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Winds of Doctrine

Studies in Contemporary Opinion

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IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MR. BERTRAND RUSSELL

I. A NEW SCHOLASTICISM

IN its chase after idols this age has not wholly forgotten the gods, and reason and faith in reason are not left without advocates. Some years ago, at Trinity College, Cambridge, Mr. G. E. Moore began to produce a very deep impression amongst the younger spirits by his powerful and luminous dialectic. Like Socrates, he used all the sharp arts of a disputant in the interests of common sense and of an almost archaic dogmatism. Those who heard him felt how superior his position was, both in rigour and in force, to the prevailing inversions and idealisms. The abuse of psychology, rampant for two hundred years, seemed at last to be detected and challenged; and the impressionistic rhetoric that philosophy was saturated with began to be squeezed out by clear questions, and by a disconcerting demand for literal sincerity. German idealism, when we study it as a product of its own age and country, is a most engaging phenomenon; it is full of afflatus, sweep, and deep searchings of heart; but it is essentially romantic and egotistical, and all in it that is not soliloquy is mere system-making and sophistry. Therefore when it is taught by unromantic people *ex cathedra*, in stentorian tones, and represented as the rational foundation of science and religion, with neither of which it has any honest sympathy, it becomes positively odious—one of the worst impostures and blights to which a youthful imagination could be subjected. It is chiefly against the incubus of this celestial monster that Mr. Moore dared to lift up his eyes; and many a less courageous or less clear-sighted person was thankful to him for it. But a man with such a mission requires a certain narrowness and concentration of mind; he has to be intolerant and to pound a good deal on the same notes. We need

not wonder if Mr. Moore has written rather meagrely, and with a certain vehemence and want of imagination.

All this, however, was more than made up for by the powerful ally who soon came to his aid. Mr. Bertrand Russell began by adopting Mr. Moore's metaphysics, but he has given as much as he has received. Apart from his well-known mathematical attainments, he possesses by inheritance the political and historical mind, and an intrepid determination to pierce convention and look to ultimate things. He has written abundantly and, where the subject permits, with a singular lucidity, candour, and charm. Especially his *Philosophical Essays* and his little book on *The Problems of Philosophy* can be read with pleasure by any intelligent person, and give a tolerably rounded picture of the tenets of the school. Yet it must be remembered that Mr. Russell, like Mr. Moore, is still young and his thoughts have not assumed their ultimate form. Moreover, he lives in an atmosphere of academic disputation which makes one technical point after another acquire a preponderating influence in his thoughts. His book on *The Problems of Philosophy* is admirable in style, temper, and insight, but it hardly deserves its title; it treats principally, in a somewhat personal and partial way, of the relation of knowledge to its objects, and it might rather have been called "The problems which Moore and I have been agitating lately." Indeed, his philosophy is so little settled as yet that every new article and every fresh conversation revokes some of his former opinions, and places the crux of philosophical controversy at a new point. We are soon made aware that exact thinking and true thinking are not synonymous, but that one exact thought, in the same mind, may be the exact opposite of the next. This inconstancy, which after all does not go very deep, is a sign of sincerity and pure love of truth; it marks the freshness, the vivacity, the self-forgetfulness, the logical ardour belonging to this delightful reformer. It may seem a paradox, but at bottom it is not, that the vitalists should be oppressed, womanish, and mystical, and only the intellectualists keen, argumentative, fearless, and full of life. I mention this casualness and inconstancy in Mr. Russell's utterances not to deride them, but to show the reader how impossible it is, at this juncture, to give a comprehensive account of his philosophy, much less a final judgment upon it.

The principles most fundamental and dominant in his thought are perhaps the following: That the objects the mind deals with, whether material or ideal, are what and where the mind says they are, and

independent of it; that some general principles and ideas have to be assumed to be valid not merely for thought but for things; that relations may subsist, arise, and disappear between things without at all affecting these things internally; and that the nature of everything is just what it is, and not to be confused either with its origin or with any opinion about it. These principles, joined with an obvious predilection for Plato and Leibnitz among philosophers, lead to the following doctrines, among others: that the mind or soul is an entity separate from its thoughts and pre-existent; that a material world exists in space and time; that its substantial elements may be infinite in number, having position and quality, but no extension, so that each mind or soul might well be one of them; that both the existent and the ideal worlds may be infinite, while the ideal world contains an infinity of things not realised in the actual world; and that this ideal world is knowable by a separate mental consideration, a consideration which is, however, empirical in spirit, since the ideal world of ethics, logic, and mathematics has a special and surprising constitution, which we do not make but must attentively discover.

The reader will perceive, perhaps, that if the function of philosophy is really, as the saying goes, to give us assurance of God, freedom, and immortality, Mr. Russell's philosophy is a dire failure. In fact, its author sometimes gives vent to a rather emphatic pessimism about this world; he has a keen sense for the manifold absurdities of existence. But the sense for absurdities is not without its delights, and Mr. Russell's satirical wit is more constant and better grounded than his despair. I should be inclined to say of his philosophy what he himself has said of that of Leibnitz, that it is at its best in those subjects which are most remote from human life. It needs to be very largely supplemented and much ripened and humanised before it can be called satisfactory or wise; but time may bring these fulfilments, and meantime I cannot help thinking it auspicious in the highest degree that, in a time of such impressionistic haste and plebeian looseness of thought, scholastic rigour should suddenly raise its head again, aspiring to seriousness, solidity, and perfection of doctrine: and this not in the interests of religious orthodoxy, but precisely in the most emancipated and unflinchingly radical quarter. It is refreshing and reassuring, after the confused, melodramatic ways of philosophising to which the idealists and the pragmatists have accustomed us, to breathe again the crisp air of scholastic common sense. It is good for us to be held down, as the

Platonic Socrates would have held us, to saying what we really believe, and sticking to what we say. We seem to regain our intellectual birth-right when we are allowed to declare our genuine intent, even in philosophy, instead of begging some kind psychologist to investigate our "meaning" for us, or even waiting for the flux of events to endow us with what "meaning" it will. It is also instructive to have the ethical attitude purified of all that is not ethical and turned explicitly into what, in its moral capacity, it essentially is: a groundless pronouncement upon the better and the worse.

Here a certain one-sidedness begins to make itself felt in Mr. Russell's views. The ethical attitude doubtless has no *ethical* ground, but that fact does not prevent it from having a *natural* ground; and the observer of the animate creation need not have much difficulty in seeing what that natural ground is. Mr. Russell, however, refuses to look also in that direction. He insists, rightly enough, that good is predicated categorically by the conscience; he will not remember that all life is not moral bias merely, and that, in the very act of recognising excellence and pursuing it, we may glance back over our shoulder and perceive how our moral bias is conditioned, and what basis it has in the physical order of things. This backward look, when the hand is on the plough, may indeed confuse our ethical self-expression, both in theory and in practice; and I am the last to deny the need of insisting, in ethics, on ethical judgments in all their purity and dogmatic sincerity. Such insistence, if we had heard more of it in our youth, might have saved many of us from chronic entanglements; and there is nothing, next to Plato, which ought to be more recommended to the young philosopher than the teachings of Messrs. Russell and Moore, if he wishes to be a moralist and a logician, and not merely to seem one. Yet this salutary doctrine, though correct, is inadequate. It is a monocular philosophy, seeing outlines clear, but missing the solid bulk and perspective of things. We need binocular vision to quicken the whole mind and yield a full image of reality. Ethics should be controlled by a physics that perceives the material ground and the relative status of whatever is moral. Otherwise ethics itself tends to grow narrow, strident, and fanatical; as may be observed in asceticism and puritanism, or, for the matter of that, in Mr. Moore's uncivilised leaning towards the doctrine of retributive punishment, or in Mr. Russell's intolerance of selfishness and patriotism, and in his refusal to entertain any pious reverence for the nature of things. The quality of wisdom, like that of

mercy, is not strained. To choose, to love and hate, to have a moral life, is inevitable and legitimate in the part; but it is the function of the part as part, and we must keep it in its place if we wish to view the whole in its true proportions. Even to express justly the aim of our own life we need to retain a constant sympathy with what is animal and fundamental in it, else we shall give a false place, and too loud an emphasis, to our definitions of the ideal. However, it would be much worse not to reach the ideal at all, or to confuse it for want of courage and sincerity in uttering our true mind; and it is in uttering our true mind that Mr. Russell can help us, even if our true mind should not always coincide with his.

In the following pages I do not attempt to cover all Mr. Russell's doctrine (the deeper mathematical parts of it being beyond my comprehension), and the reader will find some speculations of my own interspersed in what I report of his. I merely traverse after him three subjects that seem of imaginative interest, to indicate the inspiration and the imprudences, as I think them, of this young philosophy.

II. THE STUDY OF ESSENCE

"The solution of the difficulties which formerly surrounded the mathematical infinite is probably," says Mr. Russell, "the greatest achievement of which our own age has to boast. . . . It was assumed as self-evident, until Cantor and Dedekind established the opposite, that if, from any collection of things, some were taken away, the number of things left must always be less than the original number of things. This assumption, as a matter of fact, holds only of finite collections; and the rejection of it, where the infinite is concerned, has been shown to remove all the difficulties that hitherto baffled human reason in this matter." And he adds in another place: "To reconcile us, by the exhibition of its awful beauty, to the reign of Fate . . . is the task of tragedy. But mathematics takes us still further from what is human, into the region of absolute necessity, to which not only the actual world, but every possible world, must conform; and even here it builds a habitation, or rather finds a habitation eternally standing, where our ideals are fully satisfied and our best hopes are not thwarted. It is only when we thoroughly understand the entire independence of ourselves,

which belongs to this world that reason finds, that we can adequately realise the profound importance of its beauty.”

Mathematics seems to have a value for Mr. Russell akin to that of religion. It affords a sanctuary to which to flee from the world, a heaven suffused with a serene radiance and full of a peculiar sweetness and consolation. “Real life,” he writes, “is to most men a long second-best, a perpetual compromise between the ideal and the possible; but the world of pure reason knows no compromise, no practical limitations, no barrier to the creative activity embodying in splendid edifices the passionate aspiration after the perfect from which all great work springs. Remote from human passions, remote even from the pitiful laws of nature, the generations have gradually created an ordered cosmos where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and where one, at least, of our nobler impulses can escape from the dreary exile of the actual world.” This study is one of “those elements in human life which merit a place in heaven.” “The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry.”

This enthusiastic language might have, I should think, an opposite effect upon some readers to that which Mr. Russell desires. It might make them suspect that the claim to know an absolute ideal necessity, so satisfying to one of our passionate impulses, might be prompted by the same conceit, and subject to the same illusion, as the claim to know absolute truth in religion. Beauty, when attributed to necessary relations between logical entities, casts a net of subjectivity over them; and at this net the omnivorous empiricist might be tempted to haul, until he fancied he had landed the whole miraculous draught of fishes. The fish, however, would have slipped through the meshes; and it would be only his own vital emotion, projected for a moment into the mathematical world, that he would be able to draw back and hug to his bosom. Eternal truth is as disconsolate as it is consoling, and as dreary as it is interesting: these moral values are, in fact, values which the activity of contemplating that sort of truth has for different minds; and it is no congruous homage offered to ideal necessity, but merely a private endearment, to call it beautiful or good. The case is not such as if we were dealing with existence. Existence is arbitrary; it is a questionable thing needing justification; and we, at least, cannot justify it otherwise than by taking note of some affinity which it may show to

human aspirations. Therefore our private endearments, when we call some existing thing good or beautiful, are not impertinent; they assign to this chance thing its only assignable excuse for being, namely, the service it may chance to render to the spirit. But ideal necessity or, what is the same thing, essential possibility has its excuse for being in itself, since it is not contingent or questionable at all. The affinity which the human mind may develop to certain provinces of essence is adventitious to those essences, and hardly to be mentioned in their presence. It is something the mind has acquired, and may lose. It is an incident in the life of reason, and no inherent characteristic of eternal necessity.

The realm of essence contains the infinite multitude of Leibnitz's possible worlds, many of these worlds being very small and simple, and consisting merely of what might be presented in some isolated moment of feeling. If any such feeling, however, or its object, never in fact occurs, the essence that it would have presented if it had occurred remains possible merely; so that nothing can ever exist in nature or for consciousness which has not a prior and independent locus in the realm of essence. When a man lights upon a thought or is interested in tracing a relation, he does not introduce those objects into the realm of essence, but merely selects them from the plenitude of what lies there eternally. The ground of this selection lies, of course, in his human nature and circumstances; and the satisfaction he may find in so exercising his mind will be a consequence of his mental disposition and of the animal instincts beneath. Two and two would still make four if I were incapable of counting, or if I found it extremely painful to do so, or if I thought it naïve and pre-Kantian of these numbers not to combine in a more vital fashion, and make five. So also, if I happen to enjoy counting, or to find the constancy of numbers sublime, and the reversibility of the processes connecting them consoling, in contrast to the irrevocable flux of living things, all this is due to my idiosyncrasy. It is no part of the essence of numbers to be congenial to me; but it has perhaps become a part of my genius to have affinity to them.

And how, may I ask, has it become a part of my genius? Simply because nature, of which I am a part, and to which all my ideas must refer if they are to be relevant to my destiny, happens to have mathematical form. Nature had to have some form or other, if it was to exist at all; and whatever form it had happened to take would have had its prior place in the realm of essence, and its essential and logical rela-

tions there. That particular part of the realm of essence which nature chances to exemplify or to suggest is the part that may be revealed to me, and that is the predestined focus of all my admirations. Essence as such has no power to reveal itself, or to take on existence; and the human mind has no power or interest to trace all essence. Even the few essences which it has come to know, it cannot undertake to examine exhaustively; for there are many features nestling in them, and many relations radiating from them, which no one needs or cares to attend to. The implications which logicians and mathematicians actually observe in the terms they use are a small selection from all those that really obtain, even in their chosen field; so that, for instance, as Mr. Russell was telling us, it was only the other day that Cantor and Dedekind observed that although time continually eats up the days and years, the possible future always remains as long as it was before. This happens to be a fact interesting to mankind. Apart from the mathematical puzzles it may help to solve, it opens before existence a vista of perpetual youth, and the vital stress in us leaps up in recognition of its inmost ambition. Many other things are doubtless implied in infinity which, if we noticed them, would leave us quite cold; and still others, no doubt, are inapprehensible with our sort and degree of intellect. There is of course nothing in essence which an intellect postulated *ad hoc* would not be able to apprehend; but the kind of intellect we know of and possess is an expression of vital adjustments, and is tethered to nature.

That a few eternal essences, then, with a few of their necessary relations to one another, do actually appear to us, and do fascinate our attention and excite our wonder, is nothing paradoxical. This is merely what was bound to happen, if we became aware of anything at all; for the essence embodied in anything is eternal and has necessary relations to some other essences. The air of presumption which there might seem to be in proclaiming that mathematics reveals what has to be true always and everywhere, vanishes when we remember that everything that is true of any essence is true of it always and everywhere. The most trivial truths of logic are as necessary and eternal as the most important; so that it is less of an achievement than it sounds when we say we have grasped a truth that is eternal and necessary.

This fact will be more clearly recognised, perhaps, if we remember that the cogency of our ideal knowledge follows upon our intent in fixing its object. It hangs on a virtual definition, and explicates it. We

cannot oblige anybody or anything to reproduce the idea which we have chosen; but that idea will remain the idea it is whether forgotten or remembered, exemplified or not exemplified in things. To penetrate to the foundation of being is possible for us only because the foundation of being is distinguishable quality; were there no set of differing characteristics, one or more of which an existing thing might appropriate, existence would be altogether impossible. The realm of essence is merely the system or chaos of these fundamental possibilities, the catalogue of all exemplifiable natures; so that any experience whatsoever must tap the realm of essence, and throw the light of attention on one of its constituent forms. This is, if you will, a trivial achievement; what would be really a surprising feat, and hardly to be credited, would be that the human mind should grasp the *constitution of nature*; that is, should discover which is the particular essence, or the particular system of essences, which actual existence illustrates. In the matter of physics, truly, we are reduced to skimming the surface, since we have to start from our casual experiences, which form the most superficial stratum of nature, and the most unstable. Yet these casual experiences, while they leave us so much in the dark as to their natural basis and environment, necessarily reveal each its ideal object, its specific essence; and we need only arrest our attention upon it, and define it to ourselves, for an eternal possibility, and some of its intrinsic characters, to have been revealed to our thought.

Whatever, then, a man's mental and moral habit might be, it would perforce have affinity to some essence or other; his life would revolve about some congenial ideal object; he would find some sorts of form, some types of relation, more visible, beautiful, and satisfying than others. Mr. Russell happens to have a mathematical genius, and to find comfort in laying up his treasures in the mathematical heaven. It would be highly desirable that this temperament should be more common; but even if it were universal it would not reduce mathematical essence to a product of human attention, nor raise the "beauty" of mathematics to part of its essence. I do not mean to suggest that Mr. Russell attempts to do the latter; he speaks explicitly of the *value* of mathematical study, a point in ethics and not directly in logic; yet his moral philosophy is itself so much assimilated to logic that the distinction between the two becomes somewhat dubious; and as Mr. Russell will never succeed in convincing us that moral values are independent of life, he may, quite

against his will, lead us to question the independence of essence, with that blind gregarious drift of all ideas, in this direction or in that, which is characteristic of human philosophising.

III. THE CRITIQUE OF PRAGMATISM

The time has not yet come when a just and synthetic account of what is called pragmatism can be expected of any man. The movement is still in a nebulous state, a state from which, perhaps, it is never destined to issue. The various tendencies that compose it may soon cease to appear together; each may detach itself and be lost in the earlier system with which it has most affinity. A good critic has enumerated "Thirteen Pragmatisms"; and besides such distinguishable tenets, there are in pragmatism echoes of various popular moral forces, like democracy, impressionism, love of the concrete, respect for success, trust in will and action, and the habit of relying on the future, rather than on the past, to justify one's methods and opinions. Most of these things are characteristically American; and Mr. Russell touches on some of them with more wit than sympathy. Thus he writes: "The influence of democracy in promoting pragmatism is visible in almost every page of William James's writing. There is an impatience of authority, an unwillingness to condemn widespread prejudices, a tendency to decide philosophical questions by putting them to a vote, which contrast curiously with the usual dictatorial tone of philosophic writings. . . . A thing which simply *is* true, whether you like it or not, is to him as hateful as a Russian autocracy; he feels that he is escaping from a prison, made not by stone walls but by 'hard facts,' when he has humanised truth, and made it, like the police force in a democracy, the servant of the people instead of their master. The democratic temper pervades even the religion of the pragmatists; they have the religion they have chosen, and the traditional reverence is changed into satisfaction with their own handiwork. 'The prince of darkness,' James says, 'may be a gentleman, as we are told he is, but whatever the God of earth and heaven is, he can surely be no gentleman.' He is rather, we should say, conceived by pragmatists as an elected president, to whom we give a respect which is really a tribute to the wisdom of our own choice. A government in which we have no voice is repugnant to the democratic temper. William James carries up

to heaven the revolt of his New England ancestors: the Power to which we can yield respect must be a George Washington rather than a George III."

A point of fundamental importance, about which pragmatists have been far from clear, and perhaps not in agreement with one another, is the sense in which their psychology is to be taken. "The facts that fill the imaginations of pragmatists," Mr. Russell writes, "are psychical facts; where others might think of the starry heavens, pragmatists think of the perception of the starry heavens; where others think of God, pragmatists think of the belief in God, and so on. In discussing the sciences, they never think, like scientific specialists, about the facts upon which scientific theories are based; they think about the theories themselves. Thus their initial question and their habitual imaginative background are both psychological." This is so true that unless we make the substitution into psychic terms instinctively, the whole pragmatic view of things will seem paradoxical, if not actually unthinkable. For instance, pragmatists might protest against the accusation that "they never think about the facts upon which scientific theories are based," for they lay a great emphasis on facts. Facts are the cash which the credit of theories hangs upon. Yet this protest, though sincere, would be inconclusive, and in the end it would illustrate Mr. Russell's observation, rather than refute it. For we should presently learn that these facts can be made by thinking, that our faith in them may contribute to their reality, and may modify their nature; in other words, these facts are our immediate apprehensions of fact, which it is indeed conceivable that our temperaments, expectations, and opinions should modify. Thus the pragmatist's reliance on facts does not carry him beyond the psychic sphere; his facts are only his personal experiences. Personal experiences may well be the basis for no less personal myths; but the effort of intelligence and of science is rather to find the basis of the personal experiences themselves; and this non-psychic basis of experience is what common sense calls the facts, and what practice is concerned with. Yet these are not the *pragmata* of the pragmatist, for it is only the despicable intellectualist that can arrive at them; and the bed-rock of facts that the pragmatist builds upon is avowedly drifting sand. Hence the odd expressions, new to literature and even to grammar, which bubble up continually in pragmatist writings. "For illustration take the former fact that the earth is flat," says one, quite innocently; and another observes that "two centuries later,

nominalism was evidently true, because it alone would legitimise the local independence of cities.” Lest we should suppose that the historical sequence of these “truths” or illusions is, at least, fixed and irreversible, we are soon informed that the past is always changing, too; that is (if I may rationalise this mystical dictum), that history is always being rewritten, and that the growing present adds new relations to the past, which lead us to conceive or to describe it in some new fashion. Even if the ultimate inference is not drawn, and we are not told that this changing idea of the past is the only past that exists—the real past being unattainable and therefore, for personal idealism, non-existent—it is abundantly clear that the effort to distinguish fact from theory cannot be successful, so long as the psychological way of thinking prevails; for a theory, psychologically considered, is a bare fact in the experience of the theorist, and the other facts of his experience are so many other momentary views, so many scant theories, to be immediately superseded by other “truths in the plural.” Sensations and ideas are really distinguishable only by reference to what is assumed to lie without; of which external reality experience is always an effect (and in that capacity is called sensation) and often at the same time an apprehension (and in that capacity is called idea).

It is a crucial question, then, in the interpretation of pragmatism, whether the psychological point of view, undoubtedly prevalent in that school, is the only or the ultimate point of view which it admits. The habit of studying ideas rather than their objects might be simply a matter of emphasis or predilection. It might merely indicate a special interest in the life of reason, and be an effort, legitimate under any system of philosophy, to recount the stages by which human thought, developing in the bosom of nature, may have reached its present degree of articulation. I myself, for instance, like to look at things from this angle: not that I have ever doubted the reality of the natural world, or been able to take very seriously any philosophy that denied it, but precisely because, when we take the natural world for granted, it becomes a possible and enlightening inquiry to ask how the human animal has come to discover his real environment, in so far as he has done so, and what dreams have intervened or supervened in the course of his rational awakening. On the other hand, a psychological point of view might be equivalent to the idealistic doctrine that the articulation of human thought constitutes the only structure of the universe, and its whole history. According to this view, pragmatism

would seem to be a revised version of the transcendental logic, leaving logic still transcendental, that is, still concerned with the evolution of the categories. The revision would consist chiefly in this, that empirical verification, utility, and survival would take the place of dialectical irony as the force governing the evolution. It would still remain possible for other methods of approach than this transcendental pragmatism, for instinct, perhaps, or for revelation, to bring us into contact with things-in-themselves. A junction might thus be effected with the system of M. Bergson, which would lead to this curious result: that pragmatic logic would be the method of intelligence, because intelligence is merely a method, useful in practice, for the symbolic and improper representation of reality; while another non-pragmatic method—sympathy and dream—would alone be able to put us in possession of direct knowledge and genuine truth. So that, after all, the pragmatic “truth” of working ideas would turn out to be what it has seemed hitherto to mankind, namely, no real truth, but rather a convenient sort of fiction, which ceases to deceive when once its merely pragmatic value is discounted by criticism.

I remember once putting a question on this subject to Professor James; and his answer was one which I am glad to be able to record. In relation to his having said that “as far as the past facts go, there is no difference . . . be the atoms or be the God their cause,”¹ I asked whether, if God had been the cause, apart from the value of the idea of him in our calculations, his existence would not have made a difference to *him*, as he would be presumably self-conscious. “Of course,” said Professor James, “but I wasn’t considering that side of the matter; I was thinking of our idea.” The choice of the subjective point of view, then, was deliberate here, and frankly arbitrary; it was not intended to exclude the possibility or legitimacy of the objective attitude. And the original reason for deliberately ignoring, in this way, the realistic way of thinking, even while admitting that it represents the real state of affairs, would have been, I suppose, that what could be verified was always some further effect of the real objects, and never those real objects themselves; so that for interpreting and predicting our personal experience only the hypothesis of objects was pertinent, while the objects themselves, except as so represented, were useless and unattainable. The case, if I may adapt a comparison of Mr. Russell’s,

¹ *Pragmatism*, p. 101.

was as if we possessed a catalogue of the library at Alexandria, all the books being lost for ever; it would be only in the catalogue that we could practically verify their existence or character, though doubtless, by some idle flight of imagination, we might continue to think of the books, as well as of those titles in the catalogue which alone could appear to us in experience. Pragmatism, approached from this side, would then seem to express an acute critical conscience, a sort of will not to believe; not to believe, I mean, more than is absolutely necessary for solipsistic practice.

Such economical faith, enabling one to dissolve the hard materialistic world into a work of mind, which mind might outflank, was traditional in the radical Emersonian circles in which pragmatism sprang up. It is one of the approaches to the movement; yet we may safely regard the ancestral transcendentalism of the pragmatists as something which they have turned their back upon, and mean to disown. It is destined to play no part in the ultimate result of pragmatism. This ultimate result promises to be, on the contrary, a direct materialistic sort of realism. This alone is congruous with the scientific affinities of the school and its young-American temper. Nor is the transformation very hard to effect. The world of solipsistic practice, if you remove the romantic self that was supposed to evoke it, becomes at once the sensible world; and the problem is only to find a place in the mosaic of objects of sensation for those cognitive and moral functions which the soul was once supposed to exercise in the presence of an independent reality. But this problem is precisely the one that pragmatists boast they have already solved; for they have declared that consciousness does not exist, and that objects of sensation (which at first were called feelings, experiences, or "truths") know or mean one another when they lead to one another, when they are poles, so to speak, in the same vital circuit. The spiritual act which was supposed to take things for its object is to be turned into "objective spirit," that is, into dynamic relations between things. The philosopher will deny that he has any other sort of mind himself, lest he should be shut up in it again, like a sceptical and disconsolate child; while if there threatens to be any covert or superfluous reality in the self-consciousness of God, nothing will be easier than to deny that God is self-conscious; for indeed, if there is no consciousness on earth, why should we imagine that there is any in heaven? The psychologism with which the pragmatists started seems to be passing in this way, in the very effort to formulate it pragmati-

cally, into something which, whatever it may be, is certainly not psychologism. But the bewildered public may well ask whether it is pragmatism either.

There is another crucial point in pragmatism which the defenders of the system are apt to pass over lightly, but which Mr. Russell regards (justly, I think) as of decisive importance. Is, namely, the pragmatic account of truth intended to cover all knowledge, or one kind of knowledge only? Apparently the most authoritative pragmatists admit that it covers one kind only; for there are two sorts of self-evidence in which, they say, it is not concerned: first, the dialectical relation between essences; and second, the known occurrence or experience of facts. There are obvious reasons why these two kinds of cognitions, so interesting to Mr. Russell, are not felt by pragmatists to constitute exceptions worth considering. Dialectical relations, they will say, are verbal only; that is, they define ideal objects, and certainty in these cases does not coerce existence, or touch contingent fact at all. On the other hand, such apprehension as seizes on some matter of fact, as, for instance, "I feel pain," or "I expected to feel this pain, and it is now verifying my expectation," though often true propositions, are not *theoretical* truths; they are not, it is supposed, questionable beliefs but rather immediate observations. Yet many of these apprehensions of fact (or all, perhaps, if we examine them scrupulously) involve the veracity of memory, surely a highly questionable sort of truth; and, moreover, verification, the pragmatic test of truth, would be obviously impossible to apply, if the prophecy supposed to be verified were not assumed to be truly remembered. How shall we know that our expectation is fulfilled, if we do not know directly that we had such an expectation? But if we know our past experience directly—not merely knew it when present, but know now what it was, and how it has led down to the present—this amounts to enough knowledge to make up a tolerable system of the universe, without invoking pragmatic verification or "truth" at all. I have never been able to discover whether, by that perception of fact which is not "truth" but fact itself, pragmatists meant each human apprehension taken singly, or the whole series of these apprehensions. In the latter case, as in the philosophy of M. Bergson, all past reality might constantly lie open to retentive intuition, a form of knowledge soaring quite over the head of any pragmatic method or pragmatic "truth." It looks, indeed, as if the history of at least personal experience were commonly taken for granted by

pragmatists, as a basis on which to rear their method. Their readiness to make so capital an assumption is a part of their heritage from romantic idealism. To the romantic idealist science and theology are tales which ought to be reduced to an empirical equivalent in his personal experience; but the tale of his personal experience itself is a sacred figment, the one precious conviction of the romantic heart, which it would be heartless to question. Yet here is a kind of assumed truth which cannot be reduced to its pragmatic meaning, because it must be true literally in order that the pragmatic meaning of other beliefs may be conceived or tested at all.

Now, if it be admitted that the pragmatic theory of truth does not touch our knowledge either of matters of fact or of the necessary implications of ideas, the question arises: What sort of knowledge remains for pragmatic theory to apply to? Simply, Mr. Russell answers, those "working hypotheses" to which "prudent people give only a low degree of belief." For "we hold different beliefs with very different degrees of conviction. Some—such as the belief that I am sitting in a chair, or that $2 + 2 = 4$ —can be doubted by few except those who have had a long training in philosophy. Such beliefs are held so firmly that non-philosophers who deny them are put into lunatic asylums. Other beliefs, such as the facts of history, are held rather less firmly. . . . Beliefs about the future, as that the sun will rise to-morrow and that the trains will run approximately as in Bradshaw, may be held with almost as great conviction as beliefs about the past. Scientific laws are generally believed less firmly. . . . Philosophical beliefs, finally, will, with most people, take a still lower place, since the opposite beliefs of others can hardly fail to induce doubt. Belief, therefore, is a matter of degree. To speak of belief, disbelief, doubt, and suspense of judgment as the only possibilities is as if, from the writing on the thermometer, we were to suppose that blood heat, summer heat, temperate, and freezing were the only temperatures." Beliefs which require to be confirmed by future experience, or which actually refer to it, are evidently only presumptions; it is merely the truth of presumptions that empirical logic applies to, and only so long as they remain presumptions. Presumptions may be held with very different degrees of assurance, and yet be acted upon, in the absence of any strong counter-suggestion; as the confidence of lovers or of religious enthusiasts may be at blood heat at one moment and freezing at the next, without a change in anything save in the will to believe. The truth of such presumptions,

whatever may be the ground of them, depends in fact on whether they are to lead (or, rather, whether the general course of events is to lead) to the further things presumed; for these things are what presumptions refer to explicitly.

It sometimes happens, however, that presumptions (being based on voluminous blind instinct rather than on distinct repeated observations) are expressed in consciousness by some symbol or myth, as when a man says he believes in his luck; the presumption really regards particular future chances and throws of the dice, but the emotional and verbal mist in which the presumption is wrapped, veils the pragmatic burden of it; and a metaphysical entity arises, called luck, in which a man may think he believes rather than in a particular career that may be awaiting him. Now since this entity, luck, is a mere word, confidence in it, to be justified at all, must be transferred to the concrete facts it stands for. Faith in one's luck must be pragmatic, but simply because faith in such an entity is not needful nor philosophical at all. The case is the same with working hypotheses, when that is all they are; for on this point there is some confusion. Whether an idea is a working hypothesis merely or an anticipation of matters open to eventual inspection may not always be clear. Thus the atomic theory, in the sense in which most philosophers entertain it to-day, seems to be a working hypothesis only; for they do not seriously believe that there are atoms, but in their ignorance of the precise composition of matter, they find it convenient to speak of it as if it were composed of indestructible particles. But for Democritus and for many modern men of science the atomic theory is not a working hypothesis merely; they do not regard it as a provisional makeshift; they regard it as a probable, if not a certain, anticipation of what inspection would discover to be the fact, could inspection be carried so far; in other words, they believe the atomic theory is true. If they are right, the validity of this theory would not be that of pragmatic "truth" but of pragmatic "fact"; for it would be a view, such as memory or intuition or sensation might give us, of experienced objects in their experienced relations; it would be the communication to us, in a momentary dream, of what would be the experience of a universal observer. It would be knowledge of reality in M. Bergson's sense. Pragmatic "truth," on the contrary, is the relative and provisional justification of fiction; and pragmatism is not a theory of truth at all, but a theory of theory, when theory is instrumental.

For theory too has more than one signification. It may mean such a symbolic or foreshortened view, such a working hypothesis, as true and full knowledge might supersede; or it may mean this true and full knowledge itself, a synthetic survey of objects of experience in their experimental character. Algebra and language are theoretical in the first sense, as when a man believes in his luck; historical and scientific imagination are theoretical in the second sense, when they gather objects of experience together without distorting them. But it is only to the first sort of theory that pragmatism can be reasonably applied; to apply it also to the second would be to retire into that extreme subjectivism which the leading pragmatists have so hotly disclaimed. We find, accordingly, that it is only when a theory is avowedly unreal, and does not ask to be believed, that the value of it is pragmatic; since in that case belief passes consciously from the symbols used to the eventual facts in which the symbolism terminates, and for which it stands.

It may seem strange that a definition of truth should have been based on the consideration of those ideas exclusively for which truth is not claimed by any critical person, such ideas, namely, as religious myths or the graphic and verbal machinery of science. Yet the fact is patent, and if we considered the matter historically it might not prove inexplicable. Theology has long applied the name truth pre-eminently to fiction. When the conviction first dawned upon pragmatists that there was no absolute or eternal truth, what they evidently were thinking of was that it is folly, in this changing world, to pledge oneself to any final and inflexible creed. The pursuit of truth, since nothing better was possible, was to be accepted instead of the possession of it. But it is characteristic of Protestantism that, when it gives up anything, it transfers to what remains the unction, and often the name, proper to what it has abandoned. So, if truth was no longer to be claimed or even hoped for, the value and the name of truth could be instinctively transferred to what was to take its place—spontaneous, honest, variable conviction. And the sanctions of this conviction were to be looked for, not in the objective reality, since it was an idle illusion to fancy we could get at that, but in the growth of this conviction itself, and in the prosperous adventure of the whole soul, so courageous in its self-trust, and so modest in its dogmas.

Science, too, has often been identified, not with the knowledge men of science possess, but with the language they use. If science meant knowledge, the science of Darwin, for instance, would lie in his obser-

vations of plants and animals, and in his thoughts about the probable ancestors of the human race—all knowledge of actual or possible facts. It would not be knowledge of selection or of spontaneous variation, terms which are mere verbal bridges over the gaps in that knowledge, and mark the *lacunæ* and unsolved problems of the science. Yet it is just such terms that seem to clothe “Science” in its pontifical garb; the cowl is taken for the monk; and when a penetrating critic, like M. Henri Poincaré, turned his subtle irony upon them, the public cried that he had announced the “bankruptcy of science,” whereas it is merely the language of science that he had reduced to its pragmatic value—to convenience and economy in the registering of facts—and had by no means questioned that positive and cumulative knowledge of facts which science is attaining. It is an incident in the same general confusion that a critical epistemology, like pragmatism, analysing these figments of scientific or theological theory, should innocently suppose that it was analysing truth; while the only view to which it really attributes truth is its view of the system of facts open to possible experience, a system which those figments presuppose and which they may help us in part to divine, where it is accidentally hidden from human inspection.

IV. HYPOSTATIC ETHICS

If Mr. Russell, in his essay on “The Elements of Ethics,” had wished to propitiate the unregenerate naturalist, before trying to convert him, he could not have chosen a more skilful procedure; for he begins by telling us that “what is called good conduct is conduct which is a means to other things which are good on their own account; and hence . . . the study of what is good or bad on its own account must be included in ethics.” Two consequences are involved in this: first, that ethics is concerned with the economy of all values, and not with “moral” goods only, or with duty; and second, that values may and do inhere in a great variety of things and relations, all of which it is the part of wisdom to respect, and if possible to establish. In this matter, according to our author, the general philosopher is prone to one error and the professed moralist to another. “The philosopher, bent on the construction of a system, is inclined to simplify the facts unduly . . . and to twist them into a form in which they can all be deduced from one or two general principles. The moralist, on the other hand, being

primarily concerned with conduct, tends to become absorbed in means, to value the actions men ought to perform more than the ends which such actions serve. . . . Hence most of what they value in this world would have to be omitted by many moralists from any imagined heaven, because there such things as self-denial and effort and courage and pity could find no place. . . . Kant has the bad eminence of combining both errors in the highest possible degree, since he holds that there is nothing good except the virtuous will—a view which simplifies the good as much as any philosopher could wish, and mistakes means for ends as completely as any moralist could enjoin.”

Those of us who are what Mr. Russell would call ethical sceptics will be delighted at this way of clearing the ground; it opens before us the prospect of a moral philosophy that should estimate the various values of things known and of things imaginable, showing what combinations of goods are possible in any one rational system, and (if fancy could stretch so far) what different rational systems would be possible in places and times remote enough from one another not to come into physical conflict. Such ethics, since it would express in reflection the dumb but actual interests of men, might have both influence and authority over them; two things which an alien and dogmatic ethics necessarily lacks. The joy of the ethical sceptic in Mr. Russell is destined, however, to be short-lived. Before proceeding to the expression of concrete ideals, he thinks it necessary to ask a preliminary and quite abstract question, to which his essay is chiefly devoted; namely, what is the right definition of the predicate “good,” which we hope to apply in the sequel to such a variety of things? And he answers at once: The predicate “good” is indefinable. This answer he shows to be unavoidable, and so evidently unavoidable that we might perhaps have been absolved from asking the question; for, as he says, the so-called definitions of “good”—that it is pleasure, the desired, and so forth—are not definitions of the predicate “good,” but designations of the things to which this predicate is applied by different persons. Pleasure, and its rivals, are not synonyms for the abstract quality “good,” but names for classes of concrete facts that are supposed to possess that quality. From this correct, if somewhat trifling, observation, however, Mr. Russell, like Mr. Moore before him, evokes a portentous dogma. Not being able to define good, he hypostasises it. “Good and bad,” he says, “are qualities which belong to objects independently of our opinions, just as much as round and square do; and when two people differ as to

whether a thing is good, only one of them can be right, though it may be very hard to know which is right." "We cannot maintain that for me a thing ought to exist on its own account, while for you it ought not; that would merely mean that one of us is mistaken, since in fact everything either ought to exist, or ought not." Thus we are asked to believe that good attaches to things for no reason or cause, and according to no principles of distribution; that it must be found there by a sort of receptive exploration in each separate case; in other words, that it is an absolute, not a relative thing, a primary and not a secondary quality.

That the quality "good" is indefinable is one assertion, and obvious; but that the presence of this quality is unconditioned is another, and astonishing. My logic, I am well aware, is not very accurate or subtle; and I wish Mr. Russell had not left it to me to discover the connection between these two propositions. Green is an indefinable predicate, and the specific quality of it can be given only in intuition; but it is a quality that things acquire under certain conditions, so much so that the same bit of grass, at the same moment, may have it from one point of view and not from another. Right and left are indefinable; the difference could not be explained without being invoked in the explanation; yet everything that is to the right is not to the right on no condition, but obviously on the condition that some one is looking in a certain direction; and if some one else at the same time is looking in the opposite direction, what is truly to the right will be truly to the left also. If Mr. Russell thinks this is a contradiction, I understand why the universe does not please him. The contradiction would be real, undoubtedly, if we suggested that the *idea* of good was at any time or in any relation the *idea* of evil, or the *intuition* of right that of left, or the *quality* of green that of yellow; these disembodied essences are fixed by the intent that selects them, and in that ideal realm they can never have any relations except the dialectical ones implied in their nature, and these relations they must always retain. But the contradiction disappears when, instead of considering the qualities in themselves, we consider the things of which those qualities are aspects; for the qualities of things are not compacted by implication, but are conjoined irrationally by nature, as she will; and the same thing may be, and is, at once yellow and green, to the left and to the right, good and evil, many and one, large and small; and whatever verbal paradox there may be in this way of speaking (for from the point of view of

nature it is natural enough) had been thoroughly explained and talked out by the time of Plato, who complained that people should still raise a difficulty so trite and exploded.² Indeed, while square is always square, and round round, a thing that is round may actually be square also, if we allow it to have a little body, and to be a cylinder.

But perhaps what suggests this hypostasis of good is rather the fact that what others find good, or what we ourselves have found good in moods with which we retain no sympathy, is sometimes pronounced by us to be bad; and far from inferring from this diversity of experience that the present good, like the others, corresponds to a particular attitude or interest of ours, and is dependent upon it, Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore infer instead that the presence of the good must be independent of all interests, attitudes, and opinions. They imagine that the truth of a proposition attributing a certain relative quality to an object contradicts the truth of another proposition, attributing to the same object an opposite relative quality. Thus if a man here and another man at the antipodes call opposite directions up, “only one of them can be right, though it may be very hard to know which is right.”

To protect the belated innocence of this state of mind, Mr. Russell, so far as I can see, has only one argument, and one analogy. The argument is that “if this were not the case, we could not reason with a man as to what is right.” “We do in fact hold that when one man approves of a certain act, while another disapproves, one of them is mistaken, which would not be the case with a mere emotion. If one man likes oysters and another dislikes them, we do not say that either of them is

² Plato, *Philebus*, 14, D. The dialectical element in this dialogue is evidently the basis of Mr. Russell’s, as of Mr. Moore’s, ethics; but they have not adopted the other elements in it, I mean the political and the theological. As to the political element, Plato everywhere conceives the good as the eligible in life, and refers it to human nature and to the pursuit of happiness—that happiness which Mr. Russell, in a rash moment, says is but a name which some people prefer to give to pleasure. Thus in the *Philebus* (11, D) the good looked for is declared to be “some state and disposition of the soul which has the property of making all men happy”; and later (66, D) the conclusion is that insight is better than pleasure “as an element in human life.” As to the theological element, Plato, in hypostasising the good, does not hypostasise it as good, but as cause or power, which is, it seems to me, the sole category that justifies hypostasis, and logically involves it; for if things have a ground at all, that ground must exist before them and beyond them. Hence the whole Platonic and Christian scheme, in making the good independent of private will and opinion, by no means makes it independent of the direction of nature in general and of human nature in particular; for all things have been created with an innate predisposition towards the creative good, and are capable of finding happiness in nothing else. Obligation, in this system, remains internal and vital. Plato attributes a single vital direction and a single moral source to the cosmos. This is what determines and narrows the scope of the true good; for the true good is that relevant to nature. Plato would not have been a dogmatic moralist, had he not been a theist.

mistaken." In other words, we are to maintain our prejudices, however absurd, lest it should become unnecessary to quarrel about them! Truly the debating society has its idols, no less than the cave and the theatre. The analogy that comes to buttress somewhat this singular argument is the analogy between ethical propriety and physical or logical truth. An ethical proposition may be correct or incorrect, in a sense justifying argument, when it touches what is good as a means, that is, when it is not intrinsically ethical, but deals with causes and effects, or with matters of fact or necessity. But to speak of the truth of an ultimate good would be a false collocation of terms; an ultimate good is chosen, found, or aimed at; it is not opined. The ultimate intuitions on which ethics rests are not debatable, for they are not opinions we hazard but preferences we feel; and it can be neither correct nor incorrect to feel them. We may assert these preferences fiercely or with sweet reasonableness, and we may be more or less incapable of sympathising with the different preferences of others; about oysters we may be tolerant, like Mr. Russell, and about character intolerant; but that is already a great advance in enlightenment, since the majority of mankind have regarded as hateful in the highest degree any one who indulged in pork, or beans, or frogs' legs, or who had a weakness for anything called "unnatural"; for it is the things that offend their animal instincts that intense natures have always found to be, intrinsically and *par excellence*, abominations.

I am not sure whether Mr. Russell thinks he has disposed of this view where he discusses the proposition that the good is the desired and refutes it on the ground that "it is commonly admitted that there are bad desires; and when people speak of bad desires, they seem to mean desires for what is bad." Most people undoubtedly call desires bad when they are generically contrary to their own desires, and call objects that disgust them bad, even when other people covet them. This human weakness is not, however, a very high authority for a logician to appeal to, being too like the attitude of the German lady who said that Englishmen called a certain object *bread*, and Frenchmen called it *pain*, but that it really was *Brod*. Scholastic philosophy is inclined to this way of asserting itself; and Mr. Russell, though he candidly admits that there are ultimate differences of opinion about good and evil, would gladly minimise these differences, and thinks he triumphs when he feels that the prejudices of his readers will agree with his own; as if the constitutional unanimity of all human animals,

supposing it existed, could tend to show that the good they agreed to recognise was independent of their constitution.

In a somewhat worthier sense, however, we may admit that there are desires for what is bad, since desire and will, in the proper psychological sense of these words, are incidental phases of consciousness, expressing but not constituting those natural relations that make one thing good for another. At the same time the words desire and will are often used, in a mythical or transcendental sense, for those material dispositions and instincts by which vital and moral units are constituted. It is in reference to such constitutional interests that things are "really" good or bad; interests which may not be fairly represented by any incidental conscious desire. No doubt any desire, however capricious, represents some momentary and partial interest, which lends to its objects a certain real and inalienable value; yet when we consider, as we do in human society, the interests of men, whom reflection and settled purposes have raised more or less to the ideal dignity of individuals, then passing fancies and passions may indeed have bad objects, and be bad themselves, in that they thwart the more comprehensive interests of the soul that entertains them. Food and poison are such only relatively, and in view of particular bodies, and the same material thing may be food and poison at once; the child, and even the doctor, may easily mistake one for the other. For the human system whiskey is truly more intoxicating than coffee, and the contrary opinion would be an error; but what a strange way of vindicating this real, though relative, distinction, to insist that whiskey is more intoxicating in itself, without reference to any animal; that it is pervaded, as it were, by an inherent intoxication, and stands dead drunk in its bottle! Yet just in this way Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore conceive things to be dead good and dead bad. It is such a view, rather than the naturalistic one, that renders reasoning and self-criticism impossible in morals; for wrong desires, and false opinions as to value, are conceivable only because a point of reference or criterion is available to prove them such. If no point of reference and no criterion were admitted to be relevant, nothing but physical stress could give to one assertion of value greater force than to another. The shouting moralist no doubt has his place, but not in philosophy.

That good is not an intrinsic or primary quality, but relative and adventitious, is clearly betrayed by Mr. Russell's own way of arguing, whenever he approaches some concrete ethical question. For instance,

to show that the good is not pleasure, he can avowedly do nothing but appeal "to ethical judgments with which almost every one would agree." He repeats, in effect, Plato's argument about the life of the oyster, having pleasure with no knowledge. Imagine such mindless pleasure, as intense and prolonged as you please, and would you choose it? Is it your good? Here the British reader, like the blushing Greek youth, is expected to answer instinctively, No! It is an *argumentum ad hominem* (and there can be no other kind of argument in ethics); but the man who gives the required answer does so not because the answer is self-evident, which it is not, but because he is the required sort of man. He is shocked at the idea of resembling an oyster. Yet changeless pleasure, without memory or reflection, without the wearisome intermixture of arbitrary images, is just what the mystic, the voluptuary, and perhaps the oyster find to be good. Ideas, in their origin, are probably signals of alarm; and the distress which they marked in the beginning always clings to them in some measure, and causes many a soul, far more profound than that of the young Protarchus or of the British reader, to long for them to cease altogether. Such a radical hedonism is indeed inhuman; it undermines all conventional ambitions, and is not a possible foundation for political or artistic life. But that is all we can say against it. Our humanity cannot annul the incommensurable sorts of good that may be pursued in the world, though it cannot itself pursue them. The impossibility which people labour under of being satisfied with pure pleasure as a goal is due to their want of imagination, or rather to their being dominated by an imagination which is exclusively human.

The author's estrangement from reality reappears in his treatment of egoism, and most of all in his "Free Man's Religion." Egoism, he thinks, is untenable because "if I am right in thinking that my good is the only good, then every one else is mistaken unless he admits that my good, not his, is the only good." "Most people . . . would admit that it is better two people's desires should be satisfied than only one person's. . . . Then what is good is not good *for me* or *for you*, but is simply good." "It is, indeed, so evident that it is better to secure a greater good for *A* than a lesser good for *B*, that it is hard to find any still more evident principle by which to prove this. And if *A* happens to be some one else, and *B* to be myself, that cannot affect the question, since it is irrelevant to the general question who *A* and *B* may be." To the question, as the logician states it after transforming men

into letters, it is certainly irrelevant; but it is not irrelevant to the case as it arises in nature. If two goods are somehow rightly pronounced to be equally good, no circumstance can render one better than the other. And if the locus in which the good is to arise is somehow pronounced to be indifferent, it will certainly be indifferent whether that good arises in me or in you. But how shall these two pronouncements be made? In practice, values cannot be compared save as represented or enacted in the private imagination of somebody: for we could not conceive that an alien good *was* a good (as Mr. Russell cannot conceive that the life of an ecstatic oyster is a good) unless we could sympathise with it in some way in our own persons; and on the warmth which we felt in so representing the alien good would hang our conviction that it was truly valuable, and had worth in comparison with our own good. The voice of reason, bidding us prefer the greater good, no matter who is to enjoy it, is also nothing but the force of sympathy, bringing a remote existence before us vividly *sub specie boni*. Capacity for such sympathy measures the capacity to recognise duty and therefore, in a moral sense, to have it. Doubtless it is conceivable that all wills should become co-operative, and that nature should be ruled magically by an exact and universal sympathy; but this situation must be actually attained in part, before it can be conceived or judged to be an authoritative ideal. The tigers cannot regard it as such, for it would suppress the tragic good called ferocity, which makes, in their eyes, the chief glory of the universe. Therefore the inertia of nature, the ferocity of beasts, the optimism of mystics, and the selfishness of men and nations must all be accepted as conditions for the peculiar goods, essentially incommensurable, which they can generate severally. It is misplaced vehemence to call them intrinsically detestable, because they do not (as they cannot) generate or recognise the goods we prize.

In the real world, persons are not abstract egos, like *A* and *B*, so that to benefit one is clearly as good as to benefit another. Indeed, abstract egos could not be benefited, for they could not be modified at all, even if somehow they could be distinguished. It would be the qualities or objects distributed among them that would carry, wherever they went, each its inalienable cargo of value, like ships sailing from sea to sea. But it is quite vain and artificial to imagine different goods charged with such absolute and comparable weights; and actual egoism is not the thin and refutable thing that Mr. Russell makes of it. What it really

holds is that a given man, oneself, and those akin to him, are qualitatively better than other beings; that the things they prize are intrinsically better than the things prized by others; and that therefore there is no injustice in treating these chosen interests as supreme. The injustice, it is felt, would lie rather in not treating things so unequal unequally. This feeling may, in many cases, amuse the impartial observer, or make him indignant; yet it may, in every case, according to Mr. Russell, be absolutely just. The refutation he gives of egoism would not dissuade any fanatic from exterminating all his enemies with a good conscience; it would merely encourage him to assert that what he was ruthlessly establishing was the absolute good. Doubtless such conscientious tyrants would be wretched themselves, and compelled to make sacrifices which would cost them dear; but that would only extend, as it were, the pernicious egoism of that part of their being which they had allowed to usurp a universal empire. The twang of intolerance and of self-mutilation is not absent from the ethics of Mr. Russell and Mr. Moore, even as it stands; and one trembles to think what it may become in the mouths of their disciples. Intolerance itself is a form of egoism, and to condemn egoism intolerantly is to share it.

I cannot help thinking that a consciousness of the relativity of values, if it became prevalent, would tend to render people more truly social than would a belief that things have intrinsic and unchangeable values, no matter what the attitude of any one to them may be. If we said that goods, including the right distribution of goods, are relative to specific natures, moral warfare would continue, but not with poisoned arrows. Our private sense of justice itself would be acknowledged to have but a relative authority, and while we could not have a higher duty than to follow it, we should seek to meet those whose aims were incompatible with it as we meet things physically inconvenient, without insulting them as if they were morally vile or logically contemptible. Real unselfishness consists in sharing the interests of others. Beyond the pale of actual unanimity the only possible unselfishness is chivalry—a recognition of the inward right and justification of our enemies fighting against us. This chivalry has long been practised in the battle-field without abolishing the causes of war; and it might conceivably be extended to all the conflicts of men with one another, and of the warring elements within each breast. Policy, hypnotisation, and even surgery may be practised without exorcisms or anathemas.

When a man has decided on a course of action, it is a vain indulgence in expletives to declare that he is sure that course is absolutely right. His moral dogma expresses its natural origin all the more clearly the more hotly it is proclaimed; and ethical absolutism, being a mental grimace of passion, refutes what it says by what it is. Sweeter and more profound, to my sense, is the philosophy of Homer, whose every line seems to breathe the conviction that what is beautiful or precious has not thereby any right to existence; nothing has such a right; nor is it given us to condemn absolutely any force – god or man – that destroys what is beautiful or precious, for it has doubtless something beautiful or precious of its own to achieve.

The consequences of a hypostasis of the good are no less interesting than its causes. If the good were independent of nature, it might still be conceived as relevant to nature, by being its creator or mover; but Mr. Russell is not a theist after the manner of Socrates; his good is not a power. Nor would representing it to be such long help his case; for an ideal hypostasised into a cause achieves only a mythical independence. The least criticism discloses that it is natural laws, zoological species, and human ideals, that have been projected into the empyrean; and it is no marvel that the good should attract the world where the good, by definition, is whatever the world is aiming at. The hypostasis accomplished by Mr. Russell is more serious, and therefore more paradoxical. If I understand it, it may be expressed as follows: In the realm of eternal essences, before anything exists, there are certain essences that have this remarkable property, that they ought to exist, or at least that, if anything exists, it ought to conform to them. What exists, however, is deaf to this moral emphasis in the eternal; nature exists for no reason; and, indeed, why should she have subordinated her own arbitrariness to a good that is no less arbitrary? This good, however, is somehow good notwithstanding; so that there is an abysmal wrong in its not being obeyed. The world is, in principle, totally depraved; but as the good is not a power, there is no one to redeem the world. The saints are those who, imitating the impotent dogmatism on high, and despising their sinful natural propensities, keep asserting that certain things are in themselves good and others bad, and declaring to be detestable any other saint who dogmatises differently. In this system the Calvinistic God has lost his creative and punitive functions, but continues to decree groundlessly what is good and what evil, and to love the one and hate the other with an infinite love

or hatred. Meanwhile the reprobate need not fear hell in the next world, but the elect are sure to find it here.

What shall we say of this strangely unreal and strangely personal religion? Is it a ghost of Calvinism, returned with none of its old force but with its old aspect of rigidity? Perhaps: but then, in losing its force, in abandoning its myths, and threats, and rhetoric, this religion has lost its deceptive sanctimony and hypocrisy; and in retaining its rigidity it has kept what made it noble and pathetic; for it is a clear dramatic expression of that human spirit—in this case a most pure and heroic spirit—which it strives so hard to dethrone. After all, the hypostasis of the good is only an unfortunate incident in a great accomplishment, which is the discernment of the good. I have dwelt chiefly on this incident, because in academic circles it is the abuses incidental to true philosophy that create controversy and form schools. Artificial systems, even when they prevail, after a while fatigue their adherents, without ever having convinced or refuted their opponents, and they fade out of existence not by being refuted in their turn, but simply by a tacit agreement to ignore their claims: so that the true insight they were based on is too often buried under them. The hypostasis of philosophical terms is an abuse incidental to the forthright, unchecked use of the intellect; it substitutes for things the limits and distinctions that divide them. So physics is corrupted by logic; but the logic that corrupts physics is perhaps correct, and when it is moral dialectic, it is more important than physics itself. Mr. Russell's ethics *is* ethics. When we mortals have once assumed the moral attitude, it is certain that an indefinable value accrues to some things as opposed to others, that these things are many, that combinations of them have values not belonging to their parts, and that these valuable things are far more specific than abstract pleasure, and far more diffused than one's personal life. What a pity if this pure morality, in detaching itself impetuously from the earth, whose bright satellite it might be, should fly into the abyss at a tangent, and leave us as much in the dark as before!



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