GENERAL LITERATURE

Among the works which have had the most influence upon the development of the theory of morals are: Plato, dialogues entitled Republic, Laws, Protagoras and Gorgias; Aristotle, Ethics; Cicero, De Finibus and De Officiis; Marcus Aurelius, Meditations; Epictetus, Conversations; Lucretius, De Rerum Natura; St. Thomas Aquinas (selected and translated by Rickaby under title of Aquinas Ethics); Hobbes, Leviathan; Spinoza, Ethics; Shaftesbury, Characteristics, and Inquiry concerning Virtue; Hutcheson, System of Moral Philosophy; Butler, Sermons; Hume, Essays, Principles of Morals; Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments; Bentham, Principles of Morals and Legislation; Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, and Foundations of the Metaphysics of Ethics; Comte, “Social Physics” (in his Course of Positive Philosophy); Mill, Utilitarianism; Spencer, Principles of Ethics; Green, Prolegomena to Ethics; Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics; Selby-Bigge, British Moralists, 2 vols. (a convenient collection of selections).

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF MORAL THEORY

§ 1. REFLECTIVE MORALITY AND ETHICAL THEORY

The intellectual distinction between customary and reflective morality is clearly marked. The former places the standard and rules of conduct in ancestral habit; the latter appeals to conscience, reason, or to some principle which includes thought. The distinction is as important as it is definite, for it shifts the center of gravity in morality. Nevertheless the distinction is relative rather than absolute. Some degree of reflective thought must have entered occasionally into systems which in the main were founded on social wont and use, while in contemporary morals, even when the need of critical judgment is most recognized, there is an immense amount of conduct that is merely accommodated to social usage. In what follows we shall, accordingly, emphasize the difference in principle between customary and reflective morals rather than try to describe different historic and social epochs. In principle a revolution was wrought when Hebrew prophets and Greek seers asserted that conduct is not truly conduct unless it springs from the heart, from personal desires and affections, or from personal insight and rational choice.

The change was revolutionary not only because it displaced custom from the supreme position, but even more because it entailed the necessity of criticizing existing customs and institutions from a new point of view. Standards which were regarded by the followers of tradition as the basis of duty and responsibility were denounced by prophet and philosopher as the source of moral corruption. These proclaimed the hollowness of outer conformity and insisted upon the cleansing of
the heart and the clarifying of the mind as preconditions of any genuinely good conduct.

One great source of the abiding interest which Greek thought has for the western world is that it records so clearly the struggle to make the transition from customary to reflective conduct. In the Platonic dialogues for example Socrates is represented as constantly raising the question of whether morals can be taught. Some other thinker (like Protagoras in the dialogue of that name) is brought in who points out that habituation to existing moral traditions is actually taught. Parents and teachers constantly admonish the young “pointing out that one act is just, another unjust; one honorable and another dishonorable; one holy and another unholy.” When a youth emerges from parental tutelage, the State takes up the task, for “the community compels them to learn laws and to live after the pattern of the laws and not according to their own fancies.”

In reply, Socrates raises the question of the foundations of such teaching, of its right to be termed a genuine teaching of virtue, and in effect points out the need of a morality which shall be stable and secure because based upon constant and universal principles. Parents and teachers differ in their injunctions and prohibitions; different communities have different laws; the same community changes its habits with time and with transformations of government. How shall we know who among the teachers, whether individuals or States, is right? Is there no basis for morals except this fluctuating one? It is not enough to praise and blame, reward and punish, enjoin and prohibit. The essence of morals, it is implied, is to know the reason for these customary instructions; to ascertain the criterion which insures their being just. And in other dialogues, it is frequently asserted that even if the mass must follow custom and law without insight, those who make laws and fix customs should have sure insight into enduring principles, or else the blind will be leading the blind.

Reflective Morality and Ethical Theory

No fundamental difference exists between systematic moral theory—the general theme of this Second Part of our study—and the reflection an individual engages in when he attempts to find general principles which shall direct and justify his conduct. Moral theory begins, in germ, when any one asks “Why should I act thus and not otherwise? Why is this right and that wrong? What right has any one to frown upon this way of acting and impose that other way? Children make at least a start upon the road of theory when they assert that the injunctions of elders are arbitrary, being simply a matter of superior position. Any adult enters the road when, in the presence of moral perplexity, of doubt as to what it is right or best to do, he attempts to find his way out through reflection which will lead him to some principle he regards as dependable.

Moral theory cannot emerge when there is positive belief as to what is right and what is wrong, for then there is no occasion for reflection. It emerges when men are confronted with situations in which different desires promise opposed goods and in which incompatible courses of action seem to be morally justified. Only such a conflict of good ends and of standards and rules of right and wrong calls forth personal inquiry into the bases of morals. A critical juncture may occur when a person, for example, goes from a protected home life into the stress of competitive business, and finds that moral standards which apply in one do not hold in the other. Unless he merely drifts, accommodating himself to whatever social pressure is uppermost, he will feel the conflict. If he tries to face it in thought, he will search for a reasonable principle by which to decide where the right really lies. In so doing he enters into the domain of moral theory, even if he does so unwittingly.

For what is called moral theory is but a more conscious and systematic raising of the question which occupies the mind of any one who in the face of moral conflict and doubt seeks a way out through reflection. In short, moral theory is but
an extension of what is involved in all reflective morality. There are two kinds of moral struggle. One kind, and that the most emphasized in moral writings and lectures, is the conflict which takes place when an individual is tempted to do something which he is convinced is wrong. Such instances are important practically in the life of an individual, but they are not the occasion of moral theory. The employee of a bank who is tempted to embezzle funds may indeed try to argue himself into finding reasons why it would not be wrong for him to do it. But in such a case, he is not really thinking, but merely permitting his desire to govern his beliefs. There is no sincere doubt in his mind as to what he should do when he seeks to find some justification for what he has made up his mind to do.

Take, on the other hand, the case of a citizen of a nation which has just declared war on another country. He is deeply attached to his own State. He has formed habits of loyalty and of abiding by its laws, and now one of its decrees is that he shall support war. He feels in addition gratitude and affection for the country which has sheltered and nurtured him. But he believes that this war is unjust, or perhaps he has a conviction that all war is a form of murder and hence wrong. One side of his nature, one set of convictions and habits, leads him to acquiesce in war; another deep part of his being protests. He is torn between two duties: he experiences a conflict between the incompatible values presented to him by his habits of citizenship and by his religious beliefs respectively. Up to this time, he has never experienced a struggle between the two; they have coincided and reinforced one another. Now he has to make a choice between competing moral loyalties and convictions. The struggle is not between a good which is clear to him and something else which attracts him but which he knows to be wrong. It is between values each of which is an undoubted good in its place but which now get in each other's way. He is forced to reflect in order to come to a decision. Moral theory is a generalized extension of the kind of thinking in which he now engages.

There are periods in history when a whole community or a group in a community finds itself in the presence of new issues which its old customs do not adequately meet. The habits and beliefs which were formed in the past do not fit into the opportunities and requirements of contemporary life. The age in Greece following the time of Pericles was of this sort; that of the Jews after their captivity; that following the Middle Ages when secular interests on a large scale were introduced into previous religious and ecclesiastic interests; the present is preeminently a period of this sort with the vast social changes which have followed the industrial expansion of the machine age.

Realization that the need for reflective morality and for moral theories grows out of conflict between ends, responsibilities, rights, and duties defines the service which moral theory may render, and also protects the student from false conceptions of its nature. The difference between customary and reflective morality is precisely that definite precepts, rules, definitive injunctions and prohibitions issue from the former, while they cannot proceed from the latter. Confusion ensues when appeal to rational principles is treated as if it were merely a substitute for custom, transferring the authority of moral commands from one source to another. Moral theory can (i) generalize the types of moral conflicts which arise, thus enabling a perplexed and doubtful individual to clarify his own particular problem by placing it in a larger context; it can (ii) state the leading ways in which such problems have been intellectually dealt with by those who have thought upon such matters; it can (iii) render personal reflection more systematic and enlightened, suggesting alternatives that might otherwise be overlooked, and stimulating greater consistency in judgment. But it does not offer a table of commandments in a catechism in which answers are as definite as are the questions
which are asked. It can render personal choice more intelligent, but it cannot take the place of personal decision, which must be made in every case of moral perplexity. Such at least is the standpoint of the discussions which follow; the student who expects more from moral theory will be disappointed. The conclusion follows from the very nature of reflective morality; the attempt to set up ready-made conclusions 
contradicts the very nature of reflective morality.

§ 2. THE NATURE OF A MORAL ACT

Since the change from customary to reflective morality shifts emphasis from conformity to prevailing modes of action over to personal disposition and attitudes, the first business of moral theory is to obtain in outline an idea of the factors which constitute personal disposition. In its general features, the traits of a reflective moral situation have long been clear; doubts and disputes arise chiefly as to the relation which they bear to one another. The formula was well stated by Aristotle. The doer of the moral deed must have a certain "state of mind" in doing it. First, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must choose it, and choose it for itself; and thirdly, the act must be the expression of a formed and stable character.

In other words, the act must be voluntary; that is, it must manifest a choice, and for full morality at least, the choice must be an expression of the general tenor and set of personality. It must involve awareness of what one is about; a fact which in the concrete signifies that there must be a purpose, an aim, an end in view, something for the sake of which the particular act is done. The acts of infants, imbeciles, insane persons in some cases, have no moral quality; they do not know what they are about. Children learn early in life to appeal to accident, that is, absence of intention and purpose on their part, as an excuse for deeds that have bad consequences. When they exculpate themselves on the ground that they did not "mean" to do something they show a realization that intent is a normal part of a moral situation. Again, there is no choice, no implication of personal disposition, when one is coerced by superior physical power. Even when force takes the form of threats, rather than of immediate exercise of it, "duress" is at least a mitigating circumstance. It is recognized that fear of extreme harm to life and limb will overpower choice in all but those of heroic make-up.

An act must be the expression of a formed and stable character. But stability of character is an affair of degrees, and is not to be taken absolutely. No human being, however mature, has a completely formed character, while any child in the degree in which he has acquired attitudes and habits has a stable character to that extent. The point of including this qualification is that it suggests a kind of running scale of acts, some of which proceed from greater depths of the self, while others are more casual, more due to accidental and variable circumstances. We overlook acts performed under conditions of great stress or of physical weakness on the ground that the doer was "not himself" at the time. Yet we should not overdo this interpretation. Conduct may be eccentric and erratic just because a person in the past has formed that kind of disposition. An unstable character may be the product of acts deliberately chosen at some time. A man is not himself in a state of intoxication. But a difference will be made between the case in which a usually temperate man is overcome by drink, and the case in which intoxication is so habitual as to be a sign of a habit formed by choice and of character.

May acts be voluntary, that is, be expressions of desire, intent, choice, and habitual disposition, and yet be morally neutral, indifferent? To all appearances the answer must be in the affirmative. We rise in the morning, dress, eat, and go about our usual business without attaching moral significance to what we are doing. These are the regular and normal things to do, and the acts, while many of them are performed
intentionally and with a knowledge of what we are doing are a matter of course. So with the student's, merchant's, engineer's, lawyer's, or doctor's daily round of affairs. We feel that it would be rather morbid if a moral issue were raised in connection with each act; we should probably suspect some mental disorder if it were, at least some weakness in power of decision. On the other hand, we speak of the persons in question going about their daily round of duties. If we omitted from our estimate of moral character all the deeds done in the performance of daily tasks, satisfaction of recurrent needs, meeting of responsibilities, each slight perhaps in itself but enormous in mass, morality would be a weak and sickly thing indeed.

The inconsistency between these two points of view is only apparent. Many acts are done not only without thought of their moral quality but with practically no thought of any kind. Yet these acts are preconditions of other acts having significant value. A criminal on his way to commit a crime and a benevolent person on his way to a deed of mercy both have to walk or ride. Such acts, non-moral in isolation, derive moral significance from the ends to which they lead. If a man who had an important engagement to keep declined to get out of bed in the morning from sheer laziness, the indirect moral quality of a seemingly automatic act would be apparent. A vast number of acts are performed which seem to be trivial in themselves but which in reality are the supports and buttresses of acts in which definite moral considerations are present. The person who completely ignored the connection of the great number of more or less routine acts with the small number in which there is a clear moral issue would be an utterly independable person.

§ 3. CONDUCT AND CHARACTER

These facts are implicitly recognized in common speech by the use of the word conduct. The word expresses continuity of action, an idea which we have already met in the conception of a stable and formed character. Where there is conduct there is not simply a succession of disconnected acts but each thing done carries forward an underlying tendency and intent, conductive, leading up, to further acts and to a final fulfillment or consummation. Moral development, in the training given by others and in the education one secures for oneself, consists in becoming aware that our acts are connected with one another; thereby an ideal of conduct is substituted for the blind and thoughtless performance of isolated acts. Even when a person has attained a certain degree of moral stability, his temptations usually take the form of fancying that this particular act will not count, that it is an exception, that for this just one occasion it will not do any harm. His "temptation" is to disregard that continuity of sequence in which one act leads on to others and to a cumulative result.

We commence life under the influence of appetites and impulses, and of direct response to immediate stimuli of heat and cold, comfort and pain, light, noise, etc. The hungry child snatches at food. To him the act is innocent and natural. But he brings down reproach upon himself; he is told that he is unmannerly, inconsiderate, greedy; that he should wait till he is served, till his turn comes. He is made aware that his act has other connections than the one he had assigned to it: the immediate satisfaction of hunger. He learns to look at single acts not as single but as related links in a chain. Thus the idea of a series, an idea which is the essence of conduct, gradually takes the place of a mere succession of disconnected acts.

This idea of conduct as a serial whole solves the problem of morally indifferent acts. Every act has potential moral significance, because it is, through its consequences, part of a larger whole of behavior. A person starts to open a window because he feels the need of air—no act could be more "natural." more morally indifferent in appearance. But he re-
members that his associate is an invalid and sensitive to drafts. He now sees his act in two different lights, possessed of two different values, and he has to make a choice. The potential moral import of a seemingly insignificant act has come home to him. Or, wishing to take exercise, there are two routes open to him. Ordinarily it would be a mere matter of personal taste which he would choose. But he recalls that the more pleasing of the two is longer, and that if he went that way he might be unable to keep an appointment of importance. He now has to place his act in a larger context of continuity and determine which ulterior consequence he prizes most: personal pleasure or meeting the needs of another.

Thus while there is no single act which must under all circumstances have conscious moral quality, there is no act, since it is a part of conduct, which may not have definite moral significance. There is no hard and fast line between the morally indifferent and the morally significant. Matthew Arnold expressed a prevailing idea when he said that conduct—in the moral sense—is three-fourths of life. Although he probably assigned it a higher ratio than most persons would, the statement expresses a widely shared idea, namely, that morality has to do with a clearly marked out portion of our life, leaving other things indifferent. Our conclusion is different. It is that potentially conduct is one hundred per cent of our conscious life. For all acts are so tied together that any one of them may have to be judged as an expression of character. On the other hand, there is no act which may not, under some circumstances, be morally indifferent, for at the time there may be no need for consideration of its relation to character. There is no better evidence of a well formed moral character than knowledge of when to raise the moral issue and when not. It implies a sensitiveness to values which is the token of a balanced personality. Undoubtedly many persons are so callous or so careless that they do not raise the moral issue often enough. But there are others so unbalanced that they hamper and paralyze conduct by indulging in what approaches a mania of doubt.

It is not enough to show that the binding together of acts so that they lead up to and carry one another forward constitutes conduct. We have also to consider why and how it is that they are thus bound together into a whole, instead of forming, as in the case of physical events, a mere succession. The answer is contained in rendering explicit the allusions which have been made to disposition and character. If an act were connected with other acts merely in the way in which the flame of a match is connected with an explosion of gunpowder, there would be action, but not conduct. But our actions not only lead up to other actions which follow as their effects but they also leave an enduring impress on the one who performs them, strengthening and weakening permanent tendencies to act. This fact is familiar to us in the existence of habit.

We are, however, likely to have a conception of habit which needs to be deepened and extended. For we are given to thinking of a habit as simply a recurrent external mode of action, like smoking or swearing, being neat or negligent in clothes and person, taking exercise, or playing games. But habit reaches even more significantly down into the very structure of the self; it signifies a building up and solidifying of certain desires; an increased sensitiveness and responsiveness to certain stimuli, a confirmed or an impaired capacity to attend to and think about certain things. Habit covers in other words the very make-up of desire, intent, choice, disposition which gives an act its voluntary quality. And this aspect of habit is much more important than that which is suggested merely by the tendency to repeated outer action, for the significance of the latter lies in the permanence of the personal disposition which is the real cause of the outer acts and of their resemblance to one another. Acts are not linked up together to form conduct in and of themselves, but because
of their common relation to an enduring and single condition—the self or character as the abiding unity in which different acts leave their lasting traces. If one surrenders to a momentary impulse, the significant thing is not the particular act which follows, but the strengthening of the power of that impulse—this strengthening is the reality of that which we call habit. In giving way, the person in so far commits himself not just to that isolated act but to a course of action, to a line of behavior.

Sometimes a juncture is so critical that a person, in deciding upon what course he will take, feels that his future, his very being, is at stake. Such cases are obviously of great practical importance for the person concerned. They are of importance for theory, because some degree of what is conspicuous in these momentous cases is found in every voluntary decision. Indeed, also it belongs to acts performed impulsively without deliberate choice. In such cases, it is later experience which makes us aware of the serious commitment implied in an earlier act. We find ourselves involved in embarrassing complications and on reflection we trace the cause of our embarrassment to a deed which we performed casually, without reflection and deliberate intent. Then we reflect upon the value of the entire class of actions. We realize the difference which exists between the thought of an act before it is done and as it is experienced afterwards. As Goldsmith so truly said “In the first place, we cook the dish to our own appetite; in the latter, nature cooks it for us.” We plunge at first into action pushed by impulse, drawn by appetite. After we have acted and consequences which are unexpected and undesired show themselves, we begin to reflect. We review the wisdom or the rightness of the course which we engaged in with little or no thought. Our judgment turns backward for its material; something has turned out differently than we anticipated, and so we think back to discover what was the matter. But while the material of the judgment comes to us from the past, what really concerns us is what we shall do the next time; the function of reflection is prospective. We wish to decide whether to continue in the course of action entered upon or to shift to another. The person who reflects on his past action in order to get light on his future behavior is the conscientious person. There is always a temptation to seek for something external to the self on which to lay the blame when things go wrong; we dislike to trace the cause back to something in ourselves. When this temptation is yielded to, a person becomes irresponsible; he neither pins himself nor can be pinned down by others to any consistent course of action, for he will not institute any connection of cause and effect between his character and his deeds.

The conclusion is that conduct and character are strictly correlative. Continuity, consistency, throughout a series of acts is the expression of the enduring unity of attitudes and habits. Deeds hang together because they proceed from a single and stable self. Customary morality tends to neglect or blur the connection between character and action; the essence of reflective morals is that it is conscious of the existence of a persistent self and of the part it plays in what is externally done. Leslie Stephen has expressed this principle as follows:

“The clear enunciation of one principle seems to be a characteristic of all great moral revolutions. The recognition amounts almost to a discovery, and may be said to mark the point at which the moral code first becomes distinctly separated from other codes. It may be briefly expressed in the phrase that morality is internal. The moral law, we may say, has to be expressed in the form, “be this,” not in the form, “do this.” The possibility of expressing any rule in this form may be regarded as deciding whether it can or cannot have a distinctively moral character. Christianity gave prominence to the doctrine that the true moral law says “hate not,” instead of “kill not.” The men of old time had forbidden adultery: the new moral teacher forbade lust; and his greatness as a moral teacher was manifested in nothing more than in the clearness with which he gave utterance to this doctrine. It would
be easy to show how profoundly the same doctrine, in various
forms, has been bound up with other moral and religious refor-
mations in many ages of the world.”

§ 4. MOTIVE AND CONSEQUENCES

In reaching the conclusion that conduct and character are
morally one and the same thing, first taken as effect and then
as causal and productive factor, we have virtually disposed of
one outstanding point of controversy in moral theory. The
issue in question is that between those who hold that motives
are the only thing which count morally and those who hold
that consequences are alone of moral import. On one side stand
those who, like Kant, say that results actually attained are of
no importance morally speaking, because they do not depend
upon the will alone; that only the will can be good or bad in
the moral sense. On the other side, are those who, like Bentham,
say that morality consists in producing consequences which
contribute to the general welfare, and that motives do not
count at all save as they happen to influence the conse-
quences one way or another. One theory puts sole emphasis
upon attitude, upon how the chosen act is conceived and in-
spired; the other theory lays stress solely upon what is done,
upon the objective content of the deed in the way of its
effect upon others. Our analysis shows that both views are
one-sided. At whichever end we begin we find ourselves
intellectually compelled to consider the other end. We are
dealing not with two different things but with two poles of the
same thing. The school of Bentham, for example, does not
hold that every consequence is of importance in judging an act
morally. It would not say that the act of a surgeon is necessa-
rily to be condemned because an operation results in the death
of a patient. It limits the theory to foreseen and desired con-
sequences. The intended consequence, the intention, of the
surgeon was to save life; morally his act was beneficent,

although unsuccessful from causes which he could not control.
They say if his intent was right, it makes no difference what
his motive was; whether he was moved by kindly feeling, by
desire for professional standing, by a wish to show his skill, or
to gain a fee, is immaterial. The only thing that counts
morally is that he intended to effect certain consequences.
The protest contained in this position against locating morals
in the conscious feeling which attends the doing of an act is
valuable and valid. Persons, children and grown-ups alike,
often say in justification for some act that turned out badly
that they meant well; they allege some innocent or amiable
feeling as the “motive” of the act. The real fact in all prob-
ability was that they took next to no pains to think out the
consequences of what they proposed to do. They kept their
minds upon any favorable results that might be fancied to
follow, and glossed over or kept from view its undesirable
consequences. If “motive” signified the emotional state
which happens to exist in consciousness at the time of acting,
Bentham’s position would be entirely sound. Since that
conception of motives is more or less prevalent, he was not
setting up a man of straw to hit, but was attacking a doctrine
which is morally dangerous. For it encourages men to neglect
the purpose and bearing of their actions, and to justify what
they feel inclined to do on the ground that their feelings when
doing it were innocent and amiable.

The underlying identification of motive with personal feel-
ing is, however, erroneous. What moves a man is not a feeling
but the set disposition, of which a feeling is at best but a
dubious indication. An emotion, as the word suggests, moves
us, but an emotion is a good deal more than a bare “feeling”;
anger is not so much a state of conscious feeling as it is a
tendency to act in a destructive way towards whatever arouses
it. It is doubtful if a miserly person is conscious of feelings of
stinginess; he rather prizes that which he hoards and is moved
to keep up and conserve that which he prizes. Just as an
angry person may deny, quite honestly, that he is angry, so an ambitious man is likely to be quite devoid of any feeling of ambition. There are objects and ends which arouse his energy and into the attaining of which he throws himself with wholeheartedness. If he were to interpret his own conduct he would say that he acts as he does not because of personal ambition, but because the objects in question are so important.

When it is recognized that “motive” is but an abbreviated name for the attitude and predisposition toward ends which is embodied in action, all ground for making a sharp separation between motive and intention—foresight of consequences—falls away. Mere foresight of results may be coldly intellectual, like a prediction of an eclipse. It moves to action only when it is accompanied with desire for that sort of result. On the other hand, a set and disposition of character leads to anticipation of certain kinds of consequences and to passing over other effects of action without notice. A careless man will not be aware of consequences that occur to a prudent man; if they do present themselves to thought, he will not attach the force to them which the careful man does. A crafty character will foresee consequences which will not occur to a frank and open man; if they should happen to come to the mind of the latter, he will be repelled by the very considerations that would attract the sly and intriguing person. Othello and Iago foresee different consequences because they have different kinds of characters. Thus the formation of intention, of purpose, is a function of the forces of human nature which lead to action, and the foreseen consequences move to action only as they are also prized and desired. The distinction between motive and intent is not found in the facts themselves, but is simply a result of our own analysis, according as we emphasize either the emotional or the intellectual aspect of an action. The theoretical value of the utilitarian position consists in the fact that it warns us against overlooking the essential place of the intellectual factor, namely, foresight of consequences. The practical value of the theory which lays stress on motive is that it calls attention to the part played by character, by personal disposition and attitude, in determining the direction which the intellectual factor takes.

But in its extreme form it suffers from the same one-sidedness as does the Benthamite theory of intention, although in the opposite direction. It is possible to make good sense of the proposition that it is the “will” which counts morally, rather than consequences. But only so, if we recognize that will signifies an active tendency to foresee consequences, to form resolute purposes, and to use all the efforts at command to produce the intended consequences in fact. The idea that consequences are morally irrelevant is true only in the sense that any act is always likely to have some consequences which could not have been foreseen, even with the best will in the world. We always build better or worse than we know, and the best laid plans of men as of mice are more or less at the mercy of uncontrollable contingent circumstances when it comes to actual consequences. But this fact of the limitation of intention cannot be converted into the doctrine that there is such a thing as motive and will apart from projection of consequences and from effort to bring them to pass. “Will,” in the sense of unity of impulse, desire, and thought which anticipates and plans, is central in morals just because by its very nature it is the most constant and effectual factor in control of consequences.

This emphasis upon character is not peculiar to any special type of moral theory. Our dominating interest is the manifestation and interaction of personalities. It is the same interest which shows itself in the drama where the colorful display of incidents is, save in the melodramatic and sentimental, a display of the outwarding of character. Political thought tends to be too much rather than too little concerned with personality at the expense of issues and principles. What Hamlet, Macbeth, Nora, Tartuffe are to the theater, Roosevelt,
Wilson, Lloyd George, Mussolini are to politics. For practical reasons we must be concerned with character in our daily affairs. Whether we buy or sell goods, lend money or invest in securities, call a physician or consult a lawyer, take or refuse advice from a friend, fall in love and marry, the ultimate outcome depends upon the characters which are involved.

§ 5. PRESENT NEED OF THEORY

We have already noted in passing that the present time is one which is in peculiar need of reflective morals and of a working theory of morals. The scientific outlook on the world and on life has undergone and is still undergoing radical change. Methods of industry, of the production, and distribution of goods have been completely transformed. The basic conditions on which men meet and associate, in work and amusement, have been altered. There has been a vast dislocation of older habits and traditions. Travel and migration are as common as they were once unusual. The masses are educated enough to read and a prolific press exists which supplies cheap reading matter. Schooling has ceased to be the privilege of the few and has become the right and even the enforced duty of the many. The stratification of society into classes each fairly homogeneous in itself has been broken into. The area of contacts with persons and populations alien to our bringing up and traditions has enormously extended. A ward of a large city in the United States may have persons of from a score to fifty racial origins. The walls and barriers that once separated nations have become less important because of the railway, steamship, telegraph, telephone, and radio.

Only a few of the more obvious changes in social conditions and interests have been mentioned. Each one of them has created new problems and issues that contain moral values which are uncertain and disputed. Nationalism and internationalism, capital and labor, war and peace, science and religious tradition, competition and cooperation. laissez-faire and State planning in industry, democracy and dictatorship in government, rural and city life, personal work and control versus investment and vicarious riches through stocks and bonds, native born and alien, contact of Jew and Gentile, of white and colored, of Catholic and Protestant, and those of new religions: a multitude of such relationships have brought to the fore new moral problems with which neither old customs nor beliefs are competent to cope. In addition, the rapidity with which social changes occur brings moral unsettlement and tends to destroy many ties which were the chief safeguards of the morals of custom. There was never a time in the history of the world when human relationships and their accompanying rights and duties, opportunities and demands, reaped the unremitting and systematic attention of intelligent thought as they do at present.

There are those who tend to minimize the importance of reflection in moral issues. They hold that men already know more morally than they practice and that there is general agreement among men on all moral fundamentals. Usually such persons will be found to adhere to some especial tradition in whose dogmas they find final and complete authority. But in fact the agreement exists to a large extent only with reference to concepts that are taken vaguely and apart from practical application. Justice: to be sure; give to each that which is his due. But is individualistic competitive capitalism a just system? or socialism? or communism? Is inheritance of large fortunes, without rendering of personal service to society, just? What system of taxation is just? What are the moral claims of free-trade and protection? What would constitute a just system of the distribution of national income? Few would question the desirability of chastity, but there are a multitude of interpretations of its meaning. Does it mean that celibacy is more pleasing to God than marriage? This idea is not generally held today, but its former vogue still affects the beliefs and practices of men and women. What is the relation of
chastity as a moral idea to divorce, birth control, state censorship of literature? Human life is sacred. But what about many of the health-destroying practices and accident-inducing practices of modern industry? What about war, preparation for which absorbs the chief part of the revenue of modern States?

And so we could go down the list of all the time-honored virtues and duties, and show that changes in conditions have made what they signify for human action a matter of uncertainty and controversy. The ultimate difference, for example, between the employing and the employed in industry is one of moral criteria and outlook. They envisage different values as having a superior claim. The same is evidently true of the convinced nationalist and internationalist, pacifist and militarist, secularist and devotee of authoritatively revealed religion. Now it is not held for a moment that moral theory can give direct and final answers to these questions. But it is held that they cannot be dealt with by adherence to mere tradition nor by trusting to casual impulse and momentary inspiration. Even if all men agreed sincerely to act upon the principle of the Golden Rule as the supreme law of conduct, we should still need inquiry and thought to arrive at even a passable conception of what the Rule means in terms of concrete practice under mixed and changing social conditions. Universal agreement upon the abstract principle even if it existed would be of value only as a preliminary to cooperative undertaking of investigation and thoughtful planning; as a preparation, in other words, for systematic and consistent reflection.

§ 6. Sources of Moral Theory

No theory can operate in a vacuum. Moral as well as physical theory requires a body of dependable data, and a set of intelligible working hypotheses. Where shall moral theory find the material with which to satisfy these needs?

1. While all that has been said about the extent of change in all conditions of life is true, nevertheless there has been no complete breach of continuity. From the beginning of human life, men have arrived at some conclusions regarding what is proper and fair in human relationships, and have engaged in working out codes of conduct. The dogmatist, whether made so by tradition or through some special insight which he claims as his own, will pick out from the many conflicting codes that one which agrees the most closely with his own education and taste. A genuinely reflective moral will look upon all the codes as possible data; it will consider the conditions under which they arose; the methods which consciously or unconsciously determined their formation and acceptance; it will inquire into their applicability in present conditions. It will neither insist dogmatically upon some of them, nor idly throw them all away as of no significance. It will treat them as a storehouse of information and possible indications of what is now right and good.

2. Closely connected with this body of material in codes and convictions, is the more consciously elaborated material of legal history, judicial decisions, and legislative activity. Here we have a long experimentation in working out principles for direction of human beings in their conduct. Something of the same kind is true of the workings of all great human institutions. The history of the family, of industry, of property systems, of government and the state, of education and art, is full of instructions about modes of human conduct and the consequences of adopting this or that mode of conduct. Informal material of the same sort abounds in biographies, especially of those who have been selected as the great moral teachers of the race.

3. A resource which mankind was late in utilizing and which it has hardly as yet begun to draw upon adequately is found in the various sciences, especially those closest to man, such as biology, physiology, hygiene and medicine, psychology and psychiatry, as well as statistics, sociology, economics, and
politics. The latter upon the whole present problems rather than solutions. But it is well to get problems more clearly in mind, and the very fact that these social disciplines usually approach their material independently of consideration of moral values has a certain intellectual advantage for the moralist. For although he still has to translate economic and political statement over into moral terms, there is some guarantee of intellectual objectivity and impartiality in the fact that these sciences approach their subject-matter in greater detachment from preformed and set moral convictions, since the latter may be only the prejudices of tradition or temperament. From the biological and psychological sciences, there are derivable highly valuable techniques for study of human and social problems and the opening of new vistas. For example, the discovery of the conditions and the consequences of health of body, personal and public, which these sciences have already effected, opens the way to a relatively new body of moral interests and responsibilities. It is impossible any longer to regard health and the conditions which affect it as a merely technical or physical matter. Its ramifications with moral order and disorder have been clearly demonstrated.

4. Then there is the body of definitely theoretical methods and conclusions which characterize European history for the last two thousand years, to say nothing of the doctrines of Asiatic thinkers for a still longer period. Keen intellects have been engaged in analysis and in the development of directive principles on a rational basis. Alternative positions and their implications have been explored and systematically developed. At first sight, the variety of logically incompatible positions which have been taken by theorists may seem to the student to indicate simply a scene of confusion and conflict. But when studied more closely they reveal the complexity of moral situations, a complexity so great that while every theory may be found to ignore factors and relations which ought to be taken into account, each one will also be found to bring to light some phase of the moral life demanding reflective attention, and which, save for it, might have remained hidden. The proper inference to be drawn is not that we should make a mechanical compromise or an eclectic combination of the different theories, but that each great system of moral thought brings to light some point of view from which the facts of our own situations are to be looked at and studied. Theories afford us at least a set of questions with which we may approach and challenge present conditions.

§ 7. CLASSIFICATION OF PROBLEMS

For the remaining portion of this Second Part we shall be occupied mainly with a consideration of some of the chief classic theories about morals which have left a moral impression on civilization. A survey of these theories brings out certain underlying differences of emphasis and resulting intellectual problems, which the student will be put in possession of, before taking up the conceptions themselves. Roughly speaking, theories will be found to vary primarily because some of them attach chief importance to purposes and ends, leading to the concept of the Good as ultimate; while some others are impressed by the importance of law and regulation, leading up to the supremacy of the concepts of Duty and the Right; while a third set regards approbation and disapprobation, praise and blame as the primary moral fact, thus terminating with making the concepts of Virtue and Vice central. Within each tendency, there are further differences of opinion as to what is the Good, the nature of Duty, Law, and the Right, and the relative standing of different virtues.

1. That men form purposes, strive for the realization of ends, is an established fact. If it is asked why they do so, the only answer to the question, aside from saying that they do so unreasonably from mere blind custom, is that they strive to attain certain goals because they believe that these ends have an intrinsic value of their own; they are good, satisfactory.
The chief province of reason in practical matters is to discriminate between ends that merely seem good and those which are really so—between specious, deceptive goods, and lasting true goods. Men have desires; immediately and apart from reflection they want this and that thing, food, a companion, money, fame and repute, health, distinction among their fellows, power, the love of friends, the admiration of rivals, etc. But why do they want these things? Because value is attributed to them; because they are thought to be good. As the scholastics said, we desire sub specie boni; beneath all the special ends striven for is the common idea of the Good, the Satisfying. Theories which regard ends as the important thing in morals accordingly make the conception of Good central in theory. Since men often take things to be good in anticipatory judgment which are not so in fact, the problem of this group of theories is to determine the real good as distinct from the things that merely seem to be so, or, what is the same thing, the permanent good from transitory and fleeting goods. From the side of attitude and disposition, the fundamental matter is therefore the insight and wisdom which is able to discriminate between ends that deceptively promise satisfaction and the ends which truly constitute it. The great problem of morals on this score is the attainment of right knowledge.

2. To other observers of human life, the control of desire and appetite has seemed much more fundamental than their satisfaction. Many of them are suspicious of the very principle of desire and of the ends which are connected with it. Desire seems to them so personal and so bent on its own satisfaction as to be the source of temptation, to be the cause which leads men to deviate from the lawful course of action. Empirically, these thinkers are struck by the rôle played in human government by commands, prohibitions, and all the devices that regulate the play of passions and desires. To them, the great problem is to discover some underlying authority which shall control the formation of aims and pur-

poses. The lower animals follow desire and appetite because they have no conception of regulative law; men have the consciousness of being bound by a principle superior to impulse and want. The morally right and the naturally satisfying are often in conflict and the heart of the moral struggle is to subordinate good to the demands of duty. The theory that makes ends supreme has been called the teleological (from the Greek, τέλος, end); the theory which makes law and duty supreme, the jural.

3. There is another group of thinkers who feel that the principle of ends and rational insight places altogether too much emphasis upon the intellectual factor in human nature, and that the theory of law and duty is too legal, external, and stringent. They are struck by the enormous part played in human life by facts of approbation and condemnation, praise and blame, reward and punishment, encouragement of some courses of action, resentment at others, and pressure to keep persons from adopting those courses which are frowned upon. They find in human nature a spontaneous tendency to favor some lines of conduct, and to censure and penalize other modes of action, a tendency which in time is extended from acts to the dispositions from which the acts flow. Out of the mass of approbations arise the ideas of virtue and vice: the dispositions which are socially commended and encouraged constituting the excellencies of character which are to be cultivated, vices and defects being those traits which are condemned. Those who hold to this theory have no difficulty in demonstrating the great rôle of commendation and disfavor in customary morality. The problem of reflective morality and hence of theory is to lay bare the standard or criterion implicit in current social approbation and reproach.

In general, they agree that what men like and praise are acts and motives that tend to serve others, while those acts and motives which are condemned are those which bring harm instead of benefit to others. Reflective morality makes this
principle of popular moral judgments conscious, and one to be rationally adopted and exercised.

In our succeeding chapters we shall consider these three types of theory and the various subdivisions into which they have evolved. Our aim will be not so much to determine which is true and which false as to see what factors of permanent value each group contributes to the clarification and direction of reflective morality.

LITERATURE


CHAPTER II

ENDS, THE GOOD AND WISDOM

§ 1. REFLECTION AND ENDS

The question of what ends a man should live for does not arise as a general problem in customary morality. It is forestalled by the habits and institutions which a person finds existing all about him. What others, especially elders, are doing provides the ends for which one should act. These ends are sanctioned by tradition; they are hallowed by the semi-divine character of the ancestors who instituted the customs; they are set forth by the wise elders, and are enforced by the rulers. Individuals trespass, deviating from these established purposes, but they do so with the conviction that thereby social condemnation, reinforced by supernatural penalties inflicted by divine beings, ensues. There are today multitudes of men and women who take their aims from what they observe to be going on around them. They accept the aims provided by religious teachers, by political authorities, by persons in the community who have prestige. Failure to adopt such a course would seem to many persons to be a kind of moral rebellion or anarchy. Many other persons find their ends practically forced upon them. Because of lack of education and because of economic stress they for the most part do just what they have to do. In the absence of the possibility of real choice, such a thing as reflection upon purposes and the attempt to frame a general theory of ends and of the good would seem to be idle luxuries.

There can, however, be no such thing as reflective morality except where men seriously ask by what purposes they should direct their conduct and why they should do so; what it is