is worth illustrating how a sense of mutual loyalty and co-operation, even within narrow bounds, provides the beginnings of the growth of a more embracing moral consciousness. Let us consider two social groups, one consisting of social outcasts in our own society and the other of a primitive people. In both cases we shall find limitations to moral practise with, however, potentialities for wider scope.

The first example comes from W. F. Whyte's study of street corner gangs in an Italian slum in America. 'Corner boys are groups of men who centre their social activities upon particular street corners, with their adjoining barber shop, lunchrooms, pool rooms or club rooms. They constitute the bottom level of society within their age group.'[1] Of these men, many of whom are involved in unsavoury rackets, Whyte says: 'They become accustomed to acting together. They were also tied to one another by mutual obligations. In their experience together there were innumerable occasions when one man would feel called upon to help another, and the man who was able would want to return the favour.'[2]

Here, among these social outcasts, we find the beginnings of moral behaviour emerging from the fact of their inter-dependence. Their code enjoins them to help their friends, to refrain from harming them. Sometimes, says Whyte, this code reaches quite a high moral level. Thus: 'Once Doc. (the leader of a gang) asked me to do something for him and I said that he had done so much for me that I welcomed the change to reciprocate. He objected:

[1] W. F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (Univ. Chicago Press), Introduction.
[2] ibid., p. 12.

"I don't want it that way. I want you to do this because you're my friend. That's all." '

The sense of obligation in such a group stops short at the boundaries of the group. It is a sense deriving from a feeling of mutual dependence in the face of a hostile world. It is not able to take in non-members of the group. We find this limitation also in the following example of a primitive society.

H. I. Hogbin, in a survey of the social reaction to crime among the islanders of the Schoulin Islands, New Guinea, describes how, when the people of Wogoe stole a pig from another district, they justified themselves by saying that on this particular occasion it was not stealing. Hogbin states that he managed to find a few individuals who could, to some extent, 'detach themselves from their surroundings' and see their action as wrong in a universal sense but, in the main, while stealing within the village was roundly condemned they were unwilling to extend this condemnation beyond the bounds of the village.

He also found a high sense of moral responsibility among some members of the village. He asked several of them whether they thought that fear alone prevents men from becoming criminals. One man said that when he heard of the offences of other people he always wondered how it had occurred to them to act how they had done, as he himself never thought of such things. The other said that if the opportunity for evil-doing presented itself, and he declined to take it, 'his inside felt good'.

In both these examples we see a limited form of moral consciousness based upon co-operation within the group together with hostility to those outside the group. Progress in morality consists, therefore, in the extension of the sense of co-operation and mutual dependence beyond the narrow confines of class, race, or nation. It involves the progressive replacement of egocentricity by sociality, the growth of a mature, rational outlook.

Morality and universality, we said, go together. The truly moral man, the good man,[1] regards himself as obligated to all

[1] This question of what is meant by a 'good' man is further considered in the following chapter.

men, not some men only; he strives to think in terms of humanity; his notion of society embraces, at least in principle, all men.

Hence we can meaningfully ask whether any particular form of society is good or bad, or, on the whole, good or bad. And we can ask this because particular forms of society display both rational and irrational features. We have argued that man is social to the extent that he is rational, that there are irrational, unsocialized elements in him which conflict with his socialized self. And these irrational, unsocialized elements obtrude into social relations, distorting their expression. If men were wholly rational, then social relations would be wholly expressive of the co-operative, other-regarding aspects of their psychologies. They would, that is to say, be wholly good. In looking for the good in society, we are looking for the rational elements, the elements which make for the unfolding of individual possibilities without social conflict, which enable men to work with and for one another. Hence, any society is good to the extent that it provides conditions which enable the expression of the unity of mankind.

In other words, the things which are universally recognized as good have this about them—they are expressive of the rational, socialized aspects of human conduct. Societies can be compared with one another in respect of the extent to which these qualities exist within them. Therein lies the possibility of an objective theory in ethics.

In the stress I have placed on the rational quality of ethical thinking I have been greatly influenced by the teachings of Kant. I propose to close this chapter with a brief discussion of the aspects of Kant's theory relevant for my theory.

Kant finds the general nature of morality in universality; to act rightly is to act in conformity with universal law, to direct our actions in accordance with a principle which enables us to transcend selfish ends and desires. This principle Kant expressed as follows: 'Act only on that maxim which thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law.'

Much of the criticism of Kant has centred round the concept of universality. A wrong act, Kant said, is one which we cannot,

without contradiction, will to be universalized, i.e. we cannot conceive of it becoming a general practice of men to do this act without, in some sense, involving our thinking in contradiction. But what kind of contradiction? For some acts the contradiction seems to be of a logical kind. For others, the contradiction seems to involve rather a denial of rational life in the sense that to conceive of the act as being universally performed is to conceive of a state of affairs which is the complete negation of rational life.

I do not propose to enter the thorny field of controversy as to whether Kant had in mind logical contradiction, or the kind of contradiction implied in self-defeating acts such as lying. I propose rather to see whether some of the difficulties can be overcome by giving a social content to the notion of universality.

Kant, we saw, finds the nature of moral behaviour in actions which conform with a universal law. But the universal law, he stresses, is derived from the notion of man as a *rational being*. It is this point which is sometimes overlooked by critics of Kant. They take the examples by which he seeks to illustrate his maxim and show that some of the wrong actions therein described can be universalized without contradiction in the logical or self-defeating sense. But if we think of man's rationality as being involved in his social being, these contradictions disappear. For such a being could not will the universalization of suicide, the making of promises with no intention of keeping them, the neglect of one's talents, the refusal to help others in need (to quote the examples given by Kant). For to do so would contradict his character as a rational, social being.

It would be irrational, for example, to tell lies, not simply in the sense that lying, if practised universally, becomes self-defeating (no one would believe anyone else and therefore there would cease to be any advantage to be gained by lying), but in the more important sense that the trust reposing at the base of social life would be destroyed. A lie, as Kant himself puts it, 'is a wrong which is done to mankind'.[1]

[1] I. Kant, 'On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies', from *Benevolent Motives*, trans. T. K. Abbott, p. 363.

An action is moral, then, not simply because it can be universalized but because it can be willed to be universalized by a rational being. An action which as rational beings we cannot will to be universalized is one which is inconsistent with our rationality. This, I think, is central to Kant's theory. The test of the rightness of an act lies in the answer to the question, 'Could you, as a rational being, will that others do it?' And this is to ask, 'Could you will that it be part of human conduct?'

The universality of the moral law resides in its social relevance. An act which we, as rational beings, can will to obtain throughout society, i.e. universally, is good.

Kant's demand that we treat every man as an end, never merely as a means, is a plea that we strive to overcome the unsocial, irrational aspects of nature which throw us into conflict with our fellows.

In Kant's concept of freedom, the notion of rational humanity is central. We are free in obeying our rational selves. In so far as we act, not in response to irrational, unsocial impulses, but from our rational humanity, we are free. Freedom for men means freedom to be men, to act in accordance with the law of our being as rational creatures. And it is a freedom which comes to us in society.

CHAPTER VI

Meaning in Ethical Theory

I HAVE attempted, in the preceding chapters, to show how psychological and social theory can help towards providing an objective basis for ethical theory. I propose now to argue that without such considerations there is a great danger of ethical theory lapsing into subjectivism, and this will involve a rather more detailed treatment of the problem of meaning in relation to ethical terms.

The aim of ethics as a philosophical inquiry, it is sometimes argued, is not so much to say what acts or circumstances are right or good, as to inquire into the meaning of, or seek to define, these terms. As Professor Moore put it, the fundamental question of ethics may be expressed thus: 'What, after all, is it that we mean to say of an action when we say that it is right or ought to be done? And what is it that we mean to say of a state of things when we say that it is good or bad?'

He has argued that we can ask of any attempt to give a psychological or sociological account of ethical terms whether the actions or situations to which the account refers are themselves 'right' or 'good'. If someone says, e.g. that rightness consists in loving your fellow-man as you love yourself, it can be asked of him whether it is a good thing to do this. Loving your fellow-man involves certain psychological and sociological conditions. But if it is 'right' or 'good' to do so, the 'rightness' or 'goodness' is logically distinct from these conditions. Sir David Ross put it this way:

'The evolutionary and sociological school of thought has on the whole shown little if any awareness of the distinction between

two questions which are logically entirely different. One is the question as to the *meaning* of such terms as "right" and "obligatory" . . . the other is the question what other characteristic, or what are the other characteristics, in virtue of which we describe conduct as having the characteristics of being right or obligatory.'[1]

The failure to make this distinction is sometimes referred to as 'the naturalistic fallacy'.

I do not wish to deny the validity of some such distinction, especially if it is made to support a claim for a study of ethics in its own right, and not merely as a department of psychology or sociology. What I wish to say is that the distinction can be drawn in such a way as to drive a quasi-logical wedge between the meaning of ethical terms and their application to psychological and social circumstances. For the question, 'Are such circumstances themselves good?' can always be raised whatever these circumstances may be, so that ultimately there are no circumstances which can have any part in the meaning of ethical terms if this distinction is rigidly maintained. This distinction becomes self-defeating if it involves the exclusion of all the characteristics of actions and situations to which ethical terms are applied, from any account of the meaning of these terms. But, more important, as I shall try to show, this distinction does not achieve its objective. For it leads to a subjectivist view of ethics in spite of the intentions of its advocates. This we shall see in our consideration of meaning in ethical theory.

Let us take this matter of logical distinctions a stage further before plunging into the complex problem of meaning in relation to ethical theory. What can logic do for ethical theory?

What logic is, how it functions, is far too complex a subject to be considered in any detail here. But there are some general characteristics of logic which we may note as relevant for our inquiry.

In a general sense, logic seems to be concerned with the rules of discourse to be observed if our words are to be both intelligible

[1] Sir D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford, 1939), p. 12.

and self-consistent; if we are not to involve ourselves in contradiction. To disregard logical principles 'reduces our thoughts and words to confusion and gibberish'.[1] And this, I think, means that whatever system of logic we consider, there are implicit in it certain rules of converse described by Aristotle as the 'laws of thought'. These laws of thought indicate the rules which must be followed if we are to communicate intelligibly with one another. And what is true of ordinary, intelligent conversation is true of the more complex forms of logical analysis. As Morris R. Cohen points out:

'The laws of identity, contradiction and excluded middle are assumed or involved in any game of operational calculus. Any attempt to prove or derive them from other propositions must involve the assumption that our p's and q's remain the same throughout our calculations and that in any given context one or other of these given symbols does or does not properly belong.'[2]

Logic, then, seems to consist, in a general sense, in showing what propositions can be held within a certain conceptual framework without inner contradiction. It seems to be concerned to prescribe rules for the intelligible interchange of ideas, and a logical criticism of a theoretical system seems to consist largely in showing up inner contradictions. In brief, a theoretical system is logically assailable if it has got its p's and q's mixed. Logic is thus a tool for clear and precise thinking. It is concerned, not so much to reveal facts about the world, as to give us rules for combining the symbols by which we refer to facts about the world, in such a way that a coherent and intelligible account of these facts results. In this sense, logic is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the attainment of truth. The world itself is neither logical nor illogical. But our thinking about it may be one or the other. That is, we may say one thing about some aspect of the world and then go on to say something quite contradictory about the same aspect in the same respect.

[1] M. R. Cohen and E. Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (Routledge, 1934), p. 187.
[2] M. R. Cohen, *A Preface to Logic* (Routledge, 1946).

Without, then, going into the complexities of logical analysis, the value of modern logic in the economy and precision it gives to our thinking in certain fields of inquiry, we can, I suggest, accept as a broad function of logic, that it tells us how to say things without self-contradiction, how to make valid inferences, how to be clear, precise, and unmistakable in our thinking. Applied to any particular field of inquiry, it can thus help us to get clear the rules governing the use of the terms in that field.

It is here that we see the relevance of logic in the formulation of ethical theory. Ethics is an attempt to attain clarity and precision about certain problems which arise in human life; problems of human conduct, of those experiences and situations which seem to require the special terminology of ethics to name them. A logical analysis applied to ethical theory takes the form of examining the relations between the propositions in which the ethical theory is set forth, to see whether they follow from one another, or are mutually contradictory, or mutually independent and so forth; seeking to establish the rules for the use of ethical terms so that it is clear what propositions are to count as ethical propositions. I do not think the more specialized technique of modern logic, concerned with the construction of deductive systems, can play much part in ethical inquiry. The degree and kind of precision involved in ethical thinking does not seem amenable to the logical techniques which have so successfully been applied in mathematics and probability theory and certain departments of physics. Perhaps Aristotle's admonition not to seek for a greater precision than the subject allows is to the point here.

The writer on ethics, then, needs logic as a tool for achieving clarity in the presentation of his ethical theory. But he must relate his ethical thinking to the world of human beings; he must not be content with the niceties of logical distinctions in evaluating ethical theories; he must be concerned with their adequacy to the situations and experiences which evoke the application of ethical terms.

That is why ethical theory must draw deeply upon social and psychological theory if its analyses are to bear a close relation to

human life. Terms like 'good', 'right', and 'ought' arise in human life from the complex interchange of human relations within a social milieu. The raw material for the moral philosopher who is seeking, in logical analysis, for the logical form of ethical statements, is provided by the actual practice and thinking on moral issues of his fellow-men.

From the question of the relation of logic to ethical theory I turn to the problem of the meaning of ethical terms.

I propose to begin my consideration of 'meaning' by thinking in a general way around this term. It is not an easy term with which to come to grips, largely because, in raising questions about it, we have to make use of it. We have to ask, i.e. what meaning 'means'. As St Augustine said about 'time', so, I think, we have to say about 'meaning'. We know what it means so long as no one asks us what it means.

One way of approach is to consider the term 'meaningless'. When do we say of anything, of a word, or phrase, or situation, that it is meaningless? We use the term 'meaningless', I think, when we wish to say that a word or phrase or anything else produces no intelligible response in us; it does not 'click' with us; we can make nothing of it. A meaningless word or phrase is outside our realm of discourse. We do not know how to use it, or how others use it. A Chinese word or a nonsense syllable like 'magjog' is meaningless to me. It conveys nothing to me. My response is perhaps just negative, blank, or puzzled. Similarly, a blue-print of an engineering project is 'meaningless' to me. I can make nothing of it; it is a maze of lines which says nothing to me.

From this we can say that a word or a phrase or an object or situation has 'meaning' if it conveys something to us; if we can understand something from it; if it forms part of our sphere of discourse. This seems to be the sense of the theory of meaning outlined by Ogden and Richards in their book, *The Meaning of Meaning*.

According to this theory 'meaning' involves a relationship between symbols (i.e. words or other conventional signs by which

men communicate with one another), the person using the symbols and who is trying to communicate something, and that to which he is referring when he uses the symbols. In other words, symbols convey 'meaning' from one person to others. If you ask me for the meaning of a word or phrase I have used, you are asking me what I am trying to get you to think about when I use these words; where am I trying to turn your thoughts. And if you understand what I am trying to say, you have got the 'meaning' of my words—they have successfully turned your thoughts in the direction I wished.

When someone is trying to tell you what he means, he is trying to get you to share some thought or feeling of his. The argument introduced by logical positivists or, at least, made widely known by them, has some point here. If someone tells you something which he wishes you to accept as true, but is unable to tell you how to find out whether it is true or not, you are entitled to feel doubtful. While it may be going too far to erect your justified doubt into a principle to the effect that the meaning of a statement lies in its method of verification, it seems reasonable to say: 'It would make more sense to me if I knew roughly how to find out whether what you say is true.' The fact is, that our words rarely convey all we are trying to say; we often mean more (are trying to convey more) than we can say in words. We may try other means of evoking in people's minds what we are trying to express, through poetry and art, for example. It is important, too, to distinguish between meaning for us and meaning for others. And it is here, I think, that we can find the beginnings of an answer to the problem of the diversity of meaning of ethical terms. Many ethical theorists are intent on telling us what ethical terms mean *for them*. They have cut themselves off by the sharpness of their logical distinction between 'meaning' and the use and application of ethical terms, from the meaning which ethical terms may have in a wider universe of discourse. Perhaps I can make this clearer by considering the work of a contemporary writer, Dr A. C. Ewing. In his book, *The Definition of Good*, Dr Ewing passes in review various analyses of the term 'good' which he rejects on the grounds

that they fail to evoke in him introspective confirmation. He writes:

'So in dealing with attempts at analysis we are in the last resort forced to fall back on our consciousness that a proposed analysis does or does not express what we mean. For, even if a philosophical analysis expressed something more than what we mean, it must at least include approximately all that we mean. It is true that an analysis may sometimes express what I mean when I think it does not, but I can never be justified in positively accepting an analysis as an expression of my meaning until I have reached the stage at which I can say, "Well, this is what I meant all along, although I did not put it so clearly."'[1]

Thus the process of finding a satisfactory definition of good seems, for Dr Ewing, to be a process of finding out what he intends to say when he uses the term 'good'.

'I prefer' [he writes] 'to base my account primarily on an examination of my psychological attitude when I consider actual concrete ethical questions. For it is this attitude of which we should be giving an account when we analyse commonsense ethical propositions' (pp. 50–1).

Dr Ewing may argue that what he finds when he examines his own psychological attitudes, when he introspects, is evidence for what others find when they do likewise. But the fact is that other acute thinkers find that they mean something quite different from Dr Ewing when they think about the nature of goodness and rightness. Thus Dr Ewing finds some ethical theories put forward by 'good and intelligent men' to be 'preposterous'. It is true that he says that this may be due to the fact that we sometimes think about ethical matters at times when we are not undergoing a genuine ethical experience while at the times when we are undergoing a genuine ethical experience we are too much concerned with it as a practical issue to think about it philosophically. But

[1] A. C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (Routledge), p. 43.

this I find an unconvincing explanation. For the 'good and intelligent men' who have put forward 'preposterous' theories have, at times, been extremely able thinkers, hardly likely to have overlooked that possible source of error. They have introspected and found that they mean different things.

Ethical theory cannot rest with a situation in which careful thinkers just cannot see what one another means, in the sense of being able to respond to a significance which is apparent to one and not to others. To be comprehensive, ethical theory must account for the various 'meanings' people have attached to ethical terms. To select one of these meanings and to say 'this is what I mean when I use ethical terms and all other "meanings" are inadequate or logically defective', is to lapse into subjectivism. If what I am trying to do when I formulate an ethical theory is to get clear in my mind what ethical terms mean for me, and you are trying to get clear what they mean for you, our ethical discussions will become a conflict of attitudes. For after we have pointed out the difficulties in one another's theories we shall turn to the final court of appeal—introspection.

I am not denying the importance of introspection for ethical theory. Introspection plays a big part in all theorizing, in science no less than in philosophy. But the introspections of the scientist, his thinking around this or that hypothesis, are checked and tested on an empirical level. A scientific hypothesis aims to relate together in an orderly and systematic manner what seem, at first sight, to be disconnected facts. The scientist may introspectively find what seems an answer to a certain problem and then feel impelled to reject it because some event occurs, or a new fact is unearthed, of which it fails to give an account. If scientists were dependent upon reflection alone for the formulation of their theories, they would produce as many conflicting theories as there are in ethics. For they too would be searching their minds for what they really meant. The point is that writers on ethics who believe with Ross that we have no more direct way of access to the facts about rightness and goodness and about what things are right and good, than by thinking about them in the sense of

seeking to apprehend intuitively ethical truths, are thrown back upon the complexities of their own psychologies for their theories of ethics. Their thinking is careful and precise. No one can read a modern work on ethics without being struck by the painstaking, detailed, and close reasoning characterizing its pages. But the matter upon which this logical acumen is exercised is often equally striking in its remoteness from the interpersonal and social problems of daily life.

Introspection, thus, has a significance for ethics which it has not for inquiries subject to testing on an empirical level. The writer on ethics is much more open to the danger of being influenced by predilections, by convictions which are emotionally grounded. He can examine his own convictions and the convictions of others and seek to assure himself that the arguments by which he seeks to support his own convictions are free from logical flaws. But he must do more than this. He cannot afford to take for granted the introspective process which informs him about his convictions, which tells him which ethical theory does or does not express his meaning. He must ask himself what is involved in the process of introspection, how far introspection can tell him what he really means, in the sense of revealing to him the complex undercurrents of psychological life which contribute towards this meaning. Professor Findlay rightly says: 'Men have tended to operate with a picture of emotional life which has been, to an impossible degree, reduced and simplified. They have tended to picture emotions as "simple stirrings in men's bosoms" only accessible to an inward eye.'[1]

Introspectively, one may be aware of a certain kind of pro-feeling, a conviction about it, when a definition of good is offered which seems to express our meaning. But the background of that feeling may not be accessible to introspection. The introspections upon which we base our ethical theories may not go far, or deep, enough. There is much that they miss in our pyschological life which might give quite a different picture of the meaning which ethical terms have for us.

[1] J. N. Findlay, 'Morality by Convention', *Mind*, 1944.

Intuition is open to similar objections.

A claim to intuitive knowledge may mean one of two things. It may mean that the claimant has special knowledge not shared by other people, private intuitions of a revelatory character, in which case we cannot contradict him, but we can say that his knowledge does not help to explain what other people mean when they use ethical terms; or it may mean that his knowledge is intuitive in the sense that it is sometimes said that our knowledge of spatial, temporal, and causal relations has an intuitive, *a priori* element in it. I do not propose to go into the complex question of the nature of intuition here. The term seems to be used generally to indicate an immediate and direct awareness, or knowledge, by a person, of certain aspects of a situation, or characteristics of an object, in which the usual channels of sense experience and the process of reasoning play little or no part. That some such direct awareness plays a part in our knowledge of spatial, temporal, and causal relations derives a certain plausibility from the universality of our experience of these relations. Everyone seems to experience objects in space-time and causal relations and the claim that some direct, intuitive process plays a part in this experience does not, at least, involve a recourse to some special and privileged form of knowledge. Unless, therefore, the ethical theorist can point to a similar universality of the ethical experience upon which he bases his theory his claim that his judgements have an intuitive or *a priori* foundation lacks plausibility. Some writers on ethics, who claim an intuitive basis for their theories, attempt to supply this universal factor by excluding as 'undeveloped' or uneducated those who do not share their intuitions. Thus Prichard, who claims that we have an immediate knowledge of moral obligation analogous to our immediate knowledge of external objects, explains that only a developed moral being is appreciative of this knowledge. Sir David Ross rests his views on the 'existing body of moral convictions of the best people'. That the data supplied for ethics by the convictions of well-educated and thoughtful people is of great importance is undeniable. But we should not neglect the extent to which these people have differed among

themselves both in the character of their moral experience and their interpretations of them.

Disagreement in moral theory, I am suggesting, results, in part at least, from this dependence upon introspection and intuition for the discovery of what one means by ethical terms. The theorist tends to fall back upon what he feels he means when he uses ethical terms, and what he feels, as we have seen, is closely related to the particular way in which his own moral consciousness has developed. Therein lies the pyschological explanation for the disagreements in moral theory. Moral theories, to a large extent, become frameworks into which are fitted the particular forms in which moral experiences occur for the theorists. If, for example, a moral theory is advanced in which stress is placed upon some such element of experience as desire, or obligation, we are entitled to assume that this is the main form in which moral experience occurs for the theorist. His theory is what he 'means' when he reflects upon his moral experiences. The writer on ethics, of course, does not depend only upon his own moral experiences for the formulation of his theory. He considers carefully what other writers have to say, scrutinizes his own theory for logical flaws and regards it in the light of what he knows of the experiences of others. But the deciding factor, in many cases, rests with his own experience, his own intuitive appraisal of the appropriateness of various moral theories. The main defect of moral theories, I am suggesting, is that they tend to deal with moral experiences in isolation from the social pattern of life in which moral terms find their application.

Moral theorists are not, of course, unaware of the underlying social reference of moral theories. But they appear not to see that it is this social reference which should provide the point of departure for any inquiry into the meaning of moral terms. This social reference shows itself in many leading theories of ethics. Modern deontological theories, e.g. make the basic ethical concept that of duty, or obligation, expressed in such terms as 'ought' and 'right', in contrast with teleological schools which stress ends to be aimed at. But not any rules of conduct are right, or ends, good.

When we examine examples of the rules and ends given by writers on ethics, we find that they are rules and ends which tend to promote those qualities in social life, of consideration for others and co-operativeness, basic for society.

This is certainly true of Sir David Ross's account of prima facie obligations. It is largely true of Prichard's treatment of obligation, which plays a central part in his ethical viewpoint. In his article, 'Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?' he acknowledges that some, at least, of the obligations which a man might feel involve social relations with others. He writes of the obligation to speak the truth as involving a relation 'consisting in the fact that others are trusting us to speak the truth, a relation the apprehension of which gives rise to the sense that communication of the truth is something owing by us to them'.[1] It is true that Prichard says that 'the relation involved in an obligation need not be a relation to another at all'. For example, there is an obligation to overcome our natural timidity or greediness 'which', he says, 'involves no relation to others'. But the obligation, as he acknowledges, involves an improvement of ourselves, a curbing of our self-centred desires, and this, I suggest, does involve consideration for others. In a sense, we owe it to others to make the best of ourselves, just as we owe it to them to tell them the truth.

It is, of course, true that both Ross and Prichard have argued that the fact that right acts or the fulfilment of obligations tend to promote these social qualities does not show that these acts are right because they promote these qualities. It only shows, they say, that being 'right' and promoting certain social qualities tend to go together. This is the kind of logical distinction we have already discussed, a distinction which drives a wedge between the meaning of ethical terms and their application in the varied pattern of social life, leading to a dependence upon introspective and intuitive processes for an analysis of their meanings.

To sum up. Ethical terms relate, on the one hand, to a pyschological development from egocentricity to sociality; on the other, to those objective conditions of social life in which men's humanity

[1] H. A. Prichard, *Mind*, 1912, p. 29.

can express itself. The rightness of actions and the goodness of situations lie in their relationships to the pattern of social life through which men realize their humanity. The abstract formulations of ethical theory need an infusion of social content to bring them into relation with social experience. I have, in this book, tried to account for the variety of ethical theories in terms of the complex process of the development of moral consciousness. We have found the agreement among ethical theorists, concerning the actions and situations to which ethical terms are applicable, in the underlying social reference of ethical theories.

The ethical writers who neglect the social nature of the individual find themselves posing questions concerning 'right', 'good', and 'ought' as abstract qualities which may, or may not, be present with other qualities. The relation between right and good and ought becomes an abstract problem and tends to be dealt with in isolation from the human situations to which these terms apply. But if we begin with man as a social being, as reaching his humanity only in society, we can give content to the abstract notions of right, good, and ought. Society is the good for man because it is through society that he achieves his humanity.

The foregoing discussion on meaning clears the way for a more specific consideration of such terms as 'good', 'right', 'ought', the central terms in ethical discourse

Language is an imprecise way of conveying meanings. People often use words as one uses the nearest tool to hand when there is a job to be done quickly. If I wish to knock a nail into the wall and a hammer is not immediately to hand I may seize the nearest suitable heavy object and use that. In a similar way, we often use the first reasonably suitable word which occurs to us when we wish to express some meaning. Generally, people understand what we are trying to say from the context in which we use the word, the intonation we give it, and so on. Ethical terms, in particular, get this rough and ready handling. Phrases like 'have a good time' . . . 'it's a good long way to the station' . . . 'that was a good dinner'. . . illustrate the multiplicity of uses to which the term 'good' is

pressed. Writers on ethics, faced with the ambiguity of ethical terms, generally find it necessary to spend considerable time distinguishing the various uses to which they are put in an effort to fine down their specifically ethical sense.

However, I propose to content myself with a very broad distinction—the distinction between the non-ethical and ethical senses in which terms such as 'good', 'right', and 'ought' are used. Let us begin with the non-ethical sense in which the term 'good' is sometimes used.

If someone describes a knife as a good one, he is generally using the word 'good' as a quick, shorthand way of saying that it is a knife which cuts or stabs efficiently, i.e. it possesses to a high degree whatever characteristics one expects to find in a knife. In the same way, a good pen is one in which the ink runs smoothly, does not blot or scratch, and so on. A good burglar is one who burgles quietly, selects the right time of day, plans his work carefully. A good day at the races is one in which one's horses come in in the desired order. In all such cases, the word 'good' is replaceable by other words with no ethical connotation.

In these rough and ready usages of the word 'good' there seems to be something in common which may help us to understand the use of 'good' in its ethical sense. They all seem to be saying that the object or situation qualified by the term 'good' has, to a high degree, certain characteristics which one expects to find in it.

Now this, in a sense, is an Aristotelian approach, an approach in terms of function. The function of a thing, in Aristotle's sense, is the expression of its distinctive characteristics, the performance of an activity which belongs peculiarly to it. Of two fountain-pens, e.g. we know that one is better than the other if it writes more smoothly, holds more ink, etc. And, in a sense, we can build a picture of the ideal fountain-pen by stating the properties we look for in a fountain-pen. This notion of an ideal implied in the use of the term 'good' builds a bridge between the non-ethical and ethical uses of the term. For the ideal, in ethical discourse, applies to man in society. The ideal man, in terms of our psycho-social

approach, can be pictured as possessing to a high degree those qualities of rationality and sociality which express themselves in consideration and love for others. The ideal society, similarly, would provide those conditions of life in which men can develop their humanity to the full, can express their love and need for one another without hindrance.[1] This, I suggest, is what good, in its ethical sense, means. When people think of a good man, or a good society, or simply just 'the good', they are applying an ideal standard of humanity, of social relationships. Moral consciousness grows, we have seen, as the individual leaves behind the egocentric stage of psychological development. He becomes aware of others, not just as objects who can satisfy his needs, but as individuals sharing human life with him, its difficulties and perplexities, its promises and hopes. This sense of a shared humanity lies at the base of morality. Without some degree of it no kind of society would be possible. That this is where goodness lies shows itself, we shall see, in all the great religions which stress the brotherhood of man. It has received its noblest philosophical expression in Kant's *Kingdom of Ends*. In developing the specific qualities of humanity, in rationality and capacity for brotherly love, we move nearer the ideal of the good man in the good society. People say of a good man, 'if only there were more people like him', for they see in him, not necessarily with complete consciousness, that he is expressing an ideal for them. His goodness lies in his humanity, not in some special skill he has, as a tailor, or footballer, or motorist, but in his attitude towards his fellows, his bearing and behaviour towards them. We recognize in him a maturity, a superiority to petty selfish ends which we would like to have achieved in ourselves. He has grown up where many of us are still struggling along at different levels of psychological development, still emotionally involved in problems which should have been left behind with our childhoods.

I have concentrated on 'good' in its ethical sense because this seems to me to be the central concept of ethics upon which other ethical concepts are dependent. I agree with Professor Stevenson

[1] This point is taken up again in the following chapter.

when he writes that the chief difference between the use of good and right is idiomatic.

'Note that it is quite idiomatic to say, "He is a good man" or "That is a good book", but not at all idiomatic to say "He is a right man", or "That is a right book". Thus "right" is much less suited than "good" for judging *persons* or *things*; and a moment's consideration will show that it is usually reserved for judging people's *actions*.'

Nevertheless, some influential moral philosophers have argued that right is a distinct ethical concept and have based this upon what they claim often happens when people make moral judgements. When people say that a certain course of action is right they seem to be saying it is right, not because of some relation it has to good, but because they just see that it is right. I think there is much truth in this. But it does not follow from this that right and good are necessarily separate concepts, that there is, in some way, 'rightness' and 'goodness' presenting quite distinct problems for ethical analysis. I think it is here that a little psychology can help clear matters up. After all, how do we first acquire our notions of right and wrong? We get them, in the first instance, through the commands and prohibitions of our parents and other adults. We are told that it is right to do this and wrong to do that and if we disobey we bring upon ourselves disapproval and the threat of loss of love. We are taught, e.g. that it is wrong to tell lies and if we tell lies and our parents catch us out we are made to feel emotionally, and sometimes physically, uncomfortable. Perhaps some parents are wise enough to try to give reasons for their disapproval of lying but, on the whole, I think, the prohibition is strengthened by the threat of loss of love. We are, I suggest, not brought up to think of right acts, or what we ought to do, in relation to good so much as in relation to possible loss of love of our parents, which their non-performance may occasion. Hence we can understand, on psychological grounds, how it may happen that we just 'see' that right is right and wrong is wrong without any awareness of their connection with good. This distinction

between right and good made by some philosophers, while it has some support from the actual thinking practice of people, may not be probing deeply enough into its causes. It is, that is to say, a distinction based upon superficial psychological observation, out of touch with modern research. Philosophers who deprecate any attempt to suggest psychological explanations for aspects of moral experience do not really succeed in excluding psychology from their own explanations. They often assume a psychology of an outmoded character.

The view I am suggesting of the relation of 'right' to 'good' needs, I think, distinguishing from the utilitarian definition of 'right' as productive of 'good'. The central ethical concept of 'good' relates, I have suggested, to certain qualities of human mental life, qualities of rationality, of consideration for others, bound up with a mature human being freed from egocentric and irrational influences. 'Right' then becomes the term idiomatically applied to the kind of actions which flow from these qualities of 'goodness', which are expressive of it. In the same way, when we speak of circumstances or objects as 'good' we are relating them, in some way, to moral consciousness, to goodness in human beings. To repeat what was said in a previous chapter, the things which are deemed good have this about them. They are expressive of the rational, socialized aspects of human conduct. In looking for the good in society, we are looking for those factors which make for the development by men of their rational humanity, enabling them to express their love and need for one another without the frustration of outworn social conditions. This, I think, is the true condition of human happiness, a condition of maturity, of freedom from the egocentricity which mars one's relations with one's fellows, a sense of shared humanity.

While, then, we think of right as applicable to actions springing from goodness in man, we can also see them as likely to be productive of those circumstances in which men can develop their rational humanity, i.e. as productive of good in this relational sense of good. But to define right as productive of good, in the utilitarian manner is, I think, a mistake. We cannot calculate, in

advance, all the consequences that may follow from our actions. We can only say that a good person's actions are right in the sense that they spring from his goodness and this goodness, expressive of a mature rational consciousness, is characterized by a freedom from self-interest and a careful study of all relevant factors before making decisions. Socrates was not far wrong when he placed knowledge and right-doing so closely together. The good man, striving to act with whatever knowledge he can acquire, is likely to produce results which will increase the possibilities of human happiness. More than this one cannot say.

I want now to say something about the use of 'ought' in ethical discourse. I am concerned with the sense in which 'ought' is used to indicate a sense of obligation rather than where it is used to indicate the kind of action which must be performed if some end is to be achieved. You ought to see the doctor, in the latter sense, means, 'If you want to get rid of that cold then go and see the doctor', and exemplifies what Kant called 'the hypothetical imperative'.

In the ethical sense, to say 'I ought to do a certain action' is to refer to a certain feeling within oneself, a sense that one is under some compulsion, or command, to do it. The action which one feels under constraint to do is one which seems right to do. It is this sense that the action that one feels one ought to do, is right, which distinguishes the action from a mere compulsive one. The transition from super-ego morality to ego-morality, we saw, involves the recognition of our obligation to others. What is interesting, psychologically, is that the perception of the right action to do does often carry with it a sense of compulsion, a categorical imperative, as Kant put it. And Kant rightly saw, I think, that this compulsive sense results from the fact that the right thing to do often conflicts with our inclinations, our desires, our egocentric tendencies. We have identified the development of moral consciousness with the growth of rationality—the recognition of the interdependence of men, and so on—and the categorical imperative, the sense that we ought to do so and so, represents the effort of our rational selves to overcome our egocentric tendencies. This does not, of course, mean that we cannot

see the right thing to do without an accompanying feeling of compulsion to do it, but only that in the many cases when we feel inclined to do something other than the right thing, we tend to feel this compulsion. In many cases when we say 'I ought to do so and so' we may be under no sense of compulsion. We are not drawn away by some other inclination from performing the act, and the phrase 'I ought, etc.' is equivalent with some such phrase as 'it seems to me to be the right thing to do'. A completely rational being, said Kant, would not be under any imperative to do the right thing. He would just do it naturally, i.e. through his subjective constitution and 'ought' has no application to him. And this must be true of those of our own acts which are largely determined by rational considerations. We do them because we see they are right and 'ought' becomes a conventional term without its psychological implication of compulsion.[1]

Still it is probably true that in most cases when we use 'ought' there is, at least, some slight sense of compulsion. But what of the cases where we say not 'I ought to do so and so' but 'you ought to do so and so', or 'it ought to be done'? How is 'ought' functioning then? Excluding the hypothetical or pragmatic use of 'ought' it seems to me that we are expressing in such phrases the course of behaviour which we, ourselves, would feel constrained to follow. It is as if we were saying: 'In this situation this is the kind of action which a rational being would perform and if you feel some inclination or desire to do something else, overcome these feelings and do this action.' 'It ought to be done' can, I think, be translated as 'someone ought to do it', for there is an implied reference to an obligation to action on the part of some person or persons.

Our psychological analysis of 'ought' provides a background for those ethical theories which stress the hortatory aspects of

[1] It is sometimes said that Kant argued that an action only had moral worth if it involved the suppression of some desire or inclination, that, as one writer interprets Kant, 'moral duty involves self-frustration'. (Lan Freed, *Social Pragmatism*, p. 55.) I suppose something like this can be read into Kant, but it does not seem to me necessarily implied by his general moral theory. If moral action springs from rationality, then it is likely that to act morally will often require for most of us quite an effort to behave on a rational level. But this does not exclude the possibility of a rational act coinciding with our desires and inclinations. In a sense, Kant recognizes this in respect of a completely rational being who, he says, by subjective constitution would always act rightly.

ethical judgements and statements. For these theories, to say something is good, or ought to be done, is to recommend it for approval, and this fits quite well into the framework of our general theory. For it is to imply an ideal pattern of behaviour springing from rational considerations; it is to recommend that people strive to extend the rational aspects of their beings and to bring into existence conditions of life which make such an extension possible. 'That a moralist is so often a reformer', writes Stevenson, 'is scarcely an accident.'[1]

I think, too, that some such theory as I am putting forward, which seeks to provide an objective basis for moral action in terms of an ideal of human rational development, can strengthen the hand of those humanists who want to be able to condemn such evils as race segregation, economic and social exploitation, without, through lack of such a theory, exposing themselves to charges of inconsistencies and self-contradiction. I have in mind, in particular, a recent review of Bertrand Russell's book, *Why I am Not a Christian* (Allen & Unwin), by Philip Toynbee, which says (referring to Russell's broadcast argument with Father Copleston):

'At the beginning he (Russell) says that some things are good and some are bad just as some things are blue and some are yellow. In other words, he comes out for an absolutist position in ethics. But Father Copleston has no great difficulty in forcing an agnostic out of this position—where does the absolute judgement come from? etc.—and in the end Russell irritably falls back on the familiar subjectivist position.

'Yet it is a position which he obviously detests and which obviously corresponds neither to his emotions nor to his experience. . . .'

With his usual honesty, Russell frankly asknowledged these difficulties which face all humanists. I am not suggesting that I have a final answer for them all but that somewhat along the lines of my approach, in which psychological and social theory is employed to show how ethical terms arise and acquire their meaning for men, an answer may be found.

[1] Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (O.U.P.), p. 13.

CHAPTER VII

Some General Problems

THERE are a number of questions about which it might be expected that a humanist theory of ethics would have something to say and which, so far, have not been considered. I have thought it better to present my account of this theory free from too many complicating issues so that its outline may be reasonably clear. I now propose to take up some of these questions, using this chapter as a clearing house of problems arising from a humanist theory of ethics.

We shall begin with religion. What has our theory to say about it, particularly in relation to its claim to give moral guidance?

Religions, of course, differ widely but, as we shall see, what they have in common is of much greater importance for moral theory than their differences. The two main features of most religions are (*a*) their belief in a supreme being who created and directs the universe together with forms of worship of Him, and (*b*) codes of conduct prescribed for men in their relations with one another. Now it is sometimes argued that these codes of conduct, constituting the moral teachings of religions, derive their claim to be obeyed from the prior belief in God whose commands they represent. There is, however, a difficulty here which stands in the way of any attempt to found a moral theory on a theological basis. The difficulty is that if you define 'good' as what God wills, or commands, you make it impossible to say that God wills or commands an act *because* it is good.[1] For if you wish to say that God wills an act because it is right or good after having defined right as what God wills, you are only saying that God wills an

[1] This point has been cogently argued by Ewing (see *The Definition of Good*, pp. 106–7).

act because He wills an act. Few religious people want to say only this. They want to say that what God wills or commands is good or right because it is good or right in itself. And this assumes that the concepts of good and right are independent concepts, to be worked out, that is to say, apart from theological considerations. In other words, it points to the need to establish ethical theory on its own ground, a view that was held by Kant although he thought it possible, having established the ground of moral theory to infer the existence of God.

It is significant, however, that while religions may differ widely in their theologies, they are strikingly alike in their moral teachings. Their theologies, so to speak, are brought down to earth, are humanized in their moral codes. In many religions this humanization takes the form of an incarnation of God in human shape. Christianity, e.g. presents us with an idealized human being in Jesus.[1] The ethical unity of all the great religions finds expression in variants of the golden rule. 'Do unto others as you would they should do to you', says Jesus. 'Hurt not others with that which pains yourself', says the Buddha. 'No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself', says Islam. 'What is hurtful to yourself do not to your fellow man', says the Talmud.

And that great humanist, Bertrand Russell, has written: 'A man who has acquired a philosophical way of feeling . . . will note what things seem to him good and bad in his own experience and will wish to secure the former and avoid the latter for others as well as for himself.'

Unfortunately, however, this ethical unity of the religions is overshadowed by their theological disunity, a disunity that does much to render ineffective their moral teachings. And yet it is the humanist aspect of the great religions that have secured their

[1] Pierre van Paassen makes this point in an interesting study of St Paul. He writes of the latter's conversion: 'In Jesus he suddenly sees what the Asiatic mystery cults lack: the concrete human personalized element. For whereas the life, death and resurrection of the pagan mystery gods . . . was no doubt inspiring and consoling to a suffering humanity, yet, on the other hand altogether vague, ethereal and intangible, the facts about Jesus as Paul sees them, are different. Jesus is solid, genuine, true. Jesus did live in the flesh. He was a human person.' In *Moment of Destiny* (Alvin Redman), p. 56.

survival and growth, the examples in nobility of behaviour and bearing of their teachers. Conversions by missionaries, e.g. have often depended more on the examples of their lives than on their theological doctrines. Their moral influence comes first: their theology is accepted much as one would say: 'If this is what such a good man believes, it must be true.' This, of course, is a simplification. Conversions take place for many complex reasons. But I think that where there is a voluntary acceptance of the teachings of a religion, as opposed to a compulsory conversion, the influence of morally good men is paramount.

This explains, too, the rarity of conversions from one major religion to another which already share the same moral standards. To a Moslem or Hindu or Buddhist, there seems no point in becoming a Christian, just as there seems no point to a Christian in becoming a Moslem or Hindu. For these religions can only offer different theologies; they already share the same moral outlook and other peoples' theologies, unless backed by some clear superiority of moral code, always seem astonishingly improbable.

Religion, then, viewed as a moral influence leans heavily on a humanistic interpretation of ethics. If love of God is expressed as love of humanity, if as Pliny put it 'God is the helping of man by man', religion shares with humanism a common background in men's need for one another.

But there is a criticism of religion that needs to be made. It is that its exhortations to people to love one another, to refrain from acts which harm one another, without recognizing the compulsions of social conditions which frustrate men's natural tendencies to co-operation, lead to what Reinhold Niebuhr calls 'sentimental moralism'. His strictures were aimed at liberal Christian thought during the 'thirties when the economic crisis made life black and hopeless for millions of people.

'The total weight of its testimonies' [he wrote] 'has been on the side of sentimental moralism. It has insisted that good-will can establish justice, whatever the political and economic mechanisms may be. It has insisted on this futile moralism at a moment in

history when the whole world faces disaster because the present methods of production and distribution are no longer able to maintain the peace and order of society.'[1]

If moral purpose is not to be frustrated and corrupted, he argued, it must become incorporated in adequate social mechanisms.

This criticism of Niebuhr brings us naturally to Marxism, another of the subjects a moral theory such as ours might be expected to discuss. The importance of Marxism for moral theory lies in its insistence that moral codes are not developed in a social vacuum. They tend to reflect dominant economic interests. In other words, the scope of moral practise may be decided by particular sectional interests; groups and classes within society may seek to justify the pursuit of their special interests by proclaiming as right or wrong those activities which support or threaten those interests. The concept of morality, we have seen, involves universality of application. But if society is divided into privileged and unprivileged members, the application of moral rules tends to be narrowed into the protection of special interests. This point is well made by Professor Tawney. He writes:

'Circumstances alter from age to age, and the practical interpretation of moral principles must alter with them. Few who consider dispassionately the facts of social history will be disposed to deny that the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, organized for purposes of economic gain, buttressed by imposing systems of law, and screened by decorous draperies of virtuous sentiment and resounding rhetoric, has been a permanent feature in the life of most communities that the world has yet seen.'[2]

There is, no doubt, a great deal of truth in this Marxian emphasis on the economic and political factors which limit and distort the expression, not only of moral principles, but of cultural aspirations in general. But Marxists sometimes seem to go to the other extreme—the extreme of social relativism which asserts that the cultural and spiritual products of any age are only to be

[1] Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (S.C.M.), p. 191–2.
[2] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Penguin), p. 219.

understood in terms of a particular set of social conditions. It is true that every society has its own special needs and problems which give direction and stimulus to the minds of its thinkers. Directly and indirectly, the science, philosophy, religion, literature, politics, and moral codes of a society bear the influence, in their content and form, of the problems which face that society. But a distinction may be made between the ideological form and the cultural content of the intellectual life of society. This distinction can be clearly seen in respect of many works of art and literature. That Shakespeare's plays, for example, in their form and structure owe much to the literary and linguistic conventions of his time is undeniable. But their significance transcends his time; they have a content which enriches humanity for all time.

Ideologically, it may be true that important scientific and philosophic theories, which have not been consciously developed to support special class interests, may be given a twist or slant which gives them the appearance of supporting these interests. Thus Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest has sometimes been given a twist which seems to justify, on biological grounds, the cut and thrust of economic competition. But it would be unwise to argue that because aspects of cultural life can be slanted so as to justify particular economic interests that they have no relevance other than this. There is an important distinction between the questions 'How well does a particular theory fit in with the pattern of social life?' and 'How true or valid is it?'

Thus one may ask for an account of the circumstances which gave an impetus to the development of physical theory in Newton's day and find some answer in a description of the technical problems which then existed. But there still remains the question of the adequacy of a physical theory to account for the facts in its field of inquiry—the question 'How true is this theory?'

And the same is true of ethics. The actions which are considered right and wrong may vary considerably from time to time and place to place. Polygamy may be considered right here and wrong there. To steal within the group may be wrong but to steal from those outside the group, right. And so on. There is clearly an

element of social expediency involved in these variations. But there is also something else, something which we noted in relation to corner-boy society and primitive societies. And that is an impulse to set up ideals of human relationships, to think in terms of humanity rather than special groups or classes, to seek to transcend the limits imposed by the needs of group expediency.

Progress in moral outlook depends not merely upon moral exhortations but also on the development of social measures to remove limitations on moral practice. The possibility of a truly universal morality lies in the extension of the co-operative basis of society. But the measures for achieving this must be guided and informed by a consciousness of the moral purpose to be served.

Here we are brought to politics. Politics, in theory, should serve the end of freeing men from the economic and social limitations on their freedom. Unfortunately, politics tends to become an end in itself, the exercise of power for the sake of power by men who have lost sight of, or never had, any moral objectives.

The cut and thrust of political life, the stress upon struggle, the glare of publicity in which political battles are fought, attract the tough-minded and ruthless to political life. The problem which faced Plato in the construction of his Republic still faces us today. How can we get people with a high sense of moral responsibility to play leading parts in political life? How can we prevent them being elbowed aside by the tougher, rougher types for whom politics provides an excellent outlet for their appetites for power and self-display? The difficulty is that the qualities of character and intellect which would assure that economic and social reform was pursued with a high sense of moral purpose generally go along with modesty and distaste for the hurly-burly of political life.

This is a problem into which we cannot go here, for it would take us too far afield with very little prospect of solving it. I can only say that it involves a sharper recognition of the relevance of ethics for political theory, a return, in a way, to the Greek notion of their interdependence. In this, I think, lies the hope of a truly universal morality, a morality which transcends narrow class and national interests and embraces all mankind.

The problem of ends and means is relevant here. How do we answer the question 'Does the end justify the means?' I think one can say that certain ends may rule out, in advance, certain means as inappropriate. Thus the end of securing a society of people integrated by bonds of love rules out deceit and cruelty as means of achieving it. One might say that the end dictates the means in the sense that only certain means are appropriate for certain ends. In any case, to speak of 'means' and 'ends' is to speak of abstractions. Ends and means must be seen in relation to the achievement of those conditions of life in which men may reach their full rational stature.

But this is to deal with the problem of ends and means on a general level of social responsibility. The problem exists for people on a more personal level. We are often faced with the task of deciding the right course of action in relation to our immediate circle of friends and acquaintances, in relation to our family, our workmates and others. Can moral philosophy help us to make decisions?

The moral philosopher may shake his head and reply that his task is to help clarify the meanings of terms used in moral discourse, not to give advice on moral practice. He may answer, with Moore, that the best course to follow is to take one's problems to a wise and trusted friend and ask for his suggestions.

This is excellent advice, for it enables one vicariously to achieve a detached point of view, to see one's problems in perspective. Nevertheless, moral theory can help, if only in a general way. For it can remind the person of the ends he must keep in mind in making his choice of actions. It can provide him with a general viewpoint from which to judge alternative actions.

When we speak of a moral problem we do not so much mean the problem of doing the right thing as the problem of knowing the right thing to do. We are often faced not with a clearcut decision between right and wrong but a difficult decision between right and right, a conflict of obligations. And it is then that we feel the need for guidance to help us decide which course of action has the greater claim on us.

There are no cut-and-dried rules of conduct to help us. We can try to relate possible courses of action to moral principles such as are implied in the golden rule and Kant's maxims. We can seek to assure ourselves that we are not primarily following egocentric aims, that we are really thinking in terms of others. And having done these things, we must also be sure that we know the facts involved so that our wish to do the right thing in any circumstances is supplemented by a clear understanding of what those circumstances are.

Acting with knowledge and in accordance with moral principles is to act as rational beings. And, as Kant insisted, it is to act as free beings.

Freedom is often opposed, in an abstract way, to determinism as if freedom means lawlessness or complete spontaneity of behaviour. In the sense in which freedom has moral significance it means the removal of conditions that limit the expression of man's essential humanity, conditions which degrade and dehumanize him. It means the provision of conditions that make possible the fulfilment of man's potentialities for a rational life.

In the same sense, freedom to choose does not mean random choice but rational choice. The man who knows about motor cars can freely choose among a variety of models. The man who knows little, has little choice.

Moral choice, too, requires knowledge; knowledge, we have seen, of the facts in any situation and the moral purpose to be served. Knowledge and the capacity to act in accordance with moral principles together constitute the essence of human freedom—a freedom, as Rousseau saw, that grows out of men's co-operative efforts in society.

CHAPTER VIII

Philosophical Background

ONE thing remains before I summarize, in conclusion, the arguments of this book. And that is to consider the general character or status of ethical inquiry. What kind of inquiry is it? Is it a scientific or a philosophical one? Where does the distinction between these lie?

The distinction is sometimes made by saying that whereas science is only concerned with facts and theories about facts, philosophy is concerned with values. Another way of putting it is to say that science is not concerned to tell us what purposes or ends to pursue. It can only tell us what means are available once we have decided upon the ends.

But how do we get to know what ends to pursue? How do we decide what ought to be, as distinct from what is? What is the philosophical method—if there is one—which leads to this?

One important difference between philosophical and scientific thinking is the wider generality of the former. Perhaps we can say that the philosopher ruminates more; he looks at the theories of science and the everyday beliefs that we accept without question, and puzzles about them. He asks how they come to be accepted, what assumptions lie behind them, what purposes they serve, what part do they play in human life? In that sense, his approach is evaluative. It is true that the modern tendency is to limit much philosophical thinking to a critical examination of the logic and language in which both scientific and everyday thinking are expressed. But there is another aspect of philosophical thinking—to seek to develop a comprehensive view of the nature of the universe and man's place in it, unifying and evaluating the

experience gained in scientific and everyday life. It is with this aspect that I shall be mainly concerned in this chapter because it seems to me that a humanist moral theory has a special interest in man's relation to the universe.

It is, of course, true that most theories of ethics may be logically consistent with any number of different views concerning the nature of reality, yet there is a sense in which a particular philosophical view may suggest a particular theory of ethics. This is a point made by Professor Field in a discussion on the relation of ethics to metaphysics. He writes: 'The view that we come to about the nature of reality may be of very great interest for our, or any, moral theory, as lending it additional confirmation and answering questions which the statement of our moral theory inevitably suggests.'[1]

The philosopher who is interested in developing a general view of reality must establish a point of departure. He must begin somewhere with undefined notions, or postulates upon which he can erect his general philosophical view. I propose, therefore, to state what seem to me the minimum postulates of the philosophical view which I regard as basic for the view of ethics outlined in this book. They are postulates that lie behind most everyday and scientific thinking, the unspoken assumptions upon which they are based. In this summary of postulates I am greatly indebted to G. E. Moore's article, 'A Defence of Common Sense'.

1. There is a world around us, into which we are born, which existed before we were born, which does not depend on our thinking or any other aspect of our existence for its existence, which includes other living beings and inanimate objects.

2. We are (in a sense to be discussed later) directly aware of this world. We are able to acquire knowledge about it by which we may modify certain aspects of it.

3. The way in which one person is aware of the world and acquires knowledge of it resembles the way in which other people are aware of the world and acquire knowledge of it. Hence our knowledge may be shared with other people.

[1] G. C. Field, *Moral Theory* (Methuen), p. 183.

I am aware that these three points contain a number of terms the meaning of which are the subject of much philosophical discussion. Nevertheless, I do not think that the general viewpoint that I am expressing will fail to be understood. Such a thorough-going realism seems to me basic for any humanist ethic. For it identifies us with the world, makes us part of it rather than apart from it, and carries the implication that we can realize in the world those conditions of life through which the ideal of rational humanity may find expression.

I know that there are important arguments advanced against the claim that we can have direct and non-inferential knowledge of the world, not the least of which are drawn from considerations of the actual processes by which we come to perceive objects in the world. Take, for example, the process by which we visually perceive an object. Stimuli in the form of light waves reflected by the object excite the nerve endings in the eye and cause a complex series of electrical and chemical changes to take place there. If the excitation reaches a certain threshhold, impulses are transmitted along the optic nerve and are relayed to the occipital areas of the cortex. Something happens there (no one quite knows what) and we declare that we see the object. But, it may be asked, can this last link in the complex chain of electrical-chemical changes be expected to resemble the physical stimulus that set the chain in motion? As Dr Russell Brain put it:

"Whatever the relationship between the brain state underlying a sensation and the corresponding awareness of the sensation in consciousness it would seem to follow that the sensation must be quite unlike the physical stimulus originating in the outside world and exciting the sense-organs.'[1]

These are important objections, but they do not, I think, constitute an insuperable logical barrier to the claim that our knowledge of the world is, in some respects, direct and non-inferential. I would attempt to hurdle this barrier by drawing a distinction between knowledge *about* the world and knowledge *that* there is a

[1] W. R. Brain, *Mind, Perception and Science* (Blackwell, 1951), pp. 52–3.

world somewhat after the manner of Russell's distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance.[1]

By knowledge *that* there is an external world could be meant the immediate, non-inferential awareness of the external world which seems common to all of us. The world so to speak is there for us to think about. But by knowledge *about* the world we could mean the kind of knowledge in which interpretation, analysis, inference, and learning play an important part. If we see a small dot in the sky and hear a distinctive hum, we say we know that the dot is an aeroplane. We have, that is to say, interpreted our experience. Our knowledge, in that sense, is indirect—based upon interpretation and learning. It is also partly dependent upon the bodily transformations and the cortical disturbances we have already mentioned. But, and this is the important point, it is knowledge which we acquire within the framework of our general awareness that there is an external world. We cannot, perhaps, say how that general awareness arises. We have to begin with it. Not how there is the world but *that* there is the world is the *mystiche*, said Wittgenstein. That we can talk about an external world, even raise doubts as to its existence, seems only possible just because we know what it is to know that there is a world. If we think of man as part of the world and not as something *apart* from it, we can, perhaps, understand our apprehension of the external world as an aspect of this being of the world. We are able to live in this world, make appropriate behavioural adjustments to the world, because we are of it. If our knowledge of the world is completely indirect and inferential, or if it consists in a complex of systematic distortions which, as Professor Dorothy Emmet has put it, preserves some sort of concomitant variation with it, it would require an astonishing feat of interpretation to maintain our lives in it. The process of knowing that there is a table before us and the chemical and electrical transformations which occur with this knowing, are not necessarily identical, and there is no logical difficulty in the notion that, in spite of, or even because of,

[1] There is this important difference. Knowledge by acquaintance, for Russell, refers to a supposed direct awareness of sense-data from which the external world is inferred.

these remarkably complex physical transformations, we are able to apprehend external reality in a direct manner. There is, as K. J. W. Craik has suggested, a continuity between the workings of the external world and our perceptual and thinking processes.[1]

We may, indeed, consider this direct awareness of the external world to be a biological fact about ourselves. The growing child develops an awareness of the distinction between himself and the external world. He learns that the external world is something other than himself, something which does not readily accommodate itself to his wishes. The independent reality of the external world has been borne in upon men by the very fact of the challenge it presents to men's needs and desires. In their practical strivings to meet this challenge, to overcome the obstacles which it presents to the satisfaction of their needs, men learn not only that the world is other than themselves, but that they can acquire dependable knowledge about it. The practical successes which have been achieved in the struggle with the external world, the conquests of land, sea, and air, testify to the reliability of men's knowledge about the world—a knowledge based upon their direct awareness that there is an external world.

Indirect and inferential knowledge about the world is therefore based upon our direct awareness that there is the world. We do not infer its existence. We begin with it. I would suggest that if we do not make the possibility of direct awareness of the external world a basic requirement of our philosophical thinking, we shall be unable to develop any logically consistent view of the universe which includes the external world. The philosopher who does not wish to deny the existence of the external world, but wishes to arrive at the concept of it by an inferential process, quickly finds himself in logical difficulties. Consider, for example, the difficulties of those philosophers who argue that, in one form or another, our knowledge is always only directly of sensations, or mental events of some kind, and never of a world external to ourselves. They may not wish to deny the existence of the external world, and

[1] K. J. W. Craik, *The Nature of Explanation* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 85.

therefore they argue that from a consideration of these mental states we obtain indirect or inferential knowledge of the external world.

The logical difficulty, however, is to effect a passage from the direct awareness of mental states to an external world. The process of inference beginning with mental states leads only to other mental states, unless one is prepared to concede that some mental states have a direct relation to the external world. And this is to affirm that we can, in some sense, have direct knowledge of the external world. The alternative seems to be to remain tied to an endless series of indirect, inferential steps which never reach the external world.

I believe, then, that this realistic stress on the immediacy of our knowledge of the external world provides a congenial philosophical framework for a humanist ethic; for it underlines the kinship of man with the rest of the universe, the continuity between his mental processes and the external world. The task of a realist philosophy, as I see it, is to seek to synthesize and harmonize the discoveries of the individual sciences, to relate them to the world of everyday experience, reflecting the general growth of knowledge about the universe. It was well said by Professor Whitehead that the study of philosophy 'is a voyage towards the larger generalities'.

One of these 'generalities', supplying an important link between moral theory and social and psychological science, is the theory of emergence. It seems to me to be an excellent example of a generalization based upon the findings of many, if not all, fields of scientific research. It calls attention to the fact that new qualities may appear in a developing process that cannot be entirely explained in terms of preceding stages.

Evolutionary theory, e.g. tells us that man has developed from a relatively simple, undifferentiated unicellular organism. At stages in this development, sexual differentiation has occurred, circulatory and nervous systems have developed—qualitative changes culminating in man's mental life. Psychologists are increasingly recognizing that mental life and behaviour in general

cannot be reduced to physiological or neurological terms. Even behaviourist psychologists, who have hoped to account for human behaviour in terms of neuro-physiological processes, are now acknowledging the existence of a gap between physiology and psychology. Clark C. Hull, for example, writes: 'In spite of these heartening successes (in neurophysiology) the gap between the minute anatomical and physiological account of the nervous system as at present known and what would be required for the construction of a reasonably adequate theory of molar behaviour is impassable.' E. C. Tolman, another Behaviourist, is still more emphatic. He writes: 'Behaviour, as such, is an "emergent" phenomenon that has descriptive and defining properties of its own.'

For moral theory, emergent theory is particularly important. For it leads to the recognition that moral consciousness emerges with the maturation of mental life, a maturation that occurs under the stimulus of social experience. The transition from super-ego morality to the morality of the rational ego is a qualitative development, the replacement of the egocentricity of childhood by the moral thinking of the adult. The task of moral philosophy is thus to study the specific characteristics of moral thinking against the social and psychological background from which it has emerged.

In this chapter I have been concerned to state, somewhat dogmatically, the kind of philosophical background which seems to me appropriate for the general ethical theory I have outlined in this book. It is not, of course, the only kind of philosophical background logically compatible with it, and does not stand or fall with it. What makes it seem congenial to me is the stress that this common-sense realism places on the communicability of human knowledge the notion of a common universe in which men face and tackle together their problems. Morality springs from men's sense of a shared humanity, a sense that they are not cut off from one another; imprisoned, as it were, in their own private worlds of sensations and feelings. This kind of realism perhaps pays too little attention to many philosophical problems

—problems of how we come to know other people and objects in the external world; what, in any case, it is to know anything. Nevertheless, it provides a general framework, consistent both with ordinary everyday experience and scientific thinking, for a humanistic ethics. And this is no small thing.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

I PROPOSE, in this final chapter, to try to draw the threads of the discussion together, to summarize the results of our exploration into ethical theory.

I have tried to formulate a theory of ethics that seeks for its criteria of good and bad, right and wrong, within the sphere of human life and yet avoids the pitfalls of relativism. To do this I have looked at the way moral thinking comes to show itself in human life, to see whether a study of the growth of moral thinking gives any indication of these criteria. Moral thinking may be broadly characterized as thinking that transcends immediate, personal interests; thinking that includes others, applying general rules by which men may guide their lives and work together and for one another.

Now, the important thing about this characterization is that it follows from observations of what actually takes place in the course of psychological development. The study of the growth of the child mind, as we saw, confirms that there is a natural process of maturation in which, first of all, the child's interests are largely directed inwards, i.e. are egocentric and later turn outwards, i.e. become socially orientated. This natural development is the psychological foundation of moral thinking. In this process, we noted a further distinction between behaviour on an intelligent plane and rational behaviour. Intelligent behaviour, we saw, is behaviour in which suitable means are adopted to achieve ends in view. In this sense, a crook or a murderer may show high intelligence. But we do not generally wish to call his behaviour rational. We recognize that rationality involves

something more than intelligence. It seems to be bound up with the ability to see the universal application of rules, to see things from the standpoint of other people as well as from one's own, to include other people in our calculations. Rationality is a quality of mental life which shows itself in human beings as they pass from the egocentricity of childhood to maturity.

This, then, was our first point. That moral thinking is bound up with a natural psychological development, a natural maturation process in human psychology.

The second point was this. For this natural maturation process to take place, the presence and stimulus of other people are necessary. This, we saw, is borne out from studies of children who, for one reason or another, had been isolated from early childhood. They showed the supreme importance of social experience in the development of the human personality.

These two points, I suggested, provide us with the basis for a humanistic theory of ethics. They do so because we can formulate from them an ideal of human development. If children naturally tend to transcend their egocentric interests, to think rationally and universally, in terms of others as well as themselves, we can see the uninterrupted achievement of this state of psychological maturity as an ideal of human development—as the good for man.

This ideal gives us a standpoint from which to assess the moral quality of different societies. One society is better than another to the extent that it provides the milieu in which men can realize their rational humanity; can surmount the egocentricity of their childhood. We can, therefore, correctly speak of one social order as being morally superior to another, of moral progress, in general.

Progress in moral outlook, we saw, depends very much on the development of social techniques that remove the limitations on moral practice. But, and this is highly important, these techniques, we argued, must be guided and informed by a consciousness of the moral purpose to be served. For it is all too fatally easy to become obsessed with social mechanisms and techniques and to lose sight of the moral aim to be achieved. That is to say, while it is true that the good for man requires social conditions that

free men from the domination of natural and economic forces, it is also true that the realization of this good requires the efforts of men who can think beyond their own immediate self-interest, men who have already achieved a high level of psychological maturity.

This summarizes the psychological and social part of our inquiry.

It also seemed important to me to see whether a theory of ethics, basing itself on psychological and social considerations, could have something interesting to say on the more general, philosophical problem of the meaning of ethical terms. A theory of ethics, it seems to me, should try to do more than merely take its place alongside other theories as a possible interpretation of the variety of meanings that are ascribed to such terms as 'right' and 'good'. It should try to account, also, for the fact of this wide divergence in theory, particularly in the face of the relatively wide agreement about the kind of circumstances to which to apply these terms.

I turned to psychological theory for suggestions on this point. Moral consciousness is part of a complex psychological development from childhood to adult maturity. I used Freudian theory to indicate the kind of complexities involved, showing how varying emphases on different factors in this process may influence the form in which moral experience occurs for individuals. Ethical theorists, particularly those who separate questions of the meaning of ethical terms from questions of their application, tend, I suggested, to fall back on the special way in which ethical experiences occur for them, in the formulation of their theories. Differences in ethical theory could not be simply due to differences in the logical skill of their propounders. The man who thinks of duty and right in terms of opposition to desire, e.g. has developed psychologically in a different way, with different emphases, from the man who finds no difficulty in associating the good with the desired.

Again, ethical experience seems to occur for some people, and not for others, in terms of strong feelings of obligation. A

psychological inquiry into the development of moral consciousness would have to inquire into the relationship between a development where these feelings play an important part, and the kind of background of personal and social life against which this development occurs. The Freudian theory of the super-ego, it seems to me, while it may be disputable in many of its aspects, is an indication of the kind of compulsion that gives rise in consciousness to a sense of obligation. This sense of obligation, I suggested, cannot be reduced to the operation of the super-ego. For it is a qualitative development of mental life in which the rational influence of the ego offsets and transforms the compulsions of the super-ego into the moral feelings of obligation.

This, of course, is not the whole answer to the problem of the variety of ethical theories. It suggests only that the answer requires, at least in part, serious consideration of the complex process of psychological development with which moral consciousness is bound up. This process has many aspects which may receive different emphases for different people and lead them, therefore, if they are theoretically inclined, to produce varying ethical theories. Nevertheless, if we recognize the complexity of the process of the development of moral consciousness, we are less likely to see these theories as mutually exclusive. They are seen as expressive of important aspects of ethical experience receiving different emphases in the lives of different people.

In raising questions concerning the 'meaning' of ethical terms we need, therefore, to take into account the variations in ethical experience, the different ways in which ethical terms come to be associated with this experience. It is not enough to consult our own psychological attitudes when seeking to find an answer to the question 'What do ethical terms mean?' For we may be resting too heavily on the special personal circumstances in which we were introduced to ethical terms. We need to extend the sphere of discourse by considering the general psychological process in which moral consciousness emerges and the kind of social experience which stimulates this emergence. The general agreement as to the kind of things and actions to which to apply ethical terms

shows that there is this wider sphere of discourse and points to the possibility of an objective theory of ethics. Such an objective theory, I am urging, lies in the ideal of rational humanity in which men cease to be governed by egocentric impulses. Moral thinking reflects man's efforts to achieve the maturity of rational human life. I have argued that these efforts spring from a natural, maturation process, stimulated by social experience. That there are obstacles and difficulties in the achievement of this maturity is all too clear. Hope lies, however, in an increasing clarification of the nature of the psychological development towards moral consciousness in which rational maturity finds expression. This book tries to make a contribution to this clarification.

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