The Nature of Goodness

George Herbert Palmer

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Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Charles Franks
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

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[Illustration: Tout bien ou rien]

1903

A. F. P.
BONITATE SINGULARI MULTIS DILECTAE
VENUSTATE LITTERIS CONSILIIS PRAESTANTI
NUPER E DOMO ET GAUDIO MEO EREPTAE

PREFACE

The substance of these chapters was delivered as a course of lectures at Harvard University, Dartmouth and Wellesley Colleges, Western Reserve University, the University of California, and the Twentieth Century Club of Boston. A part of the sixth chapter was used as an address before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard, and another part before the Philosophical Union of Berkeley, California. Several of these audiences have materially aided my work by their searching criticisms, and all have helped to clear my thought and simplify its expression. Since discussions necessarily so severe have been felt as vital by companies so diverse, I venture to offer them here to a wider audience.

Previously, in “The Field of Ethics,” I marked out the place which ethics occupies among the sciences. In this book the first problem of ethics is examined. The two volumes will form, I hope, an easy yet serious introduction to this gravest and most perpetual of studies.

I. THE DOUBLE ASPECT OF GOODNESS

I

In undertaking the following discussion I foresee two grave difficulties. My reader may well feel that goodness is already the most familiar of all the thoughts we employ, and yet he may at the same time suspect that there is something about it perplexingly abstruse and remote. Familiar it certainly is. It attends all our wishes, acts, and projects as nothing else does, so that no estimate of its influence can be excessive. When we take a walk, read a book, make a dress, hire a servant, visit a friend, attend a concert, choose a wife, cast a vote, enter into business, we always do it in the hope of attaining something good. The clue of goodness is accordingly a veritable guide of life. On it depend actions far more minute than those just mentioned. We never raise a hand, for example, unless with a view to improve in some respect our condition. Motionless we should remain forever, did we not believe that by placing the hand elsewhere we might obtain something which we do not now possess. Consequently we employ the word or some synonym of it during pretty much every waking hour of our lives. Wishing some test of this frequency I turned to Shakespeare, and found that he uses the word “good” fifteen hundred times, and it's derivatives “goodness,” “better,” and “best,” about as many more. He could not make men and women talk right without incessant reference to this directive conception.

But while thus familiar and influential when mixed with action, and just because of that very fact, the notion of goodness is bewilderingly abstruse and remote. People in general do not observe this curious circumstance. Since they are so frequently encountering goodness, both laymen and scholars are apt to assume that it is altogether clear and requires no explanation. But the very reverse is the truth. Familiarity obscures. It breeds instincts and not understanding. So inwoven has goodness become with the very web of life that it is hard to disentangle. We cannot easily detach it from encompassing circumstance, look at it nakedly, and say what in itself it really is. Never appearing in practical affairs except as an element, and always intimately associated with something else, we are puzzled how to break up that intimacy and give to goodness independent meaning. It is as if oxygen were never found alone, but only in connection with hydrogen, carbon, or some other of the eighty elements which compose our globe. We might feel its wide influence, but we should have difficulty in describing what the thing itself was. Just so if any chance dozen persons should be called on to say what they mean by goodness, probably not one could offer a definition which he would be willing to hold to for fifteen minutes.

It is true, this strange state of things is not peculiar to goodness. Other familiar conceptions show a similar tendency, and just about in proportion, too, to their importance. Those which count for most in our lives are least easy to understand. What, for example, do we mean by love? Everybody has experienced it since the world began. For a century or more, novelists have been fixing our attention on it as our chief concern. Yet nobody has yet succeeded in making the matter quite plain. What is the state? Socialists are trying to tell us, and we are trying to tell them; but each, it must be owned, has about as much difficulty in understanding himself as in understanding his opponent, though the two sets of vague ideas still contain reality enough for vigorous strife. Or take the very simplest of conceptions, the conception of force—that which is presupposed in every species of physical science; ages are likely to pass before it is satisfactorily defined. Now the conception of goodness is something of this sort, something so wrought into the total framework of existence that it is hidden from view and not separately observable. We know so much about it that we do not understand it.

For ordinary purposes probably it is well not to seek to understand it. Acquaintance with the structure of the eye does not help seeing. To determine beforehand just how polite we should be would not facilitate human intercourse. And possibly a completed scheme of goodness would rather confuse than ease our daily actions. Science does not readily connect with life. For most of us all the time, and for all of us most of the time, instinct is the better prompter. But if we mean to be ethical students and to examine conduct scientifically, we must evidently at the outset come face to face with the meaning of goodness. I am consequently often surprised on looking into a treatise on ethics to find no definition of goodness proposed. The author assumes that everybody knows what goodness is, and that his own business is merely to point out under what conditions it may be had. But few readers do know what goodness is. One suspects that frequently the authors of these treatises themselves do not, and that a hazy condition of mind on this central subject is the cause of much loose talk afterwards. At any rate, I feel sure that nothing can more justly be demanded of a writer on ethics at the beginning of his undertaking

than that he should attempt to unravel the subtleties of this all−important conception. Having already in a previous volume marked out the Field of Ethics, I believe I cannot wisely go on discussing the science that I love, until I have made clear what meaning I everywhere attach to the obscure and familiar word *good* . This word being the ethical writer's chief tool, both he and his readers must learn its construction before they proceed to use it. To the study of that curious nature I dedicate this volume.

II

To those who join in the investigation I cannot promise hours of ease. The task is an arduous one, calling for critical discernment and a kind of disinterested delight in studying the high intricacies of our personal structure. My readers must follow me with care, and indeed do much of the work themselves, I being but a guide. For my purpose is not so much to impart as to reveal. Wishing merely to make people aware of what has always been in their minds, I think at the end of my book I shall be able to say, “These readers of mine know now no more than they did at, the beginning.” Yet if I say that, I hope to be able to add, “but they see vastly more significance in it than they once did, and henceforth will find the world interesting in a degree they never knew before.” In attaining this new interest they will have experienced too that highest of human pleasures,—the joy of clear, continuous, and energetic thinking. Few human beings are so inert that they are not ready to look into the dark places of their minds if, by doing so, they can throw light on obscurities there.

I ought, however, to say that I cannot promise one gain which some of my readers may be seeking. In no large degree can I induce in them that goodness of which we talk. Some may come to me in conscious weakness, desiring to be made better. But this I do not undertake. My aim is a scientific one. I am an ethical teacher. I want to lead men to understand what goodness is, and I must leave the more important work of attracting them to pursue it to preacher and moralist. Still, indirectly there is moral gain to be had here. One cannot contemplate long such exalted themes without receiving an impulse, and being lifted into a region where doing wrong becomes a little strange. When, too, we reflect how many human ills spring from misunderstanding and intellectual obscurity, we see that whatever tends to illuminate mental problems is of large consequence in the practical issues of life.

In considering what we mean by goodness, we are apt to imagine that the term applies especially, possibly entirely, to persons. It seems as if persons alone are entitled to be called good. But a little reflection shows that this is by no means the case. There are about as many good things in the world as good persons, and we are obliged to speak of them about as often. The goodness which we see in things is, however, far simpler and more easily analyzed than that which appears in persons. It may accordingly be well in these first two chapters to say nothing whatever about such goodness as is peculiar to persons, but to confine our attention to those phases of it which are shared alike by persons and things.

III

How then do we employ the word “good”? I do not ask how we ought to employ it, but how we do. For the present we shall be engaged in a psychological inquiry, not an ethical one. We need to get at the plain facts of usage. I will therefore ask each reader to look into his own mind, see on what occasions he uses the word, and decide what meaning he attaches to it. Taking up a few of the simplest possible examples, we will through them inquire when and why we call things good.

Here is a knife. When is it a good knife? Why, a knife is made for something, for cutting. Whenever the knife slides evenly through a piece of wood, unimpeded by anything in its own structure, and with a minimum of effort on the part of him who steers it, when there is no disposition of its edge to bend or break, but only to do its appointed work effectively, then we know that a good knife is at work. Or, looking at the matter from another point of view, whenever the handle of the knife neatly fits the hand, following its lines and presenting no obstruction, so that it is a pleasure to use it, we may say that in these respects also the knife is a good knife. That is, the knife becomes good through adaptation to its work, an adaptation realized in its cleavage of the wood and in its conformity to the hand. Its goodness always has reference to something outside itself, and is measured by its performance of an external task. A similar goodness is also found in persons. When we call the President of the United States good, we mean that he adapts himself easily and efficiently to the needs of his people. He detects those needs before others fully feel them, is sagacious in devices for meeting them, and powerful in carrying out his patriotic purposes through whatever selfish opposition. The President's goodness, like the knife's, refers to qualities within him only so far as these are adjusted to that which lies beyond.

Or take something not so palpable. What glorious weather! When we woke this morning, drew aside our curtains and looked out, we said “It is a good day!” And of what qualities of the day were we thinking? We meant, I suppose, that the day was well fitted to its various purposes. Intending to go to our office, we saw there was nothing to hinder our doing so. We knew that the streets would be clear, people in amiable mood, business and social duties would move forward easily. Health itself is promoted by such sunshine. In fact, whatever our plans, in calling the day a good day we meant to speak of it as excellently adapted to something outside itself.

This signification of goodness is lucidly put in the remark of Shakespeare's Portia, “Nothing I see is good without respect.” We must have some respect or end in mind in reference to which the goodness is reckoned. Good always means good *for*. That little preposition cannot be absent from our minds, though it need not audibly be uttered. The knife is good for cutting, the day for business, the President for the blind needs of his country. Omit the *for*, and goodness ceases. To be bad or good implies external reference. To be good means to further something, to be an efficient means; and the end to be furthered must be already in mind before the word good is spoken.

The respects or ends in reference to which goodness is calculated are often, it is true, obscure and difficult to seize if one is unfamiliar with the currents of men's thoughts. I sometimes hear the question asked about a merchant, “Is he good?”—a question natural enough in churches and Sunday−schools, but one which sounds rather queer on “'change.” But those who ask it have a special respect in mind. I believe they mean, “Will the man meet his notes?” In their mode of thinking a merchant is of consequence only in financial life. When they have learned whether he is capable of performing his functions there, they go no farther. He may be the most vicious of men or a veritable saint. It will make no difference in inducing commercial associates to call him good. For them the word indicates solely responsibility for business paper.

A usage more curious still occurs in the nursery. There when the question is asked, “Has the baby been good?” one discovers by degrees that the anxious mother wishes to know if it has been crying or quiet. This elementary life has as yet not acquired positive standards of measurement. It must be reckoned in negative terms, failure to disturb. Heaven knows it does not always attain to this. But it is its utmost virtue, quietude.

In short, whenever we inspect the usage of the word good, we always find behind it an implication of some end to be reached. Good is a relative term, signifying promotive of, conducive to. The good is the useful, and it must be useful for something. Silent or spoken, it is the mental reference to something else which puts all meaning into it. So Hamlet says, “There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” If I have in mind

A as an end sought, then X is good. But if B is the end, X is bad. X has no goodness or badness of its own. No new quality is added to an object or act when it becomes good.

IV

But this result is disappointing, not to say paradoxical. To call a thing good only with reference to what lies outside itself would be almost equivalent to saying that nothing is good. For if the moment anything becomes good it refers all its goodness to something beyond its own walls, should we ever be able to discover an object endowed with goodness at all? The knife is good in reference to the stick of wood; the wood, in reference to the table; the table, in reference to the writing; the writing, in reference to a reader's eyes; his eyes, in reference to supporting his family—where shall we ever stop? We can never catch up with goodness. It is always promising to disclose itself a little way beyond, and then evading us, slipping from under our fingers just when we are about to touch it. This meaning of goodness is self−contradictory.

And it is also too large. It includes more to goodness than properly belongs there. If we call everything good which is good *for* , everything which shows adaptation to an end, then we shall be obliged to count a multitude of matters good which we are accustomed to think of as evil. Filth will be good, for it promotes fevers as nothing else does. Earthquakes are good, for shaking down houses. It is inapposite to urge that we do not want fevers or shaken houses. Wishes are provided no place in our meaning of good. Goodness merely assists, promotes, is conducive to any result whatever. It marks the functional character, without regard to the desirability of that which the function effects. But this is unsatisfactory and may well set us on a search for supplementary meanings.

V

When we ask if the Venus of Milo is a good statue, we have to confess that it is good beyond almost any object on which our eyes have ever rested. And yet it is not good *for* anything; it is no means for an outside end. Rather, it is good in itself. This possibility that things may be good in themselves was once brought forcibly to my attention by a trivial incident. Wandering over my fields with my farmer in autumn, we were surveying the wrecks of summer. There on the ploughed ground lay a great golden object. He pointed to it, saying, “That is a good big pumpkin.” I said, “Yes, but I don't care about pumpkins.” “No,” he said, “nor do I.” I said, “You care for them, though, as they grow large. You called this a good big one.” “No! On the contrary, a pumpkin that is large is worth less. Growing makes it coarser. But that is a good big pumpkin.” I saw there was some meaning in his mind, but I could not make out what it was. Soon after I heard a schoolboy telling about having had a “good big thrashing.” I knew that he did not like such things. His phrase could not indicate approval, and what did it signify? He coupled the two words *good* and *big*; and I asked myself if there was between them any natural connection? On reflection I thought there was. If you wish to find the full pumpkin nature, here you have it. All that a pumpkin can be is set forth here as nowhere else. And for that matter, anybody who might foolishly wish to explore a thrashing would find all he sought in this one. In short, what seemed to be intended was that all the functions constituting the things talked about were present in these instances and hard at work, mutually assisting one another, and joining to make up such a rounded whole that from it nothing was omitted which possibly might render its organic wholeness complete. Here then is a notion of goodness widely unlike the one previously developed. Goodness now appears shut up within verifiable bounds where it is not continually referred to something which lies beyond. An object is here reckoned not as good *for*, but as good in itself. The Venus of Milo is a good statue not through what it does, but through what it is. And perhaps it may conduce to clearness if we now give technical names to our two contrasted conceptions and call the former extrinsic goodness and the latter intrinsic. Extrinsic goodness will then signify the adjustment of an object to something which lies outside itself; intrinsic will say that the many powers of an object are so adjusted to one another that they cooperate to render the object a firm totality. Both will indicate relationship; but in the one case the relations considered are *extra se*, in the other *inter se*. Goodness, however, will everywhere point to organic adjustment.

If this double aspect of goodness is as clear and important as I believe it to be, it must have left its record in language. And in fact we find that popular speech distinguishes worth and value in much the same way as I have distinguished intrinsic and extrinsic goodness. To say that an object has value is to declare it of consequence in reference to something other than itself. To speak of its worth is to call attention to what its own nature involves. In a somewhat similar fashion Mr. Bradley distinguishes the extension and harmony of goodness, and Mr. Alexander the right and the perfect.

VI

When, however, we have got the two sorts of goodness distinctly parted, our next business is to get them together again. Are they in fact altogether separate? Is the extrinsic goodness of an object entirely detachable from its intrinsic? I think not. They are invariably found together. Indeed, extrinsic goodness would be impossible in an object which did not possess a fair degree of intrinsic. How could a table, for example, be useful for holding a glass of water if the table were not well made, if powers appropriate to tables were not present and mutually cooperating? Unless equipped with intrinsic goodness, the table can exhibit no extrinsic goodness whatever. And, on the other hand, intrinsic goodness, coherence of inner constitution, is always found attended by some degree of extrinsic goodness, or influence over other things. Nothing exists entirely by itself. Each object has its relationships, and through these is knitted into the frame of the universe.

Still, though the two forms of goodness are thus regularly united, we may fix our attention on the one or the other. According as we do so, we speak of an object as intrinsically or extrinsically good. For that matter, one of the two may sometimes seem to be present in a preponderating degree, and to determine by its presence the character of the object. In judging ordinary physical things, I believe we usually test them by their serviceability to us—by their extrinsic goodness, that is—rather than bother our heads with asking what is their inner structure, and how full of organization they may be. Whereas, when we come to estimate human beings, we ordinarily regard it as a kind of indignity to assess primarily their extrinsic goodness, *i. e.*, to ask chiefly how serviceable they may be and to ignore their inner worth. To sum up a man in terms of his labor value is the moral error of the slaveholder.

If, however, we seek the highest point to which either kind of excellence may be carried, it will be found where each most fully assists the other. But this is not easy to imagine. When I set a glass of water on the table, the table is undoubtedly slightly shaken by the strain. If I put a large book upon it, the strain of the table becomes apparent. Putting a hundred pound weight upon it is an experiment that is perilous. For the extrinsic goodness of the table is at war with the intrinsic; that is, the employment of the table wears it out. In doing its work and fitting into the large relationships for which tables exist, its inner organization becomes disjointed. In time it will go to pieces. We can, however, imagine a magic table, which might be consolidated by all it does. At first it was a little weak, but by upholding the glass of water it grew stronger. As I laid the book on it, its joints acquired a tenacity which they lacked before; and only after receiving the hundred pound weight did it acquire the full strength of which it was capable. That would indeed be a marvelous table, where use and inner construction continually helped each other. Something like it we may hereafter find possible in certain regions of personal goodness, but no such perpetual motion is possible to things. For them employment is costly.

VII

I have already strained my readers' attention sufficiently by these abstract statements of matters technical and minute. Let us stop thinking for a while and observe. I will draw a picture of goodness and teach the eye what sort of thing it is. We have only to follow in our drawing the conditions already laid down. We agreed that when an object was good it was good *for* something; so that if A is good, it must be good for B. This instrumental relation, of means to end, may well be indicated by an arrow pointing out the direction in which the influence moves. But if B is also to be good, it too must be connected by an arrow with another object, C, and this in the same way with D. The process might evidently be continued forever, but will be sufficiently shown in the three stages of Figure 1. Here the arrow always expresses the extrinsic goodness of the letter which lies behind it, in reference to the letter which lies before.

[Fig. 1]

But drawing our diagram in this fashion and finding a little gap between D and A, the completing mind of man longs to fill up that gap. We have no warrant for doing anything of the sort; but let us try the experiment and see what effect will follow. Under the new arrangement we find that not only is D good for A, but that A, being good for B and for C, is also good for D. To express these facts in full it would be necessary to put a point on each end of the arrow connecting A and D.

[Fig. 2]

But the same would be true of the relation between A and B; that is, B, being good for C and for D, is also good for A. Or, as similar reasoning would hold throughout the figure, all the arrows appearing there should be supplied with heads at both ends. And there is one further correction. A is good for B and for C; that is, A is good for C. The same relation should also be indicated between B and D. So that to render our diagram complete it would be necessary to supply it with two diagonal arrows having double heads. It would then assume the following form.

[Fig. 3]

Here is a picture of intrinsic goodness. In this figure we have a whole represented in which every part is good for every other part. But this is merely a pictorial statement of the definition which Kant once gave of an organism. By an organism he says, we mean that assemblage of active and differing parts in which each part is both means and end. Extrinsic goodness, the relation of means to end, we have expressed in our diagram by the pointed arrow. But as soon as we filled in the gap between D and A each arrow was obliged to point in two directions. We had an organic whole instead of a lot of external adjustments. In such a whole each part has its own function to perform, is active; and all must differ from one another, or there would be mere repetition and aggregation instead of organic supplementation of end by means. An organism has been more briefly defined, and the curious mutuality of its support expressed, by saying that it is a unit made up of cooperant parts. And each of these definitions expresses the notion of intrinsic goodness which we have already reached. Intrinsic goodness is the expression of the fullness of function in the construction of an organism.

I have elsewhere (The Field of Ethics) explained the epoch−making character in any life of this conception of an organism. Until one has come in sight of it, he is a child. When once he begins to view things organically, he is—at least in outline—a scientific, an artistic, a moral man. Experience then becomes coherent and rational, and the disjointed modes of immaturity, ugliness, and sin no longer attract. At no period of the world's history has this truly formative conception exercised a wider influence than today. It is accordingly worth while to depict it with distinctness, and to show how fully it is wrought into the very nature of goodness.

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II. MISCONCEPTIONS OF GOODNESS

I

Our diagram of goodness, as drawn in the last chapter, has its special imperfections, and through these cannot fail to suggest certain erroneous notions of goodness. To these I now turn. The first of them is connected with its own method of construction. It will be remembered that we arbitrarily threw an arrow from D to A, thus making what was hitherto an end become a means to its own means. Was this legitimate? Does any such closed circle exist?

It certainly does not. Our universe contains nothing that can be represented by that figure. Indeed if anywhere such a self−sufficing organism did exist, we could never know it. For, by the hypothesis, it would be altogether adequate to itself and without relations beyond its own bounds. And if it were thus cut off from connection with everything except itself, it could not even affect our knowledge. It would be a closed universe within our universe, and be for us as good as zero. We must own, then, that we have no acquaintance with any such perfect organism, while the facts of life reveal conditions widely unlike those here represented.

What these conditions are becomes apparent when we put significance into the letters hitherto employed. Let our diagram become a picture of the organic life of John. Then A might represent his physical life, B his business life, C his civil, D his domestic; and we should have asserted that each of these several functions in the life of John assists all the rest. His physical health favors his commercial and political success, while at the same time making him more valuable in the domestic circle. But home life, civic eminence, and business prosperity also tend to confirm his health. In short, every one of these factors in the life of John mutually affects and is affected by all the others.

But when thus supplied with meaning, Figure 3 evidently fails to express all it should say. B is intended to exhibit the business life of John. But this is surely not lived alone. Though called a function of John, it is rather a function of the community, and he merely shares it. I had no right to confine to John himself that which plainly stretches beyond him. Let us correct the figure, then, by laying off another beside it to represent Peter, one of those who shares in the business experience of John. This common business life

[Fig. 4]

of theirs, B, we may say, enables Peter to gratify his own adventurous disposition, E; and this again stimulates his scientific tastes, F. But Peter's eminence in science commends him so to his townsmen that he comes to share again C, the civic life of John. Yet as before in the case of John, each of Peter's powers works forward, backward, and across, constructing in Peter an organic whole which still is interlocked with the life of John. Each, while having functions of his own, has also functions which are shared with his neighbor.

Nor would this involvement of functions pause with Peter. To make our diagram really representative, each of the two individuals thus far drawn would need to be surrounded by a multitude of others, all sharing in some degree the functions of their neighbors. Or rather each individual, once connected with his neighbors, would find all his functions affected by all those possessed by his entire group. For fear of making my figure unintelligible

[Fig 5.]

through its fullness of relations, I have sent out arrows in all directions from the letter A only; but in reality they would run from all to all. And I have also thought that we persons affect one another quite as decidedly through the wholeness of our characters as we do through any interlocking of single traits. Such totality of relationship I have tried to suggest by connecting the centres of each little square with the centres of adjacent ones. John as a whole is thus shown to be good for Peter as a whole.

We have successively found ourselves obliged to broaden our conception until the goodness of a single object has come to imply that of a group. The two phases of goodness are thus seen to be mutually dependent. Extrinsic goodness or serviceability, that where an object employs an already constituted wholeness to further the wholeness of another, cannot proceed except through intrinsic goodness, or that where fullness and adjustment of functions are expressed in the construction of an organism. Nor can intrinsic goodness be supposed to exist shut up to itself and parted from extrinsic influence. The two are merely different modes or points of view for assessing goodness everywhere. Goodness in its most elementary form appears where one object is connected with another as means to end. But the more elaborately complicated the relation becomes, and the richer the

entanglement of means and ends—internal and external—in the adjustment of object or person, so much ampler is the goodness. Each object, in order to possess any good, must share in that of the universe.

II

But the diagram suggests a second question. Are all the functions here represented equally influential in forming the organism? Our figure implies that they are, and I see no way of drawing it so as to avoid the implication. But it is an error. In nature our powers have different degrees of influence. We cannot suppose that John's physical, commercial, domestic, and political life will have precisely equal weight in the formation of his being. One or the other of them will play a larger part. Accordingly we very properly speak of greater goods and lesser goods, meaning by the former those which are more largely contributory to the organism. In our physical being, for example, we may inquire whether sight or digestion is the greater good; and our only means of arriving at an answer would be to stop each function and then note the comparative consequence to the organism. Without digestion, life ceases; without sight, it is rendered uncomfortable. If we are considering merely the relative amounts of bodily gain from the two functions, we must call digestion the greater good. In a table, excellence of make is apt to be a greater good than excellence of material, the character of the carpentry having more effect on its durability than does the special kind of wood employed. The very doubts about such results which arise in certain cases confirm the truth of the definition here proposed; for when we hesitate, it is on account of the difficulty we find in determining how far maintenance of the organism depends on the one or the other of the qualities compared. The meaning of the terms greater and lesser is clearer than their application. A function or quality is counted a greater good in proportion as it is believed to be more completely of the nature of a means.

III

Another question unsettled by the diagram is so closely connected with the one just examined as often to be confused with it. It is this: Are all functions of the same kind, rank, or grade? They are not; and this qualitative difference is indicated by the terms higher and lower, as the quantitative difference was by greater and less. But differences of rank are more slippery matters than difference of amount, and easily lend themselves to arbitrary and capricious treatment. In ordinary speech we are apt to employ the words high and low as mere signs of approval or disapproval. We talk of one occupation, enjoyment, work of art, as superior to another, and mean hardly more than that we like it better. Probably there is not another pair of terms current in ethics where the laudatory usage is so liable to slip into the place of the descriptive. Our opponent's ethics always seem to embody low ideals, our own to be of a higher type. Accordingly the terms should not be used in controversy unless we have in mind for them a precise meaning other than eulogy or disparagement.

And such a meaning they certainly may possess. As the term greater good is employed to indicate the degree in which a quality serves as a means, so may the higher good show the degree in which it is an end. Digestion, which was just now counted a greater good than sight, might still be rightly reckoned a lower; for while it contributes more largely to the constitution of the human organism, it on that very account expresses less the purposes to which that organism will be put. It is true we have seen how in any organism every power is both means and end. It would be impossible, then, to part out its powers, and call some altogether great and others altogether high. But though there is purpose in all, and construction in all, certain are more markedly the one than the other. Some express the superintending functions; others, the subservient. Some condition, others are conditioned by. In man, for example, the intellectual powers certainly serve our bodily needs. But that is not their principal office; rather, in them the aims of the entire human being receive expression. To abolish the distinction of high and low would be to try to obliterate from our understanding of the world all estimates of the comparative worth of its parts; and with these estimates its rational order would also disappear. Such attempts have often been made. In extreme polytheism there are no superiors among the gods and no inferiors, and chaos consequently reigns. A similar chaos is projected into life when, as in the poetry of Walt Whitman, all grades of importance are stripped from the powers of man and each is ranked as of equal dignity with every other.

That there is difficulty in applying the distinction, and determining which function is high and which low, is evident. To fix the purposes of an object would often be presumptuous. With such perplexities I am not concerned. I merely wish to point out a perfectly legitimate and even important signification of the terms high and low, quite apart from their popular employment as laudatory or depreciative epithets. It surely is not amiss to call the legibility of a book a higher good than its shape, size, or weight, though in each of these some quality of the book is expressed.

IV

A further point of possible misconception in our diagram is the number of factors represented. As here shown, these are but four. They might better be forty. The more richly functional a thing or person is, the greater its goodness. Poverty of powers is everywhere a form of evil. For how can there be largeness of organization where there is little to organize? Or what is the use of organization except as a mode of furnishing the smoothest and most compact expression to powers? Wealth and order are accordingly everywhere the double traits of goodness, and a chief test of the worth of any organism will be the diversity of the powers it includes. Throughout my discussion I have tried to help the reader to keep this twofold goodness in mind by the use of such phrases as "fullness of organization."

Yet it must be confessed that between the two elements of goodness there is a kind of opposition, needful though both are for each other. Order has in it much that is repressive; and wealth—in the sense of fecundity of powers—is, especially at its beginning, apt to be disorderly. When a new power springs into being, it is usually chaotic or rebellious. It has something else to attend to besides bringing itself into accord with what already exists. There is violence in it, a lack of sobriety, and only by degrees does it find its place in the scheme of things. This is most observable in living beings, because it is chiefly they who acquire new powers. But there are traces of it even among things. A chemical acid and base meeting, are pretty careless of everything except the attainment of their own action. Human beings are born, and for some time remain, clamorous, obliging the world around to attend more to them than they to it. There is ever a confusion in exuberant life which bewilders the onlooker, even while he admits that life had better be.

The deep opposition between these contrasted sides of goodness is mirrored in the conflicting moral ideals of conservatism and radicalism, of socialism and individualism, which have never been absent from the societies of men, nor even, I believe, from those of animals. Conservatism insists on unity and order; radicalism on wealthy life, diversified powers, particular independence. Either, left to itself, would crush society, one by emptying it of initiative, the other by splitting it into a company of warring atoms. Ordinarily each is dimly aware of its need of an opponent, yet does not on that account denounce him the less, or less eagerly struggle to expel him from provinces asserted to be its own.

By temperament certain classes of the community are naturally disposed to become champions of the one or the other of these supplemental ideals. Artists, for the most part, incline to the ideal of abounding life, exult in each novel manifestation which it can be made to assume, and scoff at order as Philistinism.

Moralists, on the other hand, lay grievous stress on order, as if it had any value apart from its promotion of life. Assuming that sufficient exuberance will come, unfostered by morality, they shut it out from their charge, make duty to consist in checking instinct, and devote themselves to pruning the sprouting man. But this is absurdly to narrow ethics, whose true aim is to trace the laws involved in the construction of a good person. In such construction the supply of moral material, and the fostering of a wide diversity of vigorous powers, is as necessary as bringing these powers into proper working form. Richness of character is as important as correctness. The world's benefactors have often been one−sided and faulty men. None of us can be complete; and we had better not be much disturbed over the fact, but rather set ourselves to grow strong enough to carry off our defects.

Because ethics has not always kept its eyes open to this obvious duality of goodness it has often incurred the contempt of practical men. The ethical writers of our time have done better. They have come to see that the goodness of a person or thing consists in its being as richly diversified as is possible up to the limit of harmonious, working, and also in being orderly up to the limit of repression of powers. Beyond either of these limits evil begins. What I have expressed in my diagram as the fullest organization is intended to lie within them.

V

It remains to compare the view of goodness here presented with two others which have met with wide approval. The competence of my own will be tested by seeing whether it can explain these, or they it. Goodness is sometimes defined as that which satisfies desire. Things are not good in themselves, but only as they respond to human wishes. A certain combination of colors or sounds is good, because I like it. A republic we Americans consider the best form of government because we believe that this more completely than any other meets the legitimate desires of its people. I know a little boy who after tasting with gusto his morning's oatmeal would turn for sympathy to each other person at table with the assertive inquiry, “Good? Good? Good?” He knew no good but enjoyment, and this was so keen that he expected to find it repeated in each of his friends. It is true we often call actions good which are not immediately pleasing; for example, the cutting off of a leg which is crushed past the possibility of cure. But the leg, if left, will cause still more distress or even death. In the last analysis the word good will be found everywhere to refer to some satisfaction of human desire. If we count afflictions good, it is because we believe that through them permanent peace may best be reached. And rightly do those name the Bible the Good Book who think that it more than any other has helped to alleviate the woes of man.

With this definition I shall not quarrel. So far as it goes, it seems to me not incorrect. In all good I too find satisfaction of desire. Only, though true, the definition is in my judgment vague and inadequate. For we shall still need some standard to test the goodness of desires. They themselves may be good, and some of them are better than others. It is good to eat candy, to love a friend, to hate a foe, to hear the sound of running water, to practice medicine, to gather wealth, learning, or postage stamps. But though each of these represents a natural desire, they cannot all be counted equally good. They must be tried by some standard other than themselves. For desires are not detachable facts. Each is significant only as a piece of a life. In connection with that life it must be judged. And when we ask if any desire is good or bad, we really inquire how far it may play a part in company with other desires in making up a harmonious existence. By its organic quality, accordingly, we must ultimately determine the goodness of whatever we desire. If it is organic, it certainly will satisfy desire. But we cannot reverse this statement and assert that whatever satisfies desire will be organically good. My own mode of statement is, therefore, clearer and more adequate than the one here examined, because it brings out fully important considerations which in this are only implied. Whatever contributes to the solidity and wealth of an organism is, from the point of view of that organism, good.

VI

A second inadequate definition of goodness is that it is adaptation to environment. This is a far more important conception than the preceding; but again, while not untrue, is still, in my judgment, partial and ambiguous. When its meaning is made clear and exact, it seems to coincide with my own; for it points out that nothing can be separately good, but becomes so through fulfillment of relations. Each thing or person is surrounded by many others. To them it must fit itself. Being but a part, its goodness is found in serving that whole with which it is connected. That is a good oar which suits well the hands of the rower, the row−lock of the boat, and the resisting water. The white fur of the polar bear, the tawny hide of the lion, the camel's hump, giraffe's neck, and the light feet of the antelope, are all alike good because they adapt these creatures to their special conditions of existence and thus favor their survival. Nor is there a different standard for moral man. His actions which are accounted good are called so because they are those through which he is adapted to his surroundings, fitted for the society of his fellows, and adjusted with the best chance of survival to his encompassing physical world.

While I have warm approval for much that appears in such a doctrine, I think those who accept it may easily overlook certain important elements of goodness. At best it is a description of extrinsic goodness, for it separates the object from its environment and makes the response of the former to an external call the measure of its worth. Of that inner worth, or intrinsic goodness, where fullness and adjustment of relations go on within and not without, it says nothing. Yet I have shown how impossible it is to conceive one of these kinds of goodness without the other.

But a graver objection still—or rather the same objection pressed more closely—is this. The present definition naturally brings up the picture of certain constant and stable surroundings enclosing an environed object which is to be changed at their demand. No such state of things exists. There is no fixed environment. It is always fixable. Every environment is plastic and derives its character, at least partially, from the environed object. Each stone sends out its little gravitative and chemical influence upon surrounding stones, and they are different through being in its neighborhood. The two become mutually affected, and it is no more suitable to say that the object must adapt itself to its environment than that the environment must be adapted to its object.

Indeed, in persons this second form of statement is the more important; for the forcing of circumstances into accordance with human needs may be said to be the chief business of human life. The man who adapts himself to his ignorant, licentious, or malarial surroundings, is not a type of the good man. Of course disregard of environment is not good either. Circumstances have their honorable powers, and these require to be studied, respected, and employed. Sometimes they are so strong as to leave a person no other course than to adapt himself to them. He cannot adapt them to himself. Plato has a good story of how a native of the little village of Seriphus tried to explain Themistocles by means of environment. “You would not,” he said to the great man, “have been eminent if you had been born in Seriphus.” “Probably not,” answered Themistocles, “nor you, if you had been born in Athens.”

The definition we are discussing, then, is not true—indeed it is hardly intelligible—if we take it in the one−sided way in which it is usually announced. The demand for adaptation does not proceed exclusively from environment, surroundings, circumstance. The stone, the tree, the man, conforms these to itself as truly as it is conformed to them. There is mutual adaptation. Undoubtedly this is implied in the definition, and the petty employment of it which I have been attacking would be rejected also by its wiser defenders. But when its meaning is thus filled out, its vagueness rendered clear, and the mutual influence which is implied becomes clearly announced, the definition turns into the one which I have offered. Goodness is the expression of the largest organization. Its aim is everywhere to bring object and environment into fullest cooperation. We have seen how in any organic relationship every part is both means and end. Goodness tends toward organism; and so far as it obtains, each member of the universe receives its own appropriate expansion and dignity. The present definition merely states the great truth of organization with too objective an emphasis; as that which found the satisfaction of desire to be the ground of goodness over−emphasized the subjective side. The one is too legal, the other too aesthetic. Yet each calls attention to an important and supplementary factor in the formation of goodness.

VII

In closing these dull defining chapters, in which I have tried to sum up the notion of goodness in general—a conception so thin and empty that it is equally applicable to things and persons—it may be well to gather together in a single group the several definitions we have reached.

Intrinsic goodness expresses the fulfillment of function in the construction of an organism.

By an organism is meant such an assemblage of active and differing parts that in it each part both aids and is aided by all the others.

Extrinsic goodness is found when an object employs an already constituted wholeness to further the wholeness of others.

A part is good when it furnishes that and that only which may add value to other parts.

A greater good is one more largely contributory to the organism as its end.

A higher good is one more fully expressive of that end.

Probably, too, it will be found convenient to set down here a couple of other definitions which will hereafter be explained and employed. A good act is the expression of selfhood as service. By an ideal we mean a mental picture of a better state of existence than we feel has actually been reached.

REFERENCES ON MISCONCEPTIONS OF GOODNESS

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III. SELF−CONSCIOUSNESS

I

In the preceding chapters I have examined only those features of goodness which are common alike to persons and to things. Goodness was there seen to be the expression of function in the construction of an organism. That is, when we ask if any being, object, or quality is good, we are really inquiring how organic it is, how much it contributes of riches or solidity to some whole or other. There must, then, be as many varieties of goodness as there are modes of constructing organisms. A special set of functions will produce one kind of organism, a different set another; and each of these will express a peculiar variety of goodness. If, then, into the construction of a person conditions enter which are not found in the making of things, these conditions will render personal goodness to some extent unlike the goodness of everything else.

Now I suppose that in the contacts of life we all feel a marked difference between persons and things. We know a person when we see him, and are quite sure he is not a thing. Yet if we were called on to say precisely what it is we know, and how we know it, we should find ourselves in some difficulty. No doubt we usually recognize a human being by his form and motions, but we assume that certain inner traits regularly attend these outward matters, and that in these traits the real ground of difference between person and thing is to be found. How many such distinguishing differences exist? Obviously a multitude; but these are, I believe, merely various manifestations of a few fundamental characteristics. Probably all can be reduced to four,— they are self−consciousness, self−direction, self−development, and self−sacrifice. Wherever these four traits are found, we feel at once that the being who has them is a person. Whatever creature lacks them is but a thing, and requires no personal attention. I might say more. These four are so likely to go together that the appearance of one gives confidence of the rest. If, for example, we discover a being sacrificing itself for another, even though we have not previously thought of it as a person, it will so stir sympathy that we shall see in it a likeness to our own kind. Or, finding a creature capable of steering itself, of deciding what its ends shall be, and adjusting its many powers to reach them, we cannot help feeling that there is much in such a being like ourselves, and we are consequently indisposed to refer its movements to mechanic adjustment.

If, then, these are the four conditions of personality, the distinctive functions by which it becomes organically good, they will evidently need to be examined somewhat minutely before we can rightly comprehend the nature of personal goodness, and detect its separation from goodness in general. Such an examination will occupy this and the three succeeding chapters. But I shall devote myself exclusively to such features of the four functions as connect them with ethics. Many interesting metaphysical and psychological questions connected with them I pass by.

II

There is no need of elaborating the assertion that a person is a conscious being. To this all will at once agree. More important is it to inspect the stages through which we rise to consciousness, for these are often overlooked. People imagine that they are self− conscious through and through, and that they always have been. They assume that the entire life of a person is the expression of consciousness alone. But this is erroneous. To a large degree we are allied with things. While self−consciousness is our distinctive prerogative, it is far from being our only possession. Rather we might say that all which belongs to the under world is ours too, while self− consciousness appears in us as a kind of surplusage. No doubt it is by the distinctive traits, those which are not shared with other creatures, that we define our special character; but these are not our sole endowment. Our life is grounded in unconsciousness, and with this, as students of personal goodness, we must first make acquaintance.

Yet how can we become acquainted with it? How grow conscious of the unconscious? We can but mark it in a negative way and call it the absence of consciousness. That is all. We cannot be directly aware of ourselves as unconscious. Indeed, we cannot be quite sure that the physical things about us, even organic objects, are unconscious. If somebody should declare that the covers of this book are conscious, and respond to everything wise or foolish which the writer puts between them, there would be no way of confuting him. All I could say would be, “I see no signs of it.” My readers occasionally give a response and show that they do or do not agree with what I say. But the volume itself lies in stolid passivity, offering no resistance to whatever I record in it. Since, then, there is no evidence in behalf of consciousness, I do not unwarrantably assume its presence. I save my belief for objects where it is indicated, and indicate its absence elsewhere by calling such objects unconscious.

But if in human beings consciousness appears, what are its marks, and how is it known? Ought we not to define it at starting? I believe it cannot be defined. Definition is taking an idea to pieces. But there are no pieces in the idea of consciousness. It is elementary, something in which all other pieces begin. That is, in attempting to define consciousness, I must in every definition employed really assume that my hearer is acquainted with it already. I cannot then define it without covert reference to experience. I might vary the term and call it awaredness, internal observation, psychic response. I might say it is that which accompanies all experience and makes it to be experience. But these are not definitions. A simple way to fix attention on it is to say that it is what we feel less and less as we sink into a swoon. What this is, I cannot more precisely state. But in swoon or sleep we are all familiar with its diminution or increase, and we recognize in it the very color of our being. After my friend's remark I am in a different state from that in which I was before. Something has affected me which may abide. This is not the case with a stone post, or at least there are no signs of it there. The post, then, is unconscious. We call ourselves conscious.

In unconsciousness our lives began, and from it they have not altogether emerged. Yet unconsciousness is a matter of degree. We may be very much aware, aware but slightly, vanishingly, not at all. Even though we never existed unconsciously, we may fairly assume such a blank terminus in order the better to figure the present condition of our minds. They show sinking degrees moving off in that direction; when we think out the series, we come logically to a point where there is no consciousness at all.

Such a point analogy also inclines us to concede. In our body we come upon unconscious sections. This body seems to have some connection with myself; yet of its large results only, and not of its minuter operations, can I be distinctly aware. In like manner it is held that within the mind processes cumulate and rise to a certain height before they cross the threshold of consciousness. Below that threshold, though actual processes, they are unknown to us. The teaching of modern psychology is that all mental action is at the start unconscious, requiring a certain bulk of stimulus in order to emerge into conditions where we become aware of it. The cumulated result we know; the minute factors which must be gathered together to form that result, we do not know. I do not pronounce judgment on this psychological question. I state the belief merely in order to show how probable it is that our conscious life is superposed upon unconscious conditions.

In conduct itself I believe every one will acknowledge that his moments of consciousness are like vivid peaks, while the great mass of his acts—even those with which he is most familiar—occur unconsciously. When we read a word on the printed page, how much of it do we consciously observe? Modern teachers of reading often declare

that detailed consciousness is here unnecessary or even injurious. Better, they say, take the word, not the letter, as the unit of consciousness. But taking merely the letter, how minutely are we conscious of its curvatures? Somewhere consciousness must stop, resting on the support of unconscious experiences. Matthew Arnold has declared conduct to be three fourths of life. If we mean by conduct consciously directed action, it is not one fourth. Yet however fragmentary, it is that which renders all the rest significant.

III

Just above our unconscious mental modifications appear the reflex actions, or instincts. Here experience is translated into action before it reaches consciousness; that is, though the actions accomplish intelligent ends, there is no previous knowledge of the ends to be accomplished. A flash of light falls on my eye, and the lid closes. It seems a wise act. The brilliant light is too fierce. It might damage the delicate organ. Prudently, therefore, I draw the small curtain until the light has gone, then raise it and resume communication with the outer world. My action seems planned for protection. In reality there was no plan. Probably enough I did not perceive the flash; the lid, at any rate, would close equally well if I did not. In falling from a height I do not decide to sacrifice my arms rather than my body, and accordingly stretch them out. They stretch themselves, without intention on my part. How anything so blind yet so sagacious can occur will become clearer if we take an illustration from a widely different field.

To−day we are all a good deal dependent on the telephone; though, not being a patient man, I can seldom bring myself to use it. It has one irritating feature, the central office, or perhaps I might more accurately say, the central office girl. Whenever I try to communicate with my friend, I must first call up the central office, as it is briefly called and longly executed. Not until attention there has been with difficulty obtained can I come into connection with my friend; for through a human consciousness at that mediating point every message must pass. In that central office are accordingly three necessary things; viz., an incoming wire, a consciousness, and an outgoing wire; and I am helpless till all these three have been brought into cooperation. Really I have often thought life too short for the performance of such tasks. And apparently our Creator thought so at the beginning, when in contriving machinery for us he dispensed with the hindering factor of a central office operator. For applied to our previous example of a flash of light, the incoming message corresponds to the sensuous report of the flash, the outgoing message to the closure of the eye, and the unfortunate central office girl has disappeared. The afferent nerve reports directly to the efferent, without passing the message through consciousness. A fortune awaits him who will contrive a similar improvement for the telephone. A special sound sent into the switch−box must automatically, and without human intervention, oblige an indicated wire to take up the uttered words. The continuous arc thus established, without employment of the at present necessary girl, will exactly represent the exquisite machinery of reflex action which each of us bears about in his own brain. Here, as in our improved telephone, the announcement itself establishes the connections needful for farther transmission, without employing the judgment of any operating official.

By such means power is economized and action becomes extremely swift and sure. Promptness, too, being of the utmost importance for protective purposes, creatures which are rich in such instincts have a large practical advantage over those who lack them. It is often assumed that brutes alone are instinctive, and that man must deliberate over each occasion. But this is far from the fact. Probably at birth man has as many instincts as any other animal. And though as consciousness awakes and takes control, some of these become unnecessary and fall away, new ones—as will hereafter be shown—are continually established, and by them the heavy work of life is for the most part performed. Personal goodness cannot be rightly understood till we perceive how it is superposed on a broad reflex mechanism.

IV

But higher in the personal life than unconsciousness, higher than the reflex instincts, are the conscious experiences. By these, we for the first time became aware of what is going on within us and without. Messages sent from the outer world are stopped at a central office established in consciousness, looked over, and deciphered. We judge whether they require to be sent in one direction or another, or whether we may not rest in their simple cognizance. Every moment we receive a multitude of such messages. They are not always called for, but they come of themselves. My hand carelessly falling on the table reports in terms of touch. A person near me laughs, and I must hear. I see the flowers on the table; smell reports them too; while taste declares their leaves to be bitter and pungent. All this time the inner organs, with the processes of breathing, blood circulation, and nervous action, are announcing their acute or massive experiences. Continually, and not by our own choice, our minds are affected by the transactions around. Sensations occur—

"The eye, it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will."

These itemized experiences thus pouring in upon our passive selves are found to vary endlessly also in degree, time, and locality. Through such variations indeed they become itemized. "Therefore is space and therefore time," says Emerson, "that men may know that things are not huddled and lumped, but sundered and divisible."

V

Have we not, then, here reached the highest point of personal life, self−consciousness? No, that is a peak higher still, for this is but consciousness. Undoubtedly from consciousness self−consciousness grows, often appearing by degrees and being extremely difficult to discriminate. Yet the two are not the same. Possibly in marking the contrast between them I may be able to gain the collateral advantage of ridding myself of those disturbers of ethical discussion, the brutes. Whenever I am nearing an explanation of some moral intricacy one of my students is sure to come forward with a dog and to ask whether what I have said shows that dog to be a moral and responsible being. So I like to watch afar and banish the brutes betimes. Perhaps if I bestow a little attention on them at present, I may keep the creatures out of my pages for the future.

Many writers maintain that brutes differ from us precisely in this particular, that while they possess consciousness they have not self− consciousness. A brute, they say, has just such experiences as I have been describing: he tastes, smells, hears, sees, touches. All this he may do with greater intensity and precision than we. But he is entirely wrapped up in these separate sensations. The single experience holds his attention. He knows no other self than that; or, strictly speaking, he knows no self at all. It is the experience he knows, and not himself the experiencer. We say, “The cat feels herself warm;” but is it quite so? Does she feel herself, or does she feel warm? Which? If we may trust the writers to whom I have referred, we ought rather to say, “The cat feels warm” than that “she feels herself warm;” for this latter statement implies a distinction of which she is in no way aware. She does not set off her passing moods in contrast to a self who might be warm or cold, active or idle, hungry or satiated. The experience of the instant occupies her so entirely that in reality the cat ceases to be a cat and becomes for the moment just warm. So it is in all her seeming activities. When she chases a mouse we rightly say, “She *is* chasing a mouse,” for then she is nothing else. Such a state of things is at least conceivable. We can imagine momentary experiences to be so engrossing that the animal is exclusively occupied with them, unable to note connections with past and future, or even with herself, their perceiver. Through very fullness of Consciousness brutes may be lacking in self−consciousness.

Whether this is the case with the brutes or not, something quite different occurs in us. No particular experience can satisfy us; we accordingly say, not “I am an experience,” but “I have an experience.” To be able to throw off the bondage of the moment is the distinctive characteristic of a person. When Shelley watches the skylark, he envies him his power of whole−heartedly seizing a momentary joy. Then turning to himself, and feeling that his own condition, if broader, is on that very account more liable to sorrow, he cries,—

“We look before and after,
And pine for what is not.”

That is the mark of man. He looks before and after. The outlook of the brute, if the questionable account which I have given of him is correct, is different. He looks to the present exclusively. The momentary experience takes all his attention. If it does not, he too in his little degree is a person. Could we determine this simple point in the brute's psychology, he would at once become available for ethical material. At present we cannot use him for such purposes, nor say whether he is selfish or self−sacrificing, possessed of moral standards and accountable, or driven by subtle yet automatic reflexes. The obvious facts of him may be interpreted plausibly in either way, and he cannot speak. Till he can give us a clearer account of this central fact of his being, we shall not know whether he is a poor relation of ours or is rather akin to rocks, and clouds, and trees. I incline to the former guess, and am ready to believe that between him and us there is only a difference of degree. But since in any case he stands at an extreme distance from ourselves, we may for purposes of explanation assume that distance to be absolute, and talk of him as having no share in the prerogative announced by Shelley. So regarded, we shall say of him that he does not compare or adjust. He does not organize experiences and know a single self running through them all. Whenever an experience takes him, it swallows his self—a self, it is true, which he never had.

It is sometimes assumed that Shelley was the first to announce this weighty distinction. Philosophers of course were familiar with it long ago, but the poets too had noticed it before the skylark told Shelley. Burns says to the mouse:—

“Still thou art blest, compared wi' me!

The present only toucheth thee:
But, ooh! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!
An' forward tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear."

This looking backward and forward which is the ground of man's grandeur, is also, Burns thinks, the ground of his misery; for in it is rooted his self−consciousness, something widely unlike the itemized consciousness of the brute. Shakespeare, too, found in us the same distinctive trait. Hamlet reflects how God has made us "with such discourse, looking before and after." We possess discourse, can move about intellectually, and are not shut up to the moment. But ages before Shakespeare the fact had been observed. Homer knew all about it, and in the last book of the Odyssey extols Halitherses, the son of Mastor, as one "able to look before and after." [Greek text omitted.] This is the mark of the wise man, not merely marking off person from brute, but person from person according to the degree of personality attained. It is characteristic of the child to show little foresight, little hindsight. He takes the present as it comes, and lives in it. We who are more mature and rational contemplate him with the same envy we feel for the skylark and the mouse, and often say, "Would I too could so suck the joys of the present, without reflecting that something else is coming and something else is gone."

VI

Yet after becoming possessed of self−consciousness, we do not steadily retain it. States of mind occur where the self slips out, though vivid consciousness remains. As I sit in my chair and fix my eye on the distance, a daydream or reverie comes over me. I see a picture, another, another. Somebody speaks and I am recalled. “Why, here I am! This is I.” I find myself once more. I had lost myself—paradoxical yet accurate expression. We have many such to indicate the disappearance of self−consciousness at moments of elation. “I was absorbed in thought,” we say; the I was sucked out by strenuous attention elsewhere. “I was swept away with grief,” i.e., I vanished, while grief held sway. “I was transported with delight,” “I was overwhelmed with shame,” and—perhaps most beautiful of all these fragments of poetic psychology,—“I was beside myself with terror,” I felt myself, to be near, but was still parted; through the fear I could merely catch glimpses of the one who was terrified.

These and similar phrases suggest the instability of self− consciousness. It is not fixed, once and forever, but varies continually and within a wide range of degree. We like to think that man possesses full self−consciousness, while other creatures have none. Our minds are disposed to part off things with sharpness, but nature cares less about sharp divisions and seems on the whole to prefer subtle gradations and unstable varieties. So the self has all degrees of vividness. Of it we never have an experience barely. It is always in some condition, colored by what it is mixed with. I know myself speaking or angry or hearing; I know myself, that is, in some special mood. But never am I able to sunder this self from the special mass of consciousness in which it is immersed and to gaze upon it pure and simple. At times that mass of consciousness is so engrossing that hardly a trace of the self remains. At times the sense of being shut up to one's self is positively oppressive. Between the two extremes there is endless variation. When we call self−consciousness the prerogative of man we do not mean that he fully possesses it, but only that he may possess it, may possess it more and more; and that in it, rather than in the merely conscious life, the significance of his being is found.

VII

Probably we are born without it. We know how gradually the infant acquires a mastery of its sensuous experience; and it is likely that for a long time after it has obtained command of its single experiences it remains unaware of its selfhood. In a classic passage of “In Memoriam” Tennyson has stated the case with that blending of witchery and scientific precision of which he alone among the poets seems capable:—

“The baby, new to earth and sky,
What time his tender palm is prest
Against the circle of the breast,
Has never thought that 'this is I.'

“But as he grows he gathers much,
And learns the use of 'I' and 'me,'
And finds 'I am not what I see,
And other than the things I touch.'

“So rounds he to a separate mind,
From whence clear memory may begin,
As thro' the frame that binds him in
His isolation grows defined.”

Until he has separated his mind from the objects around, and even from his own conscious states, he cannot perceive himself and obtain clear memory. No child recalls his first year, for the simple reason that during that year he was not there. Of course there was experience during that year, there was consciousness; but the child could not discriminate himself from the crowding experiences and so reach self− consciousness. At what precise time this momentous possibility occurs cannot be told. Probably the time varies widely in different children. In any single child it announces itself by degrees, and usually so subtly that its early manifestations are hardly perceptible. Occasionally, especially when long deferred, it breaks with the suddenness of an epoch, and the child is aware of a new existence. A little girl of my acquaintance turned from play to her mother with the cry, “Why, mamma, little girls don't know that they are.” She had just discovered it. In a famous passage of his autobiography, Jean Paul Richter has recorded the great change in himself: “Never shall I forget the inward experience of the birth of self−consciousness. I well remember the time and place. I stood one afternoon, a very young child, at the house−door, and looked at the logs of wood piled on the left. Suddenly an inward consciousness, 'I am a Me,' came like a flash of lightning from heaven, and has remained ever since. At that moment my existence became conscious of itself, and forever.”

The knowledge that I am an I cannot be conveyed to me by another human being, nor can I perceive anything similar in him. Each must ascertain it for himself. Accordingly there is only one word in every language which is absolutely unique, bearing a different meaning for every one who employs it. That is the word I. For me to use it in the sense that you do would prove that I had lost my wits. Whatever enters into my usage is out of it in yours. Obviously, then, the meaning of this word cannot be taught. Everything else may be. What the table is, what is a triangle, what virtue, heaven, or a spherodactyl, you can teach me. What I am, you cannot; for no one has ever had an experience corresponding to this except myself. People in speaking to me call me John, Baby, or Ned, an externally descriptive name which has substantially a common meaning for all who see me. When I begin to talk I repeat this name imitatively, and thinking of myself as others do. I speak of myself in the third person. Yet how early that reference to a third person begins to be saturated with self− consciousness, who can say? Before the word “I” is employed, “Johnny” or “Baby” may have been diverted into an egoistic significance. All we can say is that “I” cannot be rightly employed until consciousness has risen to self−consciousness.

VIII

And when it has so risen, its unity and coherence are by no means secure. I have already pointed out how often it is lost in moments when the conscious element becomes particularly intense. But in morbid conditions too it sometimes undergoes a disruption still more peculiar. Just as disintegration may attack any other organic unit, so may it appear in the personal life. The records of hypnotism and other related phenomena show cases where self−consciousness appears to be distributed among several selves. These curious experiences have received more attention in recent years than ever before. They do not, however, belong to my field, and to consider them at any length would only divert attention from my proper topic. But they deserve mention in passing in order to make plain how wayward is self−consciousness,— how far from an assured possession of its unity.

This unity seems temporarily suspended on occasion of swoon or nervous shock. An interesting case of its loss occurred in my own experience. Many years ago I was fond of horseback riding; and having a horse that was unusually easy in the saddle, I persisted in riding him long after my groom had warned me of danger. He had grown weak in the knees and was inclined to stumble. Riding one evening, I came to a little bridge. I remember watching the rays of the sunset as I approached it. Something too of my college work was in my mind, associated with the evening colors. And then—well, there was no “then.” The next I knew a voice was calling, “Is that you?” And I was surprised to find that it was. I was entering my own gateway, leading my horse. I answered blindly, “Something has happened. I must have been riding. Perhaps I have fallen.” I put my hand to my face and found it bloody. I led my horse to his post, entered the house, and relapsed again into unconsciousness. When I came to myself, and was questioned about my last remembrance, I recalled the little bridge. We went to it the next day. There lay my riding whip. There in the sand were the marks of a body which had been dragged. Plainly it was there that the accident had occurred, yet it was three quarters of a mile from my house. When thrown, I had struck on my forehead, making an ugly hole in it. Two or three gashes were on other parts of the head. But I had apparently still held the rein, had risen with the horse, had walked by his side till I came to four corners in the road, had there taken the proper turn, passed three houses, and entering my own gate then for the first time became aware of what was happening.

What had been happening? About twenty minutes would be required to perform this elaborate series of actions, and they had been performed exactly as if I had been guiding them, while in reality I knew nothing about them. Shall we call my conduct unconscious cerebration? Yes, if we like large words which cover ignorance. I do not see how we can certainly say what was going on. Perhaps during all this time I had neither consciousness nor self−consciousness. I may have been a mere automaton, under the control of a series of reflex actions. The feeling of the reins in my hands may have set me erect. The feeling of the ground beneath my feet may have projected these along their way; and all this with no more consciousness than the falling man has in stretching out his hands. Or, on the contrary, I may have been separately conscious in each little instant; but in the shaken condition of the brain may not have had power to spare for gluing together these instants and knitting them into a whole. It may be it was only memory which failed. I cite the case to show the precarious character of self−consciousness. It appears and disappears. Our life is glorified by its presence, and from it obtains its whole significance. Whatever we are convinced possesses it we certainly declare to be a person. Yet it is a gradual acquisition, and must be counted rather a goal than a possession. Under it, as the height of our being, are ranged the three other stages,—consciousness, reflex action, and unconsciousness.

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IV. SELF−DIRECTION

I

In the last chapter I began to discuss the nature of goodness distinctively personal. This has its origin in the differing constitutions of persons and things. Into the making of a person four characteristics enter which are not needed in the formation of a thing. The most fundamental of these I examined. Persons and things are unlike in this, that each force which stirs within a self− conscious person is correlated with all his other forces. So great and central is this correlation that a person can say, “I have an experience,” not—as, possibly, the brutes—“I am an experience.” Yet although a person tends thus to be an organic whole, he did not begin his existence in conscious unity. Probably the early stages of our life are to be sought rather in the regions of unconsciousness. Rising out of unconscious conditions into reflex actions—those ingenious provisions for our security at times when we have no directing powers of our own—we gradually pass into conditions of consciousness, where we are able to seize the single experience and to be absorbed in it. Out of this emerges by degrees an apprehension of ourselves contrasted with our experiences. Even, however, when this self−consciousness is once established, it may on vivacious or morbid occasions be overthrown. It by no means attends all the events of our lives. Yet it marks all conduct that can be called good. Goodness which is distinctively personal must in some way express the formation and maintenance of a self−conscious life.

But more is needed. A person fashioned in the way described would be aware of himself, aware of his mental changes, perhaps aware of an objective order of things producing these changes, and still might have no real share himself in what was going on. We can at least imagine a being merely contemplative. He sits as a spectator at his own drama. Trains of associated ideas pass before his interested gaze; a multitude of transactions occur in his contemplated surroundings; but he is powerless to intervene. He passively beholds, and does nothing. If such a state of things can be imagined, and if something like it occasionally occurs in our experience, it does not represent our normal condition. Our life is no mere affair of vision. Self− consciousness counts as a factor. Through it changes arise both without and within. I accordingly entitle this fourth chapter Self− direction. In it I propose to consider how our life goes forth in action; for in fact wherever self−consciousness appears, there is developed also a centre of activity, and an activity of an altogether peculiar kind.

It is well known that in interpreting these facts of action the judgment of ethical writers is divided. Libertarians and determinists are here at issue. Into their controversy I do not desire to enter. I mean to attempt a brief summary of those facts relating to human action which are tolerably well agreed upon by writers of both schools. In these there are intricacies enough. To raise the hand, to wave it in the air, to lay it on the table again, would ordinarily be reckoned simple matters. Yet operations so simple as these I shall show pass through half a dozen steps, though they are ordinarily performed so swiftly that we do not notice their several parts. In life much is knitted together which cannot be understood without dissection. In such dissection I must now engage. As a good pedagogue I must discuss operations separately which in reality get all their meaning through being found together. Against the necessary distortions of such a method the reader must be on his guard.

II

In the total process of self−direction there are evidently two main divisions,—a mental purpose must be formed, and then this purpose must be sent forth into the outer world. It is there accepted by those agencies of a physical sort which wait to do our bidding. The formation of the mental purpose I will, for the sake of brevity, call the intention, and to the sending of it forth I will give the name volition. That these terms are not always confined within these limits is plain. But I shall not force their meaning unduly by employing them so, and I need a pair of terms to mark the great contrasted sides of self−direction. The intention (A) shall designate the subjective side. But those objective adjustments which fit it to emerge and seek in an outer world its full expression I shall call the volition (B).

For the present, then, regarding entirely the former, let us see how an intention arises,—how self−consciousness sets to work in stirring up activity. To gain clearness I shall distinguish three subordinate stages, designating them by special names and numerals.

III

At the start we are guided by an end or ideal of what we would bring about. To a being destitute of self−consciousness only a single sort of action is at any moment possible. When a certain force falls upon it, it meets with a fixed response. Or, if the causative forces are many, what happens is but the well−established resultant of these forces operating upon a being as definite in nature as they. Such a being contemplates no future to be reached through motions set up within it. Its motions do not occur for the sake of realizing in coming time powers as yet but half−existent. It is not guided by ideals. Its actions set forth merely what it steadily is, not what it might be. Something like the opposite of all this shapes personal acts. A person has imagination. He contemplates future events as possible before they occur, and this contemplation is one of the very factors which bring them about. For example: while writing here, I can emancipate my thought from this present act and set myself to imagining my situation an hour hence. At that time I perceive I may be still at my writing−desk, I may be walking the streets, I may be at the theatre, or calling on my friend. A dozen, a hundred, future possibilities are depicted as open to me. On one or another of these I fix my attention, thereby giving it a causal force over other present ideas, and rendering its future realization likely.

So enormously important is imagination. By it we effect our emancipation from the present. Without this power to summon pictures of situations which at present are not, we should be exactly like the things or brutes already described. For in the thing a determined sequence follows every impulse. There is no ambiguous future disclosed, no variety of possibilities, no alternatives. Present things under definite causes have but a single issue; and if the account given of the brute is correct, his condition is unlike that of things only in this respect, that in him curious automatic springs are provided which set him in appropriate motion whenever he is exposed to harm, so enabling him suitably to face a future of which, however, he forms no image. In both brutes and things there is entire limitation to the present. This is not the case with a person. He takes the future into his reckoning, and over him it is at least as influential as the past. A person, through imagination laying hold of future possibilities, has innumerable auxiliary forces at his command. Choice appears. A depicted future thus held by attention for causal purposes is no longer a mere idea; it becomes an ideal.

But in order to transform the depicted future from an idea to an ideal, I must conceive it as rooted in my nature, and in some degree dependent on my power. Attracted by the brilliancy of the crescent moon, I think what sport it would be to hang on one of its horns and kick my heels in the air. But no, that remains a mere picture. It will not become an ideal, for it has no relation to my structure and powers. But there are other imaginable futures,—going to Europe, becoming a physician, writing a book, buying a house, which, though not fully compatible with one another, still represent, each one of them, some capacity of mine. Attention to one or the other of these will make it a reality in my life. They are competing ideals, and because of such competition my future is uncertain. The ambiguous future is accordingly a central characteristic of a person. He can imagine all sorts of states of himself which as yet have no existence, and one of these selected as an ideal may become efficient. This first stage, then, in the formation of the purpose, where various depicted future possibilities are summoned for assessment, may be called our fashioning of an ideal.

IV

But a second stage succeeds, the stage of desire. Indeed, though I call it a second, it is really but a special aspect of the first; for the ideal which I form always represents some improvement in myself. An ideal which did not promise to better me in some way would be no ideal at all. It would be quite inoperative. I never rise from my chair except with the hope of being better off. Without this, I should sit forever. But I feel uneasiness in my present position, and conceive the possibility of not being constrained; or I think of some needful work which remains unexecuted as long as I sit here, and that work undone I perceive will leave my life less satisfactory than it might be. And this imagined betterment must always be in some sense my own. If it is a picture of the gains of some one else quite unconnected with myself, it will not start my action.

But it will be objected that we do often act unselfishly and in behalf of other persons. Indeed we do. Perhaps our impulses are more largely derived from others than from ourselves, yet from desire our own share is never quite eliminated. I give to the poor. But it is because I hate poverty; or because I am attracted by the face, the story, or the supposed character of him who receives; or because I am unable to separate my interests from those of humanity everywhere. In some subtle form the I−element enters. Leave it out, and the action would lose its value and become mechanical. What I did would be no expression of self−conscious me. And such undoubtedly is the case with much of our conduct. The reflex actions, described in the last chapter, and many of our habits too, contain no precise reference to our self. Intelligent, purposeful, moral conduct, however, is everywhere shaped by the hope of improving the condition of him who acts. We do not act till we find something within or about us unsatisfactory. If contemplating myself in my actual conditions I could pronounce them all good, creation would for me be at an end. To start it, some sense of need is required. Accordingly I have named desire as the second state in the formation of a purpose, for desire is precisely this sense of disparity between our actual self and that possible bettered self depicted in the ideal.

Popular speech, however, does not here state the matter quite fully. We often talk as if our desires were for other things than ourselves. We say, for example, “I want a glass of water.” In reality it is not the water I want. That is but a fragment of my desire. It is water plus self. Only so is the desire fully uttered. Beholding my present self, my thirsty and defective self, I perceive a side of myself requiring to be bettered. Accordingly, among imagined pictures of possible futures I identify myself with that one which represents me supplied with water. But it is not water that is the object of my desire, it is myself as bettered by water. Since, however, this betterment of self is a constant factor of all desire, we do not ordinarily name it. We say, “I desire wealth, I desire the success of my friend, or the freedom of my country,” omitting the important and never absent portion of the desire, the betterment of self.

Of course a stage in the formation of the purpose so important as desire receives a multitude of names. Perhaps the simplest is appetite. In appetite I do not know what I want. I am blindly impelled in a certain direction. I do not perceive that I have a suffering self, nor know that this particular suffering would be bettered by that particular supply. Appetite is a mere instinct. In the mechanic structure of my being it is planned that without comprehension of the want I shall be impelled to the source of supply. But when appetite is permeated with a consciousness of what is lacking, I apprehend it as a need. Through needs we become persons. The capacity for dissatisfaction is the sublime thing in man. We can know our poor estate. We can say, That which I am I would not be. Passing the blind point of appetite, we come into the region of want or need; if we then can discern what is requisite to supply this need, we may be said to have a desire. That desire, if specific and urgent, we call a wish.

All these varieties of desire include the same two factors: on the one hand a recognition of present defect in ourselves, on the other imagination of possible bettered conditions. Diminish either, and personal power is narrowed. The richer a man's imagination, and the more abundant his pictures of possible futures, the more resourceful he becomes. Pondering on desire as rooted in the sense of defect, we may feel less regret that our age is one not easily satisfied. Never were there so many discontents, because there were never so many aspirations. It is true there may be a devilish discontent or a divine one. There is a discontent without definite aims, one which merely rejects what is now possessed; and there is one which seeks what is wisely attainable. Yet after all, it is a

small price to pay for aspiration that it is often attended by vagueness and unwisdom.

V

But before the formation of the purpose is complete it must pass through a third stage, the stage of decision. Ideals and desires are not enough, or rather they are too many; for there may be a multitude of them. Certain ideals are desired for supplying certain of my wants, others for supplying others. But on examination these many desirable ideals will often prove conflicting; all cannot be attained, or at least not all at once. Among them I must pick and choose, reducing and ordering their number. This process is decision. Starting with my ambiguous future, imagination brings multifold possibilities of good before me. But before these can be allowed to issue miscellaneously into action, comparison and selection reduce them to a single best. I accordingly assess the many desirable but competing ideals and see which of them will on the whole most harmoniously supplement my imperfections. On that I fasten, and the intention is complete.

All this is obvious. But one part of the process, and perhaps the most important part, is apt to receive less attention than it deserves. In decision we easily become engrossed with the single selected ideal, and do not so fully perceive that our choice implies a rejection of all else. Yet this it is—this cutting off—which rightly gives a name to the whole operation. The best is arrived at only by a process of exclusion in which we successively cut off such ideals as do not tend to the largest supply of our contemplated defects. Walking by the candy−shop, and seeing the tempting chocolates, I feel a strong desire for them. My mouth waters. I hurry into the shop and deposit my five−cent piece. In the evening I find that by spending five cents for the chocolates I am cut off from obtaining my newspaper, a loss unconsidered at the time. But to decide for anything is to decide against a multitude of other things. Taking is still more largely leaving. The full extent of this negative decision often escapes our notice, and through the very fact of choosing a good we blindly neglect a best.

VI

Here, then, are the three steps in the formation of the purpose,—the ideal, the desire, and the decision,—each earlier one preparing the way for that which is to follow. But an intention is altogether useless if it pauses here. It was formed to be sent forth, to he entrusted to forces stretching beyond the intending mind. The laws of nature are to take it in charge. The Germans have a good proverb: “A stone once thrown belongs to the devil.” When once it parts from our hands, it is no longer ours. It is taken up, for evil or for good, by agencies other than our own. If we mistake the agency to which we intrust it, enormous mischief may ensue, and we shall he helpless. These agencies, accordingly, need careful scrutiny before being called on to work their will. The business of scrutinizing them and of turning over the purpose to their keeping, forms the second half (B) of self−direction. In contrast with (A), the formation of the purpose or the intention, this may be called the realization of the purpose, or volition. Volition, it is true, is often employed more comprehensively, but we shall do the term no violence if we confine its meaning to the discharge of our subjective purpose into the objective world. Volition then will also, under our scheme, have three subordinate stages.

VII

The first of them I will call deliberation, in order to approximate it as closely as possible to the preceding decision. Having now my purpose decisively formed, I have to ask myself what physical means will best carry it out. I summon before my mind as complete a list as possible of nature's conveyances, and judge which of them will with the greatest efficiency and economy execute my intention. Here I am at a friend's house, but I have decided to go to my own. I must compare, then, the different modes of getting there, so as to pick out just that one which involves the least expenditure and the most certain result. One way occurs to me which I have never tried before, a swift and interesting way. I might go by balloon. In that balloon I could sail at my ease over the tops of the houses and across the beautiful river. When the tower of Memorial Hall comes in sight, I could pull a cord and drop gently down at my own door, having meanwhile had the seclusion and exaltation of an unusual ride. What a delightful experience! But there is one disadvantage. Balloons are not always at hand. I might be obliged to wait here for hours, for days, before getting one. I dismiss the thought of a balloon. It does not altogether suit my purpose.

Or, I might call a carriage. So I should secure solitude and a certain speed, but should pay for these with noise, jolting, and more money than I can well spare. There would be waiting, too, before the carriage comes. Perhaps I had better ask my friend to lend me his arm and to escort me home. In this there would be dignity and a saving of my strength. We could talk by the way, and I always find him interesting. But should I be willing to be so much beholden to him, and would not the wind to−day make our walk and talk difficult? Better postpone till summer weather. And after all there is Boston's most common mode of locomotion right at hand, the electric car. Strange it was not thought of before! The five−cent piece saved from the chocolates will carry me, swiftly, safely, and with independence.

It is in this way that we go through the process of deliberation. All the possible means of effecting our purpose are summoned for judgment. The feasibility of each is examined, and the cost involved in its employment. Comparison is made between the advantages offered by different agencies; and oftentimes at the close we are in a sad puzzle, finding these advantages and disadvantages so nearly balanced. One, however, is finally judged superior in fitness. To this we tie ourselves, making it the channel for our out−go. The whole process, then, in its detailed comparison and final fixation, is identical with that to which I have given the name of decision, except that the comparisons of decision refer to inner facts, those of deliberation to outer.

VIII

We now reach the climax of the whole process, effort, the actual sending forth through the deliberately chosen channel of the ideal desired and decided on. To it all the rest is merely preliminary, and in it the final move is made which commits us to the deed. About it, therefore, we may well desire the completest information. To tell the truth, I have none to give, and nobody else has. The nature of the operation is substantially unknown. Though something which we have been performing all day long, we and all our ancestors, no one of us has succeeded in getting a good sight of what actually takes place. Our purposes are prepared as I have described, and then those purposes—something altogether mental—change on a sudden to material motions. How is the transmutation accomplished? How do we pass from a mental picture to a set of motions in the physical world? What is the bridge connecting the two? The bridge is always down when we direct our gaze upon it, though firm when any act would cross.

Nor can we trace our passage any more easily in the opposite direction. When my eyes are turned on my watch, for example, the vibrations of light striking its face are reflected on the pupil of my eye. There the little motions, previously existing only in the surrounding ether, are communicated to my optic nerve. This vibrates too, and by its motion excites the matter of my brain, and then—well, I have a sensation of the white face of my watch. But what was contained in that *then* is precisely what we do not understand. Incoming motions may be transmuted into thought; or, as in effort, outgoing thought may be transmuted into motion. But alike in both cases, on the nature of that transmutation, the very thing we most desire to know, we get no light. In regard to this crucial point no one, materialist or idealist, can offer a suggestion. We may of course, in fault of explanation, restate the facts in clumsy circumlocution. Calling thought a kind of motion, we may say that in action it propagates itself from the mind through the brain into the outer world; while in the apprehension of an idea motions of the outer world pass into the brain, and there set up those motions which we know as thought. But after such explanations the mystery remains exactly where it was before. How does a “mental motion” come out of a bodily motion, or a bodily from a mental? It is wiser to acknowledge a mystery and to mark the spot where it occurs.

This marking of the spot may, however, illuminate the surrounding territory. If we cannot explain the nature of the crucial act, it may still be well to study its range. How widely is effort exercised? We should naturally answer, as widely as the habitable globe. I can sit in my office in Boston and carry on business in China. When I touch a button, great ships are loaded on the opposite side of the earth and cross the intervening oceans to work the bidding of a person they have never seen. Perhaps some day we may send our volition beyond the globe and enter into communication with the inhabitants of Mars. It would seem idle, then, to talk about the limitations of volition and a restricted range of will. But in fact that will is restricted, and its range is much narrower than the globe. For when we consider the matter, with precision, it is not exactly I who have operated in China. I operate only where I am. In touching the button my direct agency ceases. It is true that connected with that button are wires conducting to a wide variety of consequences. But about the details of that conduction I need know nothing. The wire will work equally well whether I understand or do not understand electricity. Its working is not mine, but its own. The pressure of my finger ends my act, which is then taken up and carried forward by automatic and mechanical adjustments requiring neither supervision nor consciousness on my part. We might then more accurately say that my direct volition is circumscribed by my own body. My finger tips, my lips, my nodding head are the points where I part with full control, though indefinitely beyond these I can forecast changes which the automatic agencies, once set astir, will induce.

Am I niggardly in thus confining the action of each of us within his own body? Is the range of volition thus marked out too narrow? On the contrary, it is probably still too wide. We are as powerless to direct our bodies as we are to manage affairs in China. This, at least, is the modern psychological doctrine of effort. It is now believed that volition is entirely a mental affair, and is confined to the single act of attention. It is alleged that when I attend to an ideal, fixing my mind fully upon it, the results are altogether similar to what occurred on my touching the button. Every idea tends to pass automatically into action through agencies about which I know as little as I do about ocean telegraphs. This physical frame of mine is a curious organic mechanism, in which reflex actions and

instincts do their blind work at a hint from me. I am said to raise my arm. But never having been a student of anatomy and physiology, I have not the least idea how the rise was effected; and if I am told that nerves excite muscles, and these in turn contract like cords and pull the arm this way or that, the rise will not be accomplished a bit better for the information. For, as in electric transmission, it is not I who do the work. My part is attention. The rest is adapted automatism. When I have driven everything else out of my mind except the picture of the rising arm, it rises of itself, the after−effects on nerves and muscles being apprehended by me as the sense of effort.

We cannot, then, exercise our will with a wandering mind. So long as several ideas are conflictingly attended to, they hinder each other. This we verify in regrettable experiences every day. On waking this morning, for example, I saw it was time to get up. But the bed was comfortable, and there were interesting matters to think of. I meant to get up, for breakfast was waiting, and there was that new book to be examined, and that letter to be written. How long would this require, and how should the letter be planned? But I must get up. Possibly those callers may come. And shall I want to see them? It is really time to get up. What a curious figure the pattern of the paper makes, viewed in this light! The breakfast bell! Out of my head go all vagrant reflections, and suddenly, before I can notice the process, I find myself in the middle of the floor. That is the way. From wavering thoughts nothing comes. But suddenly some sound, some sight, some significant interest, raises the depicted act into exclusive vividness of attention, and our part is done. The spring has been touched, and the physical machinery, of which we may know little or nothing, does its work. There it stands ready, the automatic machinery of this exquisite frame of ours, waiting for the unconfused signal,—our only part in the performance,—then automatically it springs to action and pushes our purpose into the outer world. Such at least is the fashionable teaching of psychologists to−day. Volition is full attention. It has no wider scope. With bodily adjustments it does not meddle. These move by their own mechanic law. Of real connection between body and mind we know nothing. We can only say that such parallelism exists that physical action occurs on occasion of complete mental vision.

No doubt this theory leaves much to be desired in the way of clearness. What is meant by fixing the attention exclusively? Is unrelated singleness possible among our mental pictures? Or how narrowly must the field of attention be occupied before these strange springs are set in motion? At the end of the explanation do not most of the puzzling problems of scope, freedom, and selection remain, existing now as problems about the nature and working of attention instead of, as formerly, problems about the emergence of the intention into outward nature? No doubt these classical problems puzzle us still. But a genuine advance toward clarity is made when we confine them within a small area by identifying volition with mental attention. Nor will it be anything to the point to say, “But I know myself as a physical creature to be involved in effort. The strain of volition is felt in my head, in my arm, throughout my entire body.” Nobody denies it. After we have attended, and the machinery is set in motion, we feel its results. The physical changes involved in action are as apprehensible in our experience as are any other natural facts, and are remembered and anticipated in each new act.

IX

Only one stage more remains, and that is an invariable one, the stage of satisfaction. It is fortunately provided that pleasure shall attend every act. Pleasure probably is nothing else but the sense that some one of our functions has been appropriately exercised. Every time, then, that an intention has been taken, up in the way just described, carried forth into the complex world, and there conducted to its mark, a gratified feeling arises. “Yes, I have accomplished it. That is good. I felt a defect, I desired to remove it, and betterment is here.” We cannot speak a word, or raise a hand, perhaps even draw a breath, without something of this glad sense of life. It may be intense, it may be slight or middling; but in some degree it is always there. For through action we realize our powers. This seemingly fixed world is found to be plastic in our hands. We modify it. We direct something, mean something. No longer idle drifters on the tide, through our desires we bring that tide our way. And in the sense of self−directed power we find a satisfaction, great or small according to the magnitude of our undertaking.

In such a catalogue of the elements of action as has just been given there is something uncanny. Can we not pick up a pin without going through all six stages? Should we ever do anything, if to do even the simplest we were obliged to do six things? Have I not made matters needlessly elaborate? No, I have not unduly elaborated. We are made just so complex. Yet as a good teacher I have falsified. For the sake of clearness I have been treating separately matters which go together. There are not six operations, there is but one. In this one there are six stages; that is, there are six points of view from which the single operation may advantageously be surveyed. But these do not exist apart. They are all intimately blended, each affecting all the rest. Because of our dull faculties we cannot understand, though we can work, them *en bloc*. He who would render them comprehensible must commit the violence of plucking them asunder, holding them up detachedly, and saying, “Of such diverse stuff is our active life composed.” But in reality each gets its meaning through connection with all the others. Life need not terrify because for purposes of verification it must be represented as so intricate an affair. It is I who have broken up its simplicity, and it belongs to my reader to put it together again.

REFERENCE ON SELF−DIRECTION

James's Psychology, ch. xxvi.
Sigwart's Der Begriff des Wollen's, in his Kleine Schriften.
A. Alexander's Theories of the Will.
Munsterberg's Die Willenshandlung.
Hoffding's Psychology, ch. vii.

V. SELF−DEVELOPMENT

I

Conceivably a being such, as has been described might advance no farther. Conscious he might be, observant of everything going on within him and without; occupied too with inducing the very changes he observes, and yet with no aim to enlarge himself or improve the world through any of the changes so induced. Complete within himself at the beginning, he might be equally so at the close, his activity being undertaken for the mere sake of action, and not for any beneficial results following in its train. Still, even such a being would be better off while acting than if quiet, and by his readiness to act would show that he felt the need of at least temporary betterment. In actual cases the need goes deeper.

A being capable of self−direction ordinarily has capacities imperfectly realized. Changing other things, he also changes himself; and it becomes a part of his aim in action to make these changes advantageous, and each act helpfully reactive. Accordingly the aim at self−development regularly attends self−direction. I could not, therefore, properly discuss my last topic without in some measure anticipating this. Every ideal of action, I was obliged to say, includes within it an aim at some sort of betterment of the actor. Our business, then, in the present chapter is not to announce a new theme, but simply to render explicit what before was implied. We must detach from action the influence which it throws back upon us, the actors. We must make this influence plain, exhibit its method, and show wherein it differs from other processes in some respects similar.

II

The most obvious fact about self−development is that it is a species of change, and that change is associated with sadness. Heraclitus, the weeping philosopher of the Greeks, discovered this fact five hundred years before Christ. “Nothing abides,” he said, “all is fleeting.” We stand in a moving tide, unable to bathe twice in the same stream; before we can stoop a second time the flood is gone. In every age this is the common theme of lamentation for poet, moralist, common man and woman. All other causes of sadness are secondary to it. As soon as we have comprehended anything, have fitted it to our lives and learned to love it, it is gone.

Such is the aspect which change ordinarily presents. It is tied up with grief. We regard what is precious as stable; and yet we are obliged to confess that nothing on earth is stable—nothing among physical things, and just as little among mental and spiritual things. But there are many kinds of change. We are apt to confuse them with one another, and in so doing to carry over to the nobler sorts thoughts applicable only to the lower. In beginning, then, the discussion of self−development, I think it will conduce to clearness if I offer a conspectus of all imaginable changes. I will set them in groups and show their different kinds, exhibiting first those which are most elementary, then those more complex, and finally those so dark and important that they pass over into a region of mystery and paradox.

III

Probably all will agree that the simplest possible change is the accidental sort, that where only relations of space are altered. My watch, now lying in the middle of the desk, is shifted to the right side, is laid in its case, or is lost in the street. I call these changes accidental, because they in no way affect the nature of the watch. They are not really changes in it, but in its surroundings. The watch still remains what it was before. To the same group we might refer a large number of other changes where no inner alteration is wrought. The watch is now in a brilliant light; I lay my hand on it, and it is in darkness. Its place has not been changed, but that of the light has been. Many of the commonest changes in life are of this sort. They are accidental or extraneous changes. In them, through all its change, the thing abides. There is no necessary alteration of its nature.

IV

But unhappily this is not the only species of change. It is not that which has brought a wail from the ages, when men have seen what they prize slip away. The common root of sorrow has been destructive change. Holding the watch in my hand, I may drop it on the floor; and at once the crystal, which has been so transparently protective, is gone. If the floor is of stone, the back of the watch may be wrenched away, the wheels of its delicate machinery jarred asunder. Destruction has come upon it, and not merely an extraneous accident. In consequence of altered surroundings, dissolution is wrought within. Change of a lamentable sort has come. What before was a beautiful whole, organically constituted in the way described in my first two chapters, has been torn asunder. What we formerly beheld with delight has disappeared.

And let us not accept false comfort. We often hear it said that, after all, destruction is an illusion. There is no such thing. What is once in the world is here forever. No particle of the watch can by any possibility be lost. And what is true of the watch is true of things far higher, of persons even. When persons decay and die, may not their destruction be only in outward seeming? We cannot imagine absolute cessation. As well imagine an absolute beginning. There is no loss. Everything abides. Only to our apprehension do destructive changes occur. We are all familiar with consolation of this sort, and how inwardly unsatisfactory it is! For while it is true that no particle of the watch is destroyed, it is precisely those particles which were in our minds of little consequence. Almost equally well they might have been of gold, silver, or steel. The precious part of the, watch was the organization of its particles, and that is gone. The face and form of my friend can indeed be blotted out in no single item. But I care nothing for its material items, The totality may be wrecked, and it is that totality to which my affections cling. And so it is in the world around—material remains, organic wholeness goes. It is almost a sarcasm of nature that she counts our precious things so cheap, while the bricks and mortar of which these are made—matters on which no human affection can fasten—she holds for everlasting. The lamentations of the ages, then, have not erred. Something tragic is involved in the framework of the universe. In order to abide, divulsion must occur. Destruction of organism is going on all around us, and ever will go on. Things must unceasingly be torn apart. One might call this destructive and lamentable change the only steadfast feature of the world.

V

Yet after all, and often in this very process of divulsion, we catch glimpses of a nobler sort of change, For there is a third species to which I might perhaps give the name of transforming: change. When, for example, a certain portion of oxygen and a certain portion of hydrogen, each having its own distinctive qualities, are brought into contact with one another, they utterly change. The qualities of both disappear, and a new set of qualities takes their place. The old ones are gone,—gone, but not lost; for they have been transformed into new ones of a predetermined and constant kind. Only a single sort of change is open to these elements when in each other's presence, and in precisely that way they will always change. In so changing they do not, it is true, fully keep their past; but a fixed relation to it they do keep, and under certain conditions may return to it again. The transforming changes of chemistry, then, are of a different nature from those of the mechanic destruction just described. In those the ruined organism leaves not a wrack behind. In chemic change something definite is held, something that originally was planned and can he prophesied. An end is attained: the fixed combination of just so much oxygen with just so much hydrogen for the making of the new substance, water. Here change is productive, and is not mere waste, as in organic destruction. Something, however, is lost—the old qualities; for these cannot be restored except through the disruption of the new substance, the water in which they are combined.

VI

But there is a more peculiar change of a higher order still, that which we speak of as development, evolution, growth. This sort of change might be described as movement toward a mark. When the seed begins to be transformed in the earth, it is adapted not merely to the next stage; but that stage has reference to one farther on, and that to still others. It would hardly be a metaphor to declare that the whole elm is already prophesied when its seed is laid in the earth. For though the entire tree is not there, though in order that the seed may become an elm it must have a helpful environment, still a certain plan of movement elmwards is, we may say, already schemed in the seed. Here accordingly, change—far from being a loss—is a continual increment and revelation. And since the later stages successively disclose the meaning of those which went before, these later stages might with accuracy he styled the truth of their predecessors, and those be accounted in comparison trivial and meaningless until thus changed. This sort of change carries its past along with it. In the destructive changes which we were lamenting a moment ago, the past was lost and the new began as an independent affair. Even in chemic change this was true to a certain extent. Yet there, though the past was lost, a future was prophesied. In the case of development the future, so far from annihilating the past, is its exhibition on a larger scale. The full significance of any single stage is not manifest until the final one is reached.

I suppose when we arrive at this thought of change as expressing development, our lamentation may well turn to rejoicing. Possibly this may be the reason why the gloom which is a noticeable feature of the thought of many preceding centuries has in our time somewhat disappeared. While our ambitions are generally wider, and we might seem, therefore, more exposed to disappointment, I think the last half of the century which has closed has been a time of large hopefulness. Perhaps it has not yet gone so far as rejoicing, for failure and sorrow are still by no means extirpated. But at least the thoughts of our day have become turned rather to the future than the past, a result which has attended the wider comprehension of development. To call development the discovery of our century would, however, be absurd. Aristotle bases his whole philosophy upon it, and it was already venerable in his time. Yet the many writers who have expounded the doctrine during the last fifty years have brought the thought of it home to the common man. It has entered into daily life as never before, and has done much to protect us against the sadness of destructive change. Perceiving that changes, apparently destructive, repeatedly bring to light meaning previously undisclosed, we more willingly than our ancestors part with the imperfect that a path to the perfect may be opened.

Is not this, then, the great conception of change which we now need to study as self−development? I believe not. One essential feature is omitted. In the typical example which I have just reviewed, the growth of an elm from its seed, we cannot say that the seed expands itself with a view to becoming a tree. That would be to carry over into the tree's existence notions borrowed from an alien sphere. Indeed, to assert that there has been any genuine development from the seed up to the finished tree is to use terms in an accommodated, metaphoric, and hypothetical way. Development there certainly has been as estimated by an outsider, an onlooker, but not as perceived by the tree itself. It has not known where it was going. Out of the unknown earth the seed pushes its way into the still less known air. But in doing so it is devoid of purpose. Nor, if we endow it with consciousness, can we suppose it would behold its end and seek it. The forces driving it toward that end are not conscious forces; they are mechanic forces. Through every stage it is pushed from behind, not drawn from before. There is no causative goal set up, alluring the seed onward. In speaking as if there were, we employ language which can have significance only for rational beings. We may hold that there is a rational plan of the universe which that seed is fulfilling. But if so, the plan does not belong to the seed. It is imposed from without, and the seed does its bidding unawares.

VII

But we may imagine a different state of affairs. Let us assume that when the seed sprouted it foreknew the elm that was to be. Every time it sucked in its slight moisture it was gently adapting this nourishment to the fulfillment of its ultimate end, asking itself whether the small material had better be bestowed on the left bough or the right, whether certain leaves should curve more obliquely toward the sun, and whether it had better wave its branches and catch the passing breeze or leave them quiet. If we could rightly imagine such a state of things, our tree would be much unlike its brothers of the forest; for, superintending its own development, it would be not a thing at all but a person. We persons are in this very way entrusted with our growth. A plan there is, a normal mode of growth, a significance to which we may attain. But that significance is not imposed on us from without, as an inevitable event, already settled through our past. On the contrary, we detect it afar as a possibility, are thus put in charge of it, and so become in large degree our own upbuilders. Development is movement toward a mark. In self−development the mark to be reached is in the conscious keeping of him who is to reach it. Toward it he may more or less fully direct his course.

And what an astonishing state of things then appears! Self−development involves a kind of contradiction in terms. How can I build if at present there is no I? Why should I build if at present there is an I? Whichever alternative we take, we fall into what looks like absurdity. Yet on that absurdity personal life is based. There is no avoiding it. Wordsworth has daringly stated the paradox: “So build we up the being that we are.” On coming into the world we are only sketched out. Of each of us there is a ground plan of which we progressively become aware. Hidden from us in our early years, it resides in the minds of our parents, just as the plan of the tree's structure is in the keeping of nature. Gradually through our advancing years and the care of those around us we catch sight of what we might be. Detecting in ourselves possibilities, we make out their relation to a plan not yet realized. We accordingly take ourselves in hand and say, “If any personal good is to come to me, it must be of my making. I cannot own myself till I am largely the author of myself. From day to day I must construct, and whenever I act study how the action will affect my betterment,—whether by performing it I am likely to degrade or to consolidate myself.” And to this process there must be no end.

Obviously, nothing like this could occur if our actual condition were our ideal condition. Self−development is open only to a being in whom there are possibilities as yet unfulfilled. The things around us have their definite constitution. They can do exactly thus and no more. What shall be the effect of any impulse falling on them is already assured. If the condition of the brutes is anything like that which we disrespectfully attributed to them, then they are in the same case; they too are shut up to fixed responses, and have in them no unfulfilled capacities. It is the possession of such empty capacities which makes us personal. Well has it been said that he who can declare, “I am that I am,” is either God or a brute. No human being can say it. To describe myself as if I were a settled fact is to make myself a thing. My life is in that which may be. The ideals of existence are my realities, and “ought” is my peculiar verb. “Is” has no other application to a person than to mark how far he has advanced along his ideal line. Were he to pause at any point as if complete, he would cease to be a person.

VIII

But it is necessary to trace somewhat carefully the method of such self−development. How do we proceed? Before the architect built the State House, he drew up a plan of the finished building, and there was no moving of stone, mortar, or tool, till everything was complete on paper. Each workman who did anything subsequently did it in deference to that perfected design. Each stone brought for the great structure was numbered for its place and had its jointing cut in adaptation to the remaining stones. If, then, each one of us is to become an architect of himself, it might seem necessary to lay out a plan of our complete existence before setting out in life, or at whatever moment we become aware that henceforth our construction is to be in our own charge. Only with such a plan in hand would orderly building seem possible. This is a common belief, but in my judgment an erroneous one. Indeed the whole analogy of the architect and his mechanisms is misleading. We rarely have in mind the total plan of our unrealized being and rarely ought we to have. Our work begins at a different point. We do not, like the architect, usually begin with a thought of completion. Bather we are first stirred by a sense of weakness.

In my own education I find this to be true. After some years as a boy in a Boston public school, I went to Phillips Academy in Andover, then to Harvard College, and subsequently to a German university, and why did I do all this? Did I have in mind the picture of myself as a learned man? I will not deny that such a fancy drifted through my brain. But it was indistinct and occasional. I did not even know what it was to be a learned man. I do not know now. The driving force that was on me was something quite different. I found myself disagreeably ignorant. Reading books and newspapers, I continually found matters referred to of which I knew nothing. Looking out on the universe, I did not understand it; and looking into the yet more marvelous universe within, I was still more grievously perplexed. I thought life not worth living on such terms. I determined to get rid of my ignorance and to endure such limitations of knowledge no longer. Is there, I asked, any place where at least a portion of my stupidity may be set aside? I removed a little fraction at school, but revealed also enormous expanses which I had not suspected before. I therefore pressed on farther, and to−day am still engaged in the almost hopeless attempt to extirpate my ignorance. What incites me continually is the sense of how small I am, not that which a few moments ago seemed my best incentive—the picture of myself as large. That on the whole has had comparatively little influence. Of course I do not assert that we are altogether without visions of a larger life. That is far from being the case. Were it so, desire would cease. We must contrast the poverty of the present with the fullness of a possible future, or we should not incline to turn from that present. Yet our grand driving force is that sense of limitation, of want or need, which was discussed in the last chapter. And our aim is rather at a better than at a best, at the removal of some small distinct hindrance than at arrival at a completed goal. We come upon excellence piecemeal, and do not, like the architect, look upon it in its entirety at the outset.

Yet in the pursuit of this “better,” the more vividly we can figure the coming stages, the more easily will they be attained. For this purpose the careers of those who have gone before us are helpful,— reports about the great ones of the past, and the revelations of themselves which they have left us in literature and institutions. Example is a powerful agent in making our footsteps quick and true. But it has its dangers, and may be a means of terrifying unless we feel that even in our low estate there are capacities allying us with our exemplar. The first vision of excellence is overwhelming. We draw back, knowing that we do not look like that, and we cannot bear to behold what is so superior. But by degrees, feeling our kinship with excellence, we are befriended.

I would not, then, make rigid statements in regard to this point of method. Grateful as I believe we should be for every sense of need, this is obviously not enough. To some extent we must have in mind the betterment which we may obtain through supplying that need. Yet I do not think a full plan of our ultimate goal is usually desirable. In small matters it is often possible and convenient. I plan my stay in Europe before going there. I figure my business prospects before forming a partnership. But in profounder affairs, I more wisely set out from the thought of the present, and the patent need of improving it, than from the future with its ideal perfection. Goethe's rule is a good one:—

“Willst du ins Unendliebe schreiten?
So sucht das Endliche, nach allen Seiten.”

Would you reach the infinite? Then enter into finite things, working out all that they contain.

IX

If in working them out a test is wanted to enable us to decide whether we are working wisely or to our harm, I believe such a test may be found in the congruity of the new with the old. Shall I by adding a fresh power to myself strengthen those I already possess? By taking this path, rich in a certain sort of good as it undoubtedly is, shall I be diverted from paths where my special goods lie? Here I am, a student of ethics. A friend calls and tells me of the charms of astronomy, a study undoubtedly majestic and delightful. Since I desire to take all knowledge for my province, why not hurry off at once to study astronomy? No indeed. No astronomy for me. I draw a ring about that subject and say, “Precious subject, fundamentally valuable for all men. But I will remain ignorant of it, because it is not quite congruous with the studies I already have on hand.” That must be my test: not how important is the study itself, but how important is it for me? How far will it help me to accept and develop those limitations to which I am now pledged?

In this acceptance of limitation, therefore, which seems at first so humiliating, I believe we have the starting point of all self− development. Our very imperfections, once accepted, prove our best means of discerning more. That is a profound remark of Hegel's that knowledge of a limit is a knowledge beyond that limit. Let us consider for a moment what it means. Suppose I should come upon Kaspar Hauser, shut in his little room. “And how long have you been here,” I ask. “Ever since I was born,” he answers. “Indeed! How much, then, do you know?” “Nothing beyond the walls of this room.” Might I not fairly reply, “You contradict yourself. How can you know anything about walls of a room unless you also know of much beyond them?” We cannot conceive a limit except as a limit from something. Accordingly, when we detect our ignorance we become by that very fact not ignorant. We have gone beyond ourselves and have seen that we are not what we should be. And this is the way of self−development. Becoming aware of our imperfections, we by that very fact continually lay hold on whatever perfect is within our reach.

X

When then we ask whether at any moment we are fully persons, we must answer, No. The actual extent of personality is at any time small. It is rather a goal than something ever attained. We have seen that it is not to be described in terms of the verb “to be.” We cannot say “I am a person,” but, only “I ought to be a person. I am seeking to be.” The great body of our life is, we know, a purely natural affair. Our instincts, our wayward impulses, our unconnected disorderly purposes— these, which fill the larger portion of our existence, do not express our personal nature. Each of them goes on its own way, neglectful of the whole. Therefore we must confess that at no time can we account ourselves completed persons. Justly we use such strange expressions as “He is much of a person,” “He is very little of a person.” Personality is an affair of degree. We are moving toward it, but have not yet arrived. “Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.” And can we ever arrive? I do not see how. We are chasing a flying goal. The nearer we approach, the farther it removes. Shall we call this fact discouraging, then, or even say that self−development is a useless process, since it never can be fulfilled? I think not. I should rather specify this feature of it as our chief source of encouragement; for I hold that only those aims which do thus contain an infinite element and are, strictly speaking, unattainable, move mankind to passionate pursuit. Probably all will agree that riches, fame, and wisdom are ideals which predominantly move us, and they are all unattainable. Suppose, some morning, when I see a merchant setting off for his office quite too early, I ask him why he is hastening so. He answers, “Why, there is money to be made. And as I intend to be a rich man some day, I must leave home comforts and be prompt at my desk.” But I persist, “You have forgotten something. It occurs to me that you never can be rich. No rich man was ever seen. Whoever has obtained a million dollars can get a million more, and the man of two millions can become one of three. Obviously, then, neither you nor any one can become a completely rich man.” Should I stay that merchant from his exit by remarks of this kind? If he answered at all, he would merely say, “Don't read too much. You had better mix more with men.”

And I should get no better treatment from the scholar, the man who is seeking wisdom. It is true no really wise man ever was on earth, or ever will be. But that is the very reason why we are all so impassioned for wisdom, because every bit we seize only opens the door to more. If we could get it in full, if some time or other, knowing that we are now wise, we could sit down in our armchairs with nothing further to do, it would be a death blow to our colleges. Nobody would attend them or care for wisdom longer. An aim which one can reach, and discover to be finally ended, moves only children. They will make collections of birds' eggs, though conceivably they might obtain every species in the neighborhood. But these are not the things which excite earnest men. They run after fame, because they can never be quite famous. They may become known to every person on their street, but there is the street beyond. Or to every one in their town, but there are other towns. Or if to every person on earth, there are still the after ages. Entire fame cannot be had; and exactly on that account it stirs every impulse of our nature in pursuit.

Now the aim at personal perfection is precisely of this sort. As servants of righteousness we cannot accept any other precept than “Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” But we know such perfection to be unattainable, Yet I sometimes doubt whether we state the matter truly so. Would it not be juster to say that perfection can always be attained, and that it is about the only thing which can be? We might well say of all the infinite ideals that they differ from the finite ones simply in this, that the finite can be attained but once, and then are ended, while the infinite are continually attained. At no moment of his life shall the merchant be cut off from becoming richer, or the scholar from growing wiser, or the public benefactor from acquiring further fame. These aims, then, are always attainable; for in them what we think of as the goal is not, as in other cases, a single point which, once reached, renders the rest of life useless and listless. The goal here is the line of increase. To be moving along that line should be our daily endeavor. Our proper utterance should be, “I was never so good as to−day, and I hope never to be so bad again.”

XI

But when we have seen how slender is our actual perfection, how slight must be reckoned the attainment of personality at any moment, we are brought face to face with the profound problem of its possible extent. How far can the self be developed? Infinitely? Is each one of us an infinite being? I will not say so. I do not like to make a statement which runs beyond my own experience. But confining myself to this, let us see what it will show.

When at any time I seek to perfect myself, does my attainment of any grade of improvement prevent or further another step? All will agree that it simply opens a new door. Perhaps I am seeking to withdraw from habits of mendacity, and beginning to tell the truth. Then every time I tell the truth I shall discover more truth to tell. And will this process ever come to an end? I have nothing to do with “evers.” I can only say that each time I try it, advance is more possible, not less possible. In the personal life there is, if I may say so, no provision for checkage. As I understand it, in the animal life there is such provision. In my first chapter I was pointing out the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic goodness; and I said that the table's entering into use and holding objects on its top tended to destroy it, though we might imagine a magic table in which every exercise of function would be preservative. Now in the personal nature we find just such a magical provision. Each time a person normally exerts himself he makes further exertion in those normal ways more possible.

And if this is true of all personal action within our experience, what right have we to set a limit to it anywhere? It may not be suitable to say that I know myself infinite, but it is certainly true that I cannot conceive myself as finite. I can readily see that this body of mine has in it what I have called a provision for checkage. Every time the blood moves in my veins it leaves its little deposit. Further motion of that blood is slightly impeded. But every time a moral purpose moves my life, it makes the next move surer. It is impossible to draw lines of limitation in moral development.

XII

Such, then, is the vast conception with which we have been dealing. Goodness, to be personal, must express perpetual self−development. All the moral aims of life may be summed up in the single word, “self− realization.” Could I fully realize myself, I should have fulfilled all righteousness, and this view is sanctioned by the Great Teacher when he asks, “What shall a man give in exchange for his life?”—his life, his soul, his self. If any one fully believed this, and lived as if all his desires were fulfilled so long as he had opportunities of self−development, he might be said to have insured himself against every catastrophe. Little could harm him. Whatever occurred, instead of exclaiming, “How calamitous!” he would simply ask, “What fresh opportunities do these strange circumstances present for enlarged living? Let me add this new discipline to what I had before. Seeking as I am to become expanded into the infinite, this experience discloses a new avenue thither. All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.”

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VI. SELF−SACRIFICE

I

The view of human goodness presented in the preceding chapter is one which is at present finding remarkably wide acceptance. Philosophers are often reproached with an indisposition to agree, and naturally where inquiry is active diversity will obtain. But to−day there appears a strange unanimity as regards the ultimate formula of ethics. The empirical schools state this as the highest form of the struggle for existence; the idealistic, as self−realization. The two are the same so far as they both regard morality as having to do with the development of life in persons. These curious beings, both also acknowledge, can never rest till they attain a completeness now incalculable.

Of course there is abundant diversity in the application of such formulae. In interpreting them we come upon problems no less urgent and tangled than those which vexed our fathers. Who and what is a person? How far is he detachable from nature? How far from his fellow men? Is his individuality an illusion, and each of us only an imperfect phase of a single universal being, so that in strictness we must own that there is none good but one, that is God? These and kindred questions naturally oppress the thought of our time. Yet all are but so many attempts to push the formula of self−realization into entire clearness. The considerable agreement in ethical formulae everywhere noticeable shows that at least so much advance has been made: morality has ceased to be primarily repressive, and is now regarded as the amplest exhibit of human nature, free from every external precept, however sacred. Man is the measure of the moral universe, and the development of himself his single duty.

But when we thus accept self−realization as our supreme aim, we bring ourselves into seeming conflict with one of our profoundest moral instincts. It is self−sacrifice that calls forth from all mankind, as nothing else does, the distinctively moral response of reverence. Intelligence, skill, beauty, learning—we admire them all; but when we see an act of self−sacrifice, however small, an awe falls on us; we bow our heads, fearful that we might not have been capable of anything so glorious. We thus acknowledge self−sacrifice to be the very culmination of the moral life. He who understand it has comprehended all righteousness, human and divine. But how does self−sacrifice accord with self−development? Will he who is busy cultivating himself sacrifice himself? Is there not a kind of conflict between the two? Yet can we abandon either? And if not, must not the formula of self−realization accept modification?

This, then, is the problem to which I must now turn: the possible adjustment of these two imperative claims,—the claim to realize one's self and the claim to sacrifice one's self. And I shall most easily set my theme before my readers if I state at once the four historic objections to the reality of self−sacrifice. I call them historic, for they have appeared and reappeared in the history of ethics, and have been worked out there on a great scale. While not altogether consistent with one another, no one of them is unimportant. Together they compactly present those conflicting considerations which must be borne in mind when we attempt to comprehend the subtleties of self− sacrifice. I will endeavor to state them briefly and sympathetically.

First, self−sacrifice is psychologically impossible. No man ever performs a strictly disinterested act, as has been shown in my chapter on self−direction. Before desire will start, his own interest must be engaged. In action we seek to accomplish something, and between that something and ourselves some sort of valued connection must be felt. Every wish indicates that the wisher experiences a need which he thinks might be supplied by the object wished for. It is true that wishes and wills are often directed upon external objects, but only because we believe that our own well−being is involved in their union with us. I devote myself to my friend as *my* friend, counting his happiness and my own inseparable. Were he so entirely a foreigner that I had no interest in him, my sacrifices for him—even if conceivable—would be meaningless. They acquire meaning only through my sense of a tie between him and me. My service of him may be regarded as my escape from petty selfishness into broad selfishness, from immediate gain to remote gain. But the prospect of gain in some form, proximate or ultimate, gain often of an impalpable and spiritual sort, always attends my wish and will. The aim at self−realization, however hidden, is everywhere the root of action. No belittlement of ourselves can appear desirable except as a step toward ultimate enlargement. Self−sacrifice in any true and thorough−going sense never occurs.

So cogent is this objection, and so frequently does it appear, not only in ethical discussion but in the minds of the struggling multitude, that he who has not faced it, and taken its truth well to heart, can have little

comprehension of self−sacrifice. But it is a blessed fact that thousands who comprehend self−sacrifice little practise it largely.

III

A second objection strips off the glory of self−sacrifice and regards it as a sad necessity. While there is nothing in it to attract or be approved, the lamentable fact is that we are so crowded together and disposed to trample on one another that, partially to escape, we must each agree to abate something of our own in behalf of a neighbor's gain. We cannot each be all we would. It is a sign of our mean estate that again and again we need to cut off sections of what we count valuable in order to save any portion. Only by such compromises are we able to get along with one another. He who refuses them finds himself exposed to still greater loss. The hard conditions under which we live appear in the fact that such restraint is inevitable. I call self−sacrifice, therefore, a sad necessity.

This theory of sacrifice is urged by Hobbes and by the later moralists who follow his daring lead. It should be counted among the objections because, while it admits the fact of self−sacrifice, it denies its dignity.

IV

A third objection declares sacrifice to be needless. Its very appearance rests on a misconception. We mistakenly suppose that in abating our own for the sake of our neighbor's good, we lose. In reality this is our true mode of enlargement. The interests of the individual and society are not hostile or alien, but supplemental. Society is nothing but the larger individual; so that he alone realizes himself who enters most fully into social relations, making the well−being of society his own. This is plain enough when we study the working of a small and comprehensible portion of society. The child does not lose through identification with family life. That is his great means of realizing himself. To assume contrast and antagonism between family interest and the interest of the child is palpably unwarranted and untrue. Equally unwarranted is a similar assumption in the broader ranges of society. When we talk of sacrifice, we refer merely to the first stage and outer aspect of the act. Underneath, self−interest is guarded, the individual giving up his individuality only through obtaining a larger individuality still.

Such identity of interest between society and the individual the moralists of the eighteenth century are never tired of pointing out. If they are right, and the identity is complete, then sacrifice is abolished or is only a generous illusion. But these men never quite succeeded in persuading the English people of their doctrine, at least they never carried their thought fully over into the common mind.

V

That common mind has always thought of sacrifice in a widely different way, but in one which renders it still more incomprehensible. Self−sacrifice it regards as a glorious madness. Though the only act which ever forces us to bow in reverent awe, it is insolubly mysterious, irrational, crazy perhaps, but superb. For in it we do not deliberate. We hear a call, we shut our ears to prudence, and with courageous blindness as regards damage of our own, we hasten headlong to meet the needs of others. To reckon heroism, to count, up opposing gains and losses, balancing them one against another in order clear−sightedly to act, is to render heroism impossible. Into it there enters an element of insanity. The sacrificer must feel that he cares nothing for what is rational, but only for what is holy, for his duty. The rational and the holy,—in the mind of him who has not been disturbed by theoretic controversy these two stand in harsh antithesis, and the antithesis has been approved by important ethical writers of our time. The rational man is, of course, needed in the humdrum work of life. His assertive and sagacious spirit clears many a tangled pathway. But he gets no reverence, the characteristic response of self−sacrifice. This is reserved for him who says, “No prudence for me! I will he admirably crazy. Let me fling myself away, so only there come salvation to others.”

Such, then, are the four massive objections: self−sacrifice is unreal psychologically, aesthetically, morally, or rationally: But negative considerations are not enough. No amount of demonstration of what a thing is not will ever reveal what it is. Objections are merely of value for clearing a field and marking the spots on which a structure cannot be reared. The serious task of erecting that structure somewhere still remains. To it I now address myself.

VI

What we need to consider first is the reality and wide range of self−sacrifice. The moment the term is mentioned there spring up before our minds certain typical examples of it. We see the soldier advancing toward the battlefield, to stake his life for a country in whose prosperity he may never share. We see the infant falling into the water, and the full−grown man flinging in after it his own assured and valued life in hopes of rescuing that incipient and uncertain thing, a little child. Yes, I myself came on a case of heroism hardly less striking. I was riding my bicycle along the public street when there dashed past me a runaway horse with a carriage at his heels, both moving so madly that I thought all the city was in danger. I pursued as rapidly as I could, and as I neared my home, saw horse and carriage standing by the sidewalk. By the horse's head stood a negro. I went up to him and said, “Did you catch that horse?” “Yes, sir,” he answered. “But,” I said, “he was going at a furious pace.” “Yes, sir.” “And he might have run you down.” “Yes, sir, but I know horses, and I was afraid he would hurt some of these children.” There he stood, the big brown hero, unexalted, soothing the still restive horse and unaware of having done anything out of the ordinary. I entered my house ashamed. Had I possessed such skill, would I have ventured my life in such a fashion?

Such are some of the shining examples of self−sacrifice which occur to us at the first mention of the word. But we shall mislead ourselves if we confine our thoughts to cases so climactic, triumphant, and spectacular. Deeds like these dazzle and do not invite to full analysis of their nature. Let us turn to affairs more usual.

I have happened to know intimately members of three professions— ministers, nurses, teachers−and I find self−sacrifice a matter of daily practice with them all. To it the minister is dedicated. He must not look for gain. He has a salary, of course; but it is much in the nature of a fee, a means of insuring him a certain kind of living. And while it is common enough to find a minister studying how he may make money in his parish, it is commoner far to find one bent on seeing how he can make righteousness prevail there, though it overwhelm him. The other professions do not so manifestly aim at self−sacrifice. They are distinctly money−making. They exact a given sum for a given service. Still, in them too how constantly do we see that that which is given far outruns that which is paid for. I have watched pretty closely the work of a dozen or more trained nurses, and I believe it Would be hard to find any class in the community showing a higher average of estimable character. How quiet they are under the most irritating circumstances! How fully they pour themselves into the lives of their patients! How prompt is the deft hand! How considerate the swift intelligence! Their hearts are aglow over what can be given, not over what can be got. A similar temper is widely observable among teachers, especially among those of the lower grades. Paid though they are for a certain task, how indisposed they are to limit themselves to that task or to confine their care of their children to the schoolroom! The hard−worked creatures acquire an intimate interest in the little lives and, heedless of themselves, are continually ready to spend and be spent for those who cannot know what they receive. Among such teachers I find self−sacrifice as broad, as deep, as genuine, if not so striking, as that of the soldier in the field.

Evidently, then, self−sacrifice may be wide−spread and may permeate the institutions of ordinary life; being found even in occupations primarily ordered by principles of give and take, where it expresses itself in a kind of surplusage of giving above what is prescribed in the contract. In this form it enters into trade. The high−minded merchant is not concerned merely with getting his money back from an article sold. He interests himself in the thoroughly excellent quality of that article, in the accommodation of his customers, the soundness of his business methods, and the honorable standing of his firm. And when we turn to our public officials, how frequent it is—how frequent in spite of what the newspapers say—to find men eager for the public good, men ready to take labor on themselves if only the state may be saved from cost and damage!

But I still underestimate the prevalence of the principle. Our instances must be homelier yet. Each day come petty citations to self− sacrifice which are accepted as a matter of course. As I walk to my lecture−room somebody stops me and says, “What is the way to Berkeley Street?” Do I reprovingly answer, “You must have made a mistake. I have no interest in Berkeley Street. I think it is you who are going there, and why are you putting me to inconvenience merely that you may the more easily find your way?” Should I answer so, he would think and possibly say, “There are strange people in Cambridge, remoter from human kind than any known

elsewhere.” Every one would feel astonishment at the man who declined to bear his little portion of a neighbor's burden. Our commonest acceptance of society involves self− sacrifice, and in all our trivial intercourse we expect to put ourselves to unrewarded inconvenience for the sake of others.

VII

What I have set myself to make plain in this series of graded examples is simply this: self−sacrifice is not something exceptional, something occurring at crises of our lives, something for which we need perpetually to be preparing ourselves, so that when the great occasion comes we may be ready to lay ourselves upon its altar. Such romanticism distorts and obscures. Self−sacrifice is an everyday affair. By it we live. It is the very air of our moral lungs. Without it society could not go on for an hour. And that is precisely why we reverence it so—not for its rarity, but for its importance. Nothing else, I suppose, so instantly calls on the beholder for a bowing of the head. Even a slight exhibit of it sends through the sensitive observer a thrill of reverent abasement. Other acts we may admire; others we may envy; this we adore.

Perhaps we are now prepared to sum up our descriptive account and throw what we have observed into a sort of definition. I mean by self− sacrifice any diminution of my own possessions, pleasures, or powers, in order to increase those of others. Naturally what we first think of is the parting with possessions. That is what the word charity most readily suggests, the giving up of some physical object owned by us which, even at the moment of giving, we ourselves desire. But the gift may be other than a physical object. When I would gladly sit, I may stand in the car for the sake of giving another ease. But the greatest conceivable self−sacrifice is when I give myself: when, that is, I in some way allow my own powers to be narrowed in order that those of some one else may be enlarged. Parents are familiar with such exquisite charity, parents who put themselves to daily hardship because they want education for their boys. But they have no monopoly in this kind. I who stand in the guardianship of youth have frequent occasion to miss a favorite pupil, boy or girl, who throws up a college training and goes home—often, in my judgment, mistakenly—to support, or merely to cheer, the family there. Of course such gifts are incomparable. No parting with one's goods, no abandonment of one's pleasures, can be measured against them. Yet this is what is going on all over the country where devoted mother, gallant son, loyal husband, are limiting their own range of existence for the sake of broadening that of certain whom they hold dear.

VIII

But when we have thus assembled our omnipresent facts and set them in order for cool assessment, the enigma of self−sacrifice only appears the more clearly. Why *should* a man sacrifice himself? Why voluntarily accept loss? Each of us has but a single life. Each feels the pressure of his own needs and desires. These point the way to enlargement. How, then, can I disinterestedly prefer another's gain? Each of us is penned within the range of his solitary consciousness, which may be broadened or narrowed but cannot be passed. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to study our own enrichment. Anticipating whatever might confirm or crumble our being, we should strenuously seize the one and reject the other. Deliberately to turn toward loss would seem to be crazy. What should a man accept in exchange for his life?

Here is the difficulty, a difficulty of the profoundest and most instructive sort. If we could see our way clearly through it, little in ethics would remain obscure. The common mode of meeting it is to leave it thus paradoxical. Self−sacrifice banishes rationality and is a glorious madness. But such a conclusion is a repellent one. How can it be? Reason is man's distinctive characteristic. While brutes act blindly, while the punctual physical universe minutely obeys laws of which it knows nothing, usually it is open to man to judge the path he will pursue. Shall we then say that, though reason is a convenience in all the lower stretches of life, when we reach self−sacrifice, our single awesome height, it ceases? I cannot think so. On the contrary, I hold that in self−sacrifice we have a case not of glorious madness, but of somewhat extreme rationality. How, then, is rational contrasted with irrational guidance? As we here approach the central and most difficult part of our discussion, clearness will oblige me to enter into some detail.

When a child looks at a watch, he sees a single object. It is something there, a something altogether detached from his consciousness, from the table, from other objects around. It is a brute fact, one single thing, complete in itself. Such is the child's perception. But a man of understanding looks at it differently. Its detached singleness is not to him the most important truth in regard to it. Its meaning must rather be found in the relations in which it stands, relations which, seeming at first to lie outside it, really enter into it and make it what it is. The rational man would accordingly see it all alive with the qualities of gold, brass, steel, the metals of which it is composed. He would find it incomprehensible apart from the mind of its maker, and would not regard that mind and watch as two things, but as matters essentially related. Indeed, these relations would run wider still, and reason would not rest satisfied until the watch was united to time itself, to the very framework of the universe. Apart from this it would be meaningless. In short, if a man comprehends the watch in a rational way he must comprehend it in what may he called a conjunct way. The child might picture it as abstract and single, but it could really be known only in connection with all that exists. Of course we pause far short of such full knowledge. Our reason cannot stretch to the infinity of things. But just so far as relations can be traced between this object and all other objects, so much the more rational does the knowledge of the watch become. Rationality is the comprehending of anything in its relations. The perceptive, isolated view is irrational.

But if this is true of so simple a matter as a watch, it is doubly true of a complex human being. The child imagines he can comprehend a person too in isolation, but rational proverb−makers long ago told us, “One person, no person.” Each person must be conceived as tied in with all his fellows. We have seen how in the case of the watch we were almost obliged to abandon the thought of a single object and to speak of it as a kind of centre of constitutive relations. A plexus of ties runs in every direction, and where these cross there is the watch. So it is among human beings. If we try for a moment to conceive a person as single and detached, we shall find he would have no powers to exercise. No emotions would be his, whether of love or hate, for they imply objects to arouse them, no occupations of civilized life, for these involve mutual dependency. From speech he would be cut off, if there were nobody to speak to; nor would any such instrument as language be ready for his use, if ancestors had not cooperated in its construction. His very thoughts would become a meaningless series of impressions if they indicated no reality beside themselves. So empty would be that fiction, the single and isolated individual. The real creature, rational and conjunct man, is he who stands in living relationship with his fellows, they being a veritable part of him and he of them. Man is essentially a social being, not a being who happens to be living in society. Society enters into his inmost fibre, and apart from society he is not. Yet this does not mean that society,

any more than the individual, has an independent existence, prior, complete, and authoritative. What would society be, parted from the individuals who compose it? No more than an individual who does not embody social relationships. The two are mutual conceptions, different aspects of the same thing. We may view a person abstractly, fixing attention on his single centre of consciousness; or we may view him conjunctly, attending to his multifarious ties.

Now what is distinctive of self−sacrifice is that it insists in a somewhat extreme way on this second and rational mode of regard. It is a frank confession of interlocking lives. It says, “I have nothing to do with the abstract, isolated, and finite self. That is a matter of no consequence. What I care about is the conjunct, social, and infinite self—that self which is inseparable from others. Where that calls, I serve.” The self−sacrificing person knows no interest of his own separate from those of his father and mother, his wife and children. He cannot ask what is good for himself and set it in contrast with what is good for them. For his own broader existence is presented in these dear members of his family. And such a man, so far from being mad, is wise as few of us are. Glorious indeed is the self− sacrificer, because he is so sane, because in him all pettiness and detachment are swept away. He appears mad only to those who stand at the opposite point of view, but in his eyes it is they who are ridiculous. In fact, each must be counted crazy or wise according to the view we take of what constitutes the real person.

I remember a story current in our newspapers during the Civil War. Just before a battle, an officer of our army, knowing of what consequence it was that his regiment should hold its ground, hastened to the rear to see that none of his men were straggling. He met a cowardly fellow trying to regain the camp. Turning upon him in a passion of disgust, he said, “What! Do you count your miserable little life worth more than that of this great army?” “Worth more to me, sir,” the man replied. How sensible! How entirely just from his own point of view, that of the isolated self! Taking only this into account, he was but a moral child, incapable of comprehending anything so difficult as a conjunct self. He imagined that could he but save this eating, breathing, feeling self, no matter if the country were lost, he would be a gainer. What folly! What would existence be worth outside the total inter−relationship of human beings called his land? But this fact he could not perceive. To risk his separate self in such a cause seemed absurd. Turn for a moment and see how absurd the separate self appears from the point of view of the conjunct. When our Lord hung upon the cross, the jeering soldiers shouted, “He saved others, himself he cannot save.” No, he could not; and his inability seemed to them ridiculous, while it was in reality his glory. His true self he was saving—himself and all mankind—the only self he valued.

IX

Now it is this strange complexity of our being, compelling us to view ourselves in both a separate and a conjunct way, which creates all the difficulty in the problem of self−sacrifice. But I dare say that when I have thus shown the reality and worth of the conjunct self, it will be felt that self−sacrifice is altogether illusory; for while it seems to produce loss, it is in fact the avoidance of what entails littleness. So says Emerson:—

“Let love repine and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply:
'T is man's perdition to be safe
When for the truth he ought to die.”

Have we not, then, by explaining the rationality of self−sacrifice, explained away the whole matter and practically identified it with self−culture? There is plausibility in this view—and it has often been maintained—but not complete truth. For evidently the emotions excited by culture and sacrifice are directly antagonistic. Toward a man pursuing the aim of culture we experience a feeling of approval, not unmixed with suspicion, but we give him none of that reverent adoration which is the proper response to sacrifice. And if the feelings of the beholder are contrasted, so also are the psychological processes of the performer. The man of culture starts with a sense of defect which he seeks to supplement; the sacrificer, with a sense of fullness which he seeks to empty. He who turns to self−culture says, “I have progressed thus far. I have gained thus much of what I would acquire. But still I am poor. I need more. Let me gather as abundantly as possible on every side.” But the thought of him who turns to self− sacrifice is, “I have been gaining, but I only gained to give. Here is my opportunity. Let me pour out as largely as I may.” He contemplates final impoverishment. Accordingly I was obliged to say in my definition that the self−sacrificer seeks to heighten another's possessions, pleasures, or powers at the cost of his own. Undoubtedly at the end of the process he often finds himself richer than at the beginning. Perhaps this is the normal result; but it is not contemplated. Psychologically the sacrificer is facing in a different direction.

X

Yet, though the motive agencies of the two are thus contrasted, I think we must acknowledge that sacrifice no less than culture is a powerful form of self−assertion. To miss this is to miss its essential character, and at the same time to miss the safeguards which should protect it against waste. For to say, “I will sacrifice myself” is to leave the important part of the business unexpressed. The weighty matter is in the covert preposition *for*.—“I will sacrifice myself *for*,” An approved object is aimed at. We are not primarily interested in negating ourselves. Only our estimate of the importance of the object justifies our intended loss. This object should accordingly be scrutinized. Self−sacrifice is noble if its end is noble, but become reprehensible when its object is petty or undeserving. Omit or overlook that word *for*, and self−sacrifice loses its exalted character. It sinks into asceticism, one often most degrading of moral aberrations. In asceticism we prize self−sacrifice for its own sake. We hunt out what we value most; we judge what would most completely fulfill our needs; and then we abolish it. Abolish it for what? For nothing but the mere sake of abolishing. This is to turn morality upside down; and in place of the Christian ideal of abounding life, to set up the pessimistic aim of impoverishment. There is nothing of this kind in self−sacrifice. Here we assert ourselves, our conjunct selves. We estimate what will be best for the community of man and seek to further this at whatever cost to our isolated individuality. By this dedication to a deserving object sacrifice is purified, ennobled, and made strong. We speak of the glorious deed of him who plunges into the water to save a child. But it is a foolish and immoral thing to risk one's life for a stone, a coin, or nothing at all. “Is the object deserving?” we must ask, “or shall I reserve myself for greater need?”

Too easily does our sympathetic and sentimental age, recklessly eulogistic of altruism, hurry into self−sacrifice. Altruism in itself is worthless. That an act is unselfish can never justify its performance. He who would be a great giver must first be a great person. Our men, and still more our women, need as urgently the gospel of self−development as that of self−sacrifice; though the two are naturally supplemental. Our only means of estimating the propriety and dignity of sacrifice is to inquire how closely connected with ourselves is its object. Until we can justify this connection, we have no right to incur it, for genuine sacrifice is always an act of self−assertion. In saving his regiment and contributing his share toward saving his country, the soldier asserts his own interests. He is a good soldier in proportion as he feels these interests to be his; while the deserter is condemned, not for refusing to give his life to an alien country and regiment, but because he was small enough to imagine that these great constituents of himself were alien. I tell the man on the street the way home because I cannot part his bewilderment from my own. The problem always is, What may I suitably regard as mine? And in solving it, we should study as carefully that for which we propose to sacrifice ourselves as anything which we might seek to obtain. Triviality or lack of permanent consequence is as objectionable in the one case as in the other. The only safe rule is that self−sacrifice is self−assertion, is a judgment as regards what we would welcome to be a portion of our conjunct self.

Perhaps an extreme case will show this most clearly. Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” He did not then lose his will. He asserted and obtained it. For his will was that the divine will should be fulfilled, and fulfilled it was. He set aside one form of his will, his private and isolated will, knowing it to be delusive. But his true or conjunct will—and he knew it to be his true one—he abundantly obtained. It is no wonder, then, that in explaining these things to his disciples he says, “My meat it is to do the will of my Father.” That is always the language of genuine self−sacrifice. The act is not complete until the sense of loss has disappeared.

XI

Yet while I hold that self−sacrifice is thus the very extreme of rationality, grounding as it does all worth in the relational or conjunct selfhood, I cannot disguise from myself that it contains an element of tragedy too. This my readers will already have felt and will have begun to rebel against my insistence that self−sacrifice is the fulfillment of our being. For though it is true that when opposition arises between the conjunct and separate selves our largest safety is with the former, the very fact that such opposition is possible involves tragedy. One part of the nature becomes arrayed against another. We must die to live. Our lower goods are found incompatible with our higher. Pleasure, comfort, property, friends, possibly life itself, have become hostile to our more inclusive aims and must be cast aside. It is true that when the tragic antithesis is presented and we can reach our higher goods only by loss of the lower, hesitation is ruin. It is true too that on account of that element of self−assertion to which I have drawn, attention, the genuine sacrificer is ordinarily unaware of any such tragedy. But none the less tragedy is there. To suppose it absent would strip sacrifice of what we regard as most characteristic.

Nor can we pause here. Those who would call self−sacrifice a glorious madness have still further justification. A leap into the dark we must at least admit it to be, For trace it rationally as far as we may, there always remains uncertainty at the close. There is, for example, uncertainty about ultimate results. The mother toiling for her child, and neglecting for its sake most of what would render her own life rich, can never know that this child will grow up to power. The day may come when she will wish it had died in childhood. The glory of her action is bound up with this darkness. Were the soldier, marching to the field, sure that his side would be victorious, he would be only half a hero. The consequences of self−sacrifice can never be certain, foreseen, calculable. There must be risk. Omit it, and the sacrifice disappears. Indeed nothing in life which calls forth high admiration is free from this touch of faith and courage, this movement into the unknown. It is at the very heart of self−sacrifice.

But besides the unknown character of the result there is usually uncertainty as regards the cost. The sacrificer does not give according to measure. I do not say I will attend to this sick person up to such and such a point, but when that point is reached I shall have done enough. This would hardly be self−sacrifice. I rather say, “Here I am. Take me, use me to the full, spend of me whatever you need. How much that will be, I do not know.” So there is an element of darkness in ourselves.

And possibly I ought to mention a third variety of these incalculabilities of sacrifice. We do not plan the case. A while ago, meeting a literary man whose product is of much consequence to the community and himself, I asked him how his book was coming on. “Badly,” he answered. “Just now an aged relative has fallen ill. There is no other place where she can be properly disposed, and so she has been brought to my house. I must care for her, my home will be much broken up, and my work must be set aside.” I said, “Is that your duty? Have you not a more important obligation to your book?” But he answered, “One cannot choose a duty.” I did not fully agree. I think we should carefully weigh duties, even if we do not choose them. Morality would otherwise become the sport of accident. But I perceive that in the last analysis no duty is made by ourselves. It is given us by something more authoritative than we, something which we cannot alter, fully estimate, or without damage evade. Necessity is laid upon us, sometimes an invading necessity. We are walking our well−ordered path, pursuing some dear aims, when harsh before us stands a waiting duty, bidding us lay aside that in which we are engaged and take it. I have said I believe a degree of scrutiny is needful here. We should ask, what for? We should correlate the new duty with those already pledged. And probably an interrupting duty is less often the one it is well to follow than one which has had something of our time and care. Few fresh calls can have the weighty claim of loyalty to obligation already incurred. But, after all, that on which we finally decide has not sprung from our own wishes. It subjects those wishes to itself. Standing over against us, it summons us to do its bidding, and allows us no more to be our own self−directed masters.

XII

Summing up, then, the jarring characteristics of self−sacrifice,—its frequency, rationality, assertiveness, nearness to self—culture; yes, and its darker traits of risk, immeasurability, and authoritativeness, —does it not begin to appear that I have been calling it by a wrong name? Self−sacrifice is a negative term. It lays stress on the thought that I set myself aside, become in some way less than I was before. And no doubt through all this intricate discussion certain belittlements have been acknowledged, though these have also been shown to lie along the path of largeness. There are, therefore, in self−sacrifice both negative and positive elements. But why select its name from the subordinate part? Why turn to the front its incidental negations? This is topsy−turvy nomenclature. Better blot the word self−sacrifice from our dictionaries. Devotion, service, love, dedication to a cause, —these words mark its real nature and are the only descriptions of it which its practicers will recognize. That damage to the abstract self which chiefly impresses the outsider is something of which the sacrificer is hardly aware. How exquisitely astonished are the men in the parable when called to receive reward for their generous gifts! “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee?” They thought they had only been following their own desires.

Perhaps the most admirable case of self−sacrifice is that in which no single person appears who is profited by our loss. The scholar, the artist, the scientific man dedicate themselves to the interests of undifferentiated humanity. They serve their undecipherable race, not knowing who will obtain gains through their toils. In their sublime benefactions they study the wants of no individual person, not even of themselves. Yet, turn to a man of this type and try to call his attention to the privations he endures, and what will be his answer? “I have no coat? I have no dinner? I have little money? People do not honor me as they honor others? Yes, I believe I lack these trifles. But think what I possess! This great subject; or rather, it possesses me. And it shall have of me whatever it requires.”

In such service of the absolute is found the highest expression of self−sacrifice, of social service, of self−realization. The doctrine that though union with a reason and righteousness not exclusively our own each of us may hourly be renewed is the very heart of ethics.

XIII

I have attempted to cut out a clear path through an ethical jungle overgrown with the exuberance of human life. I have not succeeded, and it is probably impossible to succeed. In the subject itself there is paradox. Conflicting elements enter into the very constitution of a person. To trace them even imperfectly one must be patient of refinements, accessible to qualifications, and ever ready to admit the opposite of what has been laboriously established. We all desire through study to win a swift simplicity. But nature abhors simplicity: she complicates; she forces those who would know to take pains, to proceed cautiously, and to feel their way along from point to point. This I have tried to do; and I believe that the inquiry, though intricate, primarily scientific, and only partially successful, need not altogether lack practical consequence. Our age is bewildered between heroism and greed. To each it is drawn more powerfully than any age preceding. Neither of the two does it quite comprehend. If we can render the nobler somewhat more intelligible, we may increase the confidence of those who now, half−ashamed, follow its glorious but blindly compulsive call.

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VII. NATURE AND SPIRIT

I

At this culmination of our long discussion, a discussion much confused by its necessary mass of details, it may be well to pause a moment, to fix attention on the great lines along which we have been moving, and to mark the points on which they appear to converge. We have regarded goodness as divided into two very unequal parts. The first two chapters treated of goodness in general, a species which being shared alike by persons and things is in no sense distinctive of persons. The last four chapters have been given to the more complex task of exploring the goodness of persons.

In things we found that goodness consists in having their manifold parts drawn into integral wholeness. And this is true also of persons. But the modes of organization in the two cases were so unlike as to require long elucidation. Our conclusion would seem to be that while goodness is everywhere expressive of organization, personal conduct is good only when consciously organized, guided, and aimed at the development of a social self. We have seen how self−consciousness lies at the foundation of personality, sharply discriminating persons from things. We have seen too that wherever it is present, the person curiously directs himself, passing through all the varieties of purposive activity which were catalogued in the chapter on self− direction. But such activity implies a being of variable, not of fixed powers, a being accordingly capable of enlargement, and with possibilities in him which every moment renders real. This progressive realization of himself, this development, he—so far as he is good— consciously conducts. And finally we found in the person the strange fact that he conceives of his good self as essentially in conjunction with his fellow man, and recognizes that parted off and in separate abstractness he is no person at all. Accordingly personal organization, direction, enlargement, conjunction. Under our analysis two antithetic worlds emerge, a world of nature and of spirit, the former guided by blind forces, the latter self−managed. Unlike spiritual beings, natural objects are under alien control; have not the power of development, and when brought into close conjunction with others are liable to disruption.

II

Accepting this vital distinction, we see that the work of spiritual man will consist in progressively subjugating whatever natural powers he finds within him and without, rendering them all expressive of self−conscious purpose. for we men are not altogether spiritual; in us two elements meet. Our spirituality is superposed on a natural basis. Like things, we have our natural aptitudes, blind tendencies, established functions of body and mind. These are all serviceable and organic; but to become spiritual all need to be redeemed, or drawn over into the field of consciousness, where our special stamp may be set upon them. When we speak of a good act, we mean an act which shows the results of such redemption, one whose every part has been studied in relation to every other part, and has thus been made to bear our own image and superscription.

And this is essentially the Christian ideal, that spirit shall be lord of nature. I ought to reject my natural life, accounting it not my life at all. Until shaped by myself, it is merely my opportunity for life, material furnished, out of which my true and conscious life may be constructed. Widely is this contrasted with the pagan conceptions, where man appears with powers as fixed as the things around him. Indeed, in many forms of paganism there is no distinction between persons and things. They are blended. And such blending usually operates to the disparagement of the person; for things being more numerous, and their laws more urgent, the powers of man become lost in those of nature. Or if distinction is made, and men in some dim fashion become aware that they are different from things, still it is the tendency of paganism to subordinate person to nature. The child is sacrificed to the sun. The sun is not thought of as existing for the child. From the Christian point of view everything seems turned upside down. Man is absorbed in natural forces, natural forces are reverenced as divine, and self−consciousness—if noticed at all—is regarded as an impertinent accident.

In the Christian ideal all this is reversed. Man is called to be master of himself, and therefore of all else. The many beautiful adjustments of the natural world are thought to possess dignity only so far as they accept the conscious purposes put by us in their keeping. And in man himself goodness is held to exist only in proportion as his conduct expresses fullness of self−consciousness, fullness of direction, and fullness of conscious conjunction with other persons. I do not see how we can escape this conclusion. The careful argumentation through which the previous chapters have brought us obliges us to count conduct valuable in proportion as it bears the impress of self−conscious mind.

III

Yet it must be owned that during the last few centuries doubts have arisen about the justice of this Christian ideal. The simple conception of a world of spirit and a world of nature arrayed against each other, the one of them exactly what the other is not, the world of spirit the superior, the world of nature to be frowned on, used possibly, but always in subordination to spiritual purposes,—this view, dominant as it was in the Middle Ages, and still largely influential, has been steadily falling into disrepute. There is even a tendency in present estimates to reverse the ancient valuation and allow superiority to nature. Such a transformation is strikingly evident in those sensitive recorders of human ideals, the Fine Arts. Let us see what at different times they have judged best worthy of record.

Early painting dealt with man alone, or rather with persons; for personality in its transcendent forms—saints, angels, God himself— was usually preferred above little man. Except the spiritual, nothing was regarded as of consequence. The principle of early painting might be summed in the proud saying, “On earth there is nothing great but man; in man there is nothing great but mind.” It is true when man is thus detached from nature he hardly appears to advantage or in his appropriate setting. But the early painters would tolerate nothing natural near their splendid persons. They covered their backgrounds with gilding, so that a glory surrounded the entire figure, throwing out the personality sharp and strong. Nothing broke its effect. But after all, one comes to see that we inhabit a world; nature is continually about us, and man really shows his eminence most fully when standing dominant over nature. Early painting, accordingly, began to set in a little landscape around the human figures, contrasting the person with that which was not himself. But an independent interest could not fail to spring up in these accessories. By degrees the landscape is elaborated and the figure subordinated. The figure is there by prescription, the landscape because people enjoy it. Nature begins to assert her claims; and man, the eminent and worthy representative of old ideals, retires from his ancient prominence.

When the Renaissance revolted against the teachings of the mediaeval church, the disposition to return to nature was insolently strong. Natural impulses were glorified, the physical world attracted attention, and even began to be studied. Hitherto it had been thought deserving of study only because in a few respects it was able to minister to man. But in the Renaissance men studied it for its own sake. Gradually the distinction between man and nature grew faint, so that a kind of pantheism arose in which a general power, at once natural and spiritual, appeared as the ruler of all. We individual men emerge for a moment from this great central power, ultimately relapsing into it. Nature had acquired coordinate, if not superior, rights. Yet the full expression of this independent interest in nature is more recent than is usually observed. Landscape painting goes back but little beyond the year sixteen hundred. It is only two or three centuries ago that painters discovered the physical world to be worthy of representation for its own sake.

As the worth of nature thus became vindicated in painting, parallel changes were wrought in the other arts. Arts less distinctly rational began to assert themselves, and even to take the lead. The art most characteristic of modern times, the one which most widely and poignantly appeals to us, is music. But in music we are not distinctly conscious of a meaning. Most of us in listening to music forget ourselves under its lulling charms, abandon ourselves to its spell, and by it are swept away, perhaps to the infinite, perhaps to an obliteration of all clear thought. Is it not largely because we are so hard pressed under the anxious conditions of modern life that music becomes such an enormous solace and strength? I do not say that no other factors have contributed to the vogue of music, but certainly it is widely prized as an effective means of escape from ourselves. Music too, though early known in calm and elementary forms, has within the last two centuries been developed into almost a new art.

Of all the arts poetry is the most strikingly rational and articulate. Its material is plain thought, plain words. We employ in it the apparatus of conscious life. Poetry was therefore concerned in early times entirely with things of the spirit. It dealt with persons, and with them alone. It celebrated epic actions, recorded sagacious judgments, or uttered in lyric song emotions primarily felt by an individual, yet interpreting the common lot of man. But there has occurred a great change in poetry too, a change notable during the last century but initiated long before. Poetry has been growing naturalistic, and is to−day disposed to reject all severance of body and spirit. The great

nature movement which we associate with the names of Cowper, Burns, and Wordsworth, has withdrawn man's attention from conscious responsibility, and has taught him to adore blind and vast forces which he cannot fully comprehend. We all know the refreshment and the deepening of life which this mystic new poetry has brought. But it is hard to say whether poetry is nowadays a spiritual or a natural art. Many of us would incline to the latter view, and would hold that even in dealing with persons it treats them as embodiments of natural forces. Our instincts and unguided passions, the features which most identify us with the physical world, are coming more and more to be the subjects of modern poetry.

IV

Nature, meanwhile, that part of the universe which is not consciously guided, has become within a century our favorite field of scientific study. The very word science is popularly appropriated to naturalistic investigation. Of course this is a perversion. Originally it was believed that the proper study of mankind was man. And probably we should all still acknowledge that the study of personal structure is as truly science as study of the structure of physical objects. Yet so powerfully is the tide setting toward reverence for the unconscious and the sub−conscious that science, our word for knowledge, has lost its universality and has taken on an almost exclusively physical character.

Perhaps there was only one farther step possible. Philosophy itself, the study of mind, might be regarded as a study of the unconscious. And this step has been taken. Books now bear the paradoxical title “Philosophy of the Unconscious,” and investigation of the sub−conscious processes is perhaps the most distinctive trait of philosophy to−day. More and more it is believed that we cannot adequately explore a person without probing beneath consciousness. The blind processes can no longer be ruled out. Nature and spirit cannot be parted as our fathers supposed they might. Probably Kant is the last great scholar who will ever try to hold that distinction firm, and he is hardly successful. In spite of his vigorous antitheses, hints of covert connection between the opposed forces are not absent. Indeed, if the two are so widely parted as his usual language asserts, it is hard to see how his ethics can have mundane worth. Curiously enough too, at the very time when Kant was reviving this ancient distinction, and offering it as the solid basis of personal and social life, the opposite belief received its most clamorous announcement, resounding through the civilized world in the teachings of Rousseau. Rousseau warns us that the conscious constructions of man are full of artifice and deceit, and lead to corruption and pain. Conscious guidance should, consequently, be banished, and man should return to the peace, the ease, and the certainty of nature.

V

Now I do not think it is worth while to blame or praise a movement so vast as this. If it is folly to draw an indictment against a nation, it is greater folly to indict all modern civilization. We must not say that philosophy and the fine arts took a wrong turn at the Renaissance,—at least it is useless to call on them now to turn back. The world seldom turns back. It absorbs, it re−creates, it brings new significance into the older thought. All progress, Goethe tells us, is spiral,—coming out at the place where it was before, but higher up. No, we cannot wisely blame or praise, but we may patiently study and understand. That is what I am attempting to do here. The movement described is no negligible accident of our time. It is world−wide, and shows progress steadily in a single direction.

In order, however, to prove that such a change in moral estimates has occurred, it was hardly necessary to survey the course of history. The evidence lies close around us, and is found in the standards of the society in which we move. Who are the people most prized? Are they the most self−conscious? That should be the case if our long argument is sound. Our preceding chapters would urge us to fill life with consciousness. In proportion as consciousness droops, human goodness becomes meagre; as our acts are filled with it, they grow excellent. These are our theoretic conclusions, but the experience of daily life does not bear them out. If, for example, I find the person who is talking to me watches each word he utters, pauses again and again for correction, choosing the determined word and rejecting the one which instinctively comes to his lips, I do not trust what he says, or even listen to it; while he is shaping his exact sentences I attend to something else. In general, if a man's small actions impress us as minutely planned, we turn from him. It is not the self−reflecting persons, cautious of all they do, say, or think, who are popular. It is rather those instinctively spontaneous creatures characterized by abandon—men and women who let themselves go, and with all the wealth of the world in them, allow it to come out of itself—that we take to our hearts. We prize them for their want of deliberation. In short, we give our unbiased endorsement not to the spiritual or consciously guided person, but to him, on the contrary, who shows the closest adjustment to nature.

VI

Yet even so, we have gone too far afield for evidence. First we surveyed the ages, then we surveyed one another. But there is one proof−spot nearer still. Let us survey ourselves. I am much mistaken if there are not among my readers persons who have all their lives suffered from self−consciousness. They have longed to be rid of it, to be free to think of the other person, of the matter in hand. Instead of this, their thoughts are forever reverting to their own share in any affair. Too contemptible to be avowed, and more distressing than almost any other species of suffering, excessive self−consciousness shames us with our selfishness, yet will not allow us to turn from it. When I go into company where everybody is spontaneous and free, easily uttering what the occasion calls for, I can utter only what I call for and not at all what the occasion asks. Between the two demands there is always an awkward jar. When tortured by such experiences it does not soothe to have others carelessly remark, “Oh, just be natural!” That is precisely what we should like to be, but how? That little point is continually left unexplained. Yet obviously self− consciousness involves something like a deadlock. For how can one consciously exert himself to be unconscious and try not to try? We cannot arrange our lives so as to have no arrangement in them, and when shaking hands with a friend, for example, be on our guard against noticing. Once locked up in this vicious circle, we seem destined to be prisoners forever. That is what constitutes the anguish of the situation. The most tyrannical of jailers—one's self—is over us, and from his bondage we are powerless to escape. The trouble is by no means peculiar to our time, though probably commoner forty years ago than at any other period of the world's history. But it had already attracted the attention of Shakespeare, who bases on it one of his greatest plays. When Hamlet would act, self−consciousness stands in his way. The hindering process is described in the famous soliloquy with astonishing precision and vividness, if only we substitute our modern term “self−consciousness” for that which was its ancient equivalent:—

> “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action.”

And such is our experience. We, too, have purposed all manner of important and serviceable acts; but just as we were setting them in execution, consideration fell upon us. We asked whether it was the proper moment, whether he to whom it was to be done was really needy, or were we the fit doer, or should it be done in this way or that. We hesitated, and the moment was gone. Self−consciousness had again demonstrated its incompetence for superintending a task. Many of us, far from regarding self−consciousness as a ground of goodness, are disposed to look upon it as a curse.

VII

Before, however, attempting to discover whether our theoretic conclusions may he drawn into some sort of living accord with these results of experience, let us probe a little more minutely into these latter, and try to learn what reasons there may be for this very general distrust of self−consciousness as a guide. Hitherto I have exhibited that distrust as a fact. We always find it so; our neighbors find it so, the ages have found it so. But why? I have not pointed out precisely the reasons for the continual fact. Let me devote a page or two to rational diagnosis.

To begin with, I suppose it will be conceded that we really cannot guide ourselves through and through. There are certain large tracts of life totally unamenable to consciousness.

Of our two most important acts, and those by which the remaining ones are principally affected, birth and death, the one is necessarily removed from conscious guidance, and the other is universally condemned if so guided. We do not—as we have previously seen—happen to be present at our birth, and so are quite cut off from controlling that. Yet the conditions of birth very considerably shape everything else in life. We cannot, then, be purely spiritual; it is impossible. We must be natural beings at our beginning; and at the other end the state of things is largely similar, for we are not allowed to fix the time of our departure. The Stoics were. “If the house smokes,” they said, “leave it.” When life is no longer worth while, depart. But Christianity will not allow this. Death must be a natural affair, not a spiritual. I am to wait till a wandering bacillus alights in my lung. He will provide a suitable exit for me. But neither I nor my neighbors must decide my departure. Let laws of nature reign.

And if these two tremendous events are altogether removed from conscious guidance, many others are but slightly amenable to it. The great organic processes both of mind and body are only indirectly, or to a partial extent, under the control of consciousness. A few persons, I believe, can voluntarily suspend the beating of their hearts. They are hardly to be envied. The majority of us let our hearts alone, and they work better than if we tried to work them. Though it is true that we can control our breathing, and that we occasionally do so, this also in general we wisely leave to natural processes. A similar state of affairs we find when we turn to the mind itself. The association of ideas, that curious process by which one thought sticks to another and through being thus linked draws after it material for use in all our intellectual constructions, goes on for the most part unguided. It would be plainly useless, therefore, to treat our great distinction as something hard and fast. Nature and spirit may be contrasted; they cannot be sundered. Spirit removed from nature would become impotent, while nature would then proceed on a meaningless career.

Then too there are all sorts of degrees in consciousness. No man was ever so conscious of himself and his acts that he could not be more so. When introspection is causing us our sharpest distress, it may still be rendered more minute. That is one cause of its peculiar anguish. We are always uncertain whether our troubles have not arisen from too little self−consciousness, and we whip ourselves into greater nicety and elaborateness of personal observation. Varying through a multitude of degrees, the fullness of consciousness is never reached. A more thorough exercise of it is always possible. At the last, nature must be admitted as a partner in the control of our lives, and her share in that partnership the present age believes to be a large one.

VIII

For could we always consciously steer our conduct, we should be unwise to do so. Consciousness hinders action. Acts are excellent in proportion as they are sure, swift, and easy. When we undertake anything, we seek to do exactly that thing, reach precisely that end, and not merely to hit something in the neighborhood. Occasions, too, run fast, and should be seized on the minute. Action is excellent only when it meets the urgent and evasive demands of life. Faltering and hesitation are fatal. Nor must action unduly weary. Good conduct effects its results with the least necessary expenditure of effort. When there are so many demands pressing upon us, we should not allow ourselves to become exhausted by a single act, but should keep ourselves fresh for further needs. Efficient action, then, is sure, swift, and easy.

Now the peculiarity of self−consciousness is that it hinders all this and makes action inaccurate, slow, and fatiguing. Inaccuracy is almost certain. When we study how something is to be done, we are apt to lay stress on certain features of the situation, and not to bring others into due prominence. It is difficult separately to correlate the many elements which go to make up a desired result. Sometimes we become altogether puzzled and for the moment the action ceases. When I have had occasion to drive a screw in some unusual and inconvenient place, after setting the blade of the screw−driver into the slot I have asked myself, “In which direction does this screw turn?” But the longer I ask, the more uncertain I am. My only solution lies in trusting my hand, which knows a great deal more about the matter than I. When we once begin to meditate how a word is spelled, how helpless we are! It is better to drop the question, and pick up the dictionary. In all such cases consideration tends to confuse.

It tends to delay, too, as everybody knows. To survey all the relations in which a given act may stand, to balance their relative gains and losses, and with full sight to decide on the course which offers the greatest profit, would require the years of Methuselah. But at what point shall we cut the process short? To obtain full knowledge, we should pass in review all that relates to the act we propose; should inquire what its remoter consequences will be, and how it will affect not merely myself, my cousin, my great−grandchild, but the man in the next street, city, or state. There is no stopping. To carry conscious verification over a moderate range is slow business. If on the impulse of occasion we dash off an action unreflectingly, life will be swift and simple. If we try to anticipate all consequences of our task it will be slow and endless.

Nor need I dwell on the fatigue such conscious work involves. In writing a letter, we usually sit down before our paper, our minds occupied with what we would say. We allow our fingers to stroll of themselves across the page, and we hardly notice whether they move or not. If anybody should ask, “How did you write the letter *s?*” we should be obliged to look on the paper to see. But suppose, instead of writing in this way, I come to the task to−morrow determined to superintend all the work consciously. How shall I hold my pen in the best possible manner? How shape this letter so that each of its curves gets its exact bulge? How give the correct slant to what is above or below the line? I will not ask how long a time a letter prepared in this fashion would require, or whether when written it would be fit to read, for I wish to fix attention on the exhaustion of the writer. He certainly could endure such fatigue for no more than a single epistle. The schoolboy, when forced to it, seldom holds out for more than half a page, though he employs every contortion of shoulder, tongue, and leg to ease and diversify the struggle.

A dozen years ago some nonsense verses were running through the papers,—verses pointing out with humorous precision the very infelicities of conscious control to which I am now directing attention. They put the case thus:—

“The centipede was happy, quite,
Until the toad for fun
Said, 'Pray which leg comes after which?'
This worked her mind to such a pitch
She lay distracted in a ditch,
Considering how to run.”

And no wonder! Problems so complex as this should be left to the disposal of nature, and not be drawn over into the region of spiritual guidance. But the complexities of the centipede are simple matters when compared

with the elaborate machinery of man. The human mind offers more alternatives in a minute than does the centipede in a lifetime. If spiritual guidance is inadequate to the latter, and is found merely to hinder action, why is not the blind control of nature necessary for the former also? Our age believes it is and, ever disparaging the conscious world, attaches steadily greater consequence to the unconscious. “It is the unintelligent me,” writes Dr. O. W. Holmes, “stupid as an idiot, that has to try a thing a thousand times before he can do it and then never knows how he does it, that at last does it well. We have to educate ourselves through the pretentious claims of intellect into the humble accuracy of instinct; and we end at last by acquiring the dexterity, the perfection, the certainty which those masters of arts, the bee and the spider, inherit from nature.”

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VII. THE THREE STAGES OF GOODNESS

I

Such is the mighty argument conducted through several centuries in behalf of nature against spirit as a director of conduct. I have stated it at length both because of its own importance and because it is in seeming conflict with the results of my early chapters. But those results stand fast. They were reached with care. To reject them would be to obliterate all distinction between persons and things. Self−consciousness is the indisputable prerogative of persons. Only so far as we possess it and apply it in action do we rise above the impersonal world around. And even if we admit the contention in behalf of nature as substantially sound, we are not obliged to accept it as complete. It may be that neither nature nor spirit can be dispensed with in the supply of human needs. Each may have its characteristic office; for though in the last chapter I have been setting forth the superiorities of natural guidance, in spiritual guidance there are advantages too, advantages of an even more fundamental kind. Let us see what they are.

They may be summarily stated in a single sentence: consciousness alone gives fresh initiative. Disturbing as the influence of consciousness confessedly is, on its employment depends every possibility of progress. Natural action is regular, constant, conformed to a pattern. In the natural world event follows event in a fixed order, Under the same conditions the same result appears an indefinite number of times. The most objectionable form of this rigidity is found in mechanism. I sometimes hear ladies talking about “real lace” and am on such occasions inclined to speak of my real boots. They mean, I find, not lace that is the reverse of ghostly, but simply that which bears the impress of personality. It is lace which is made by hand and shows the marks of hand work. Little irregularities are in it, contrasting it with the machine sort, where every piece is identical with every other piece. It might be more accurately called personal lace. The machine kind is no less real—unfortunately—but mechanism is hopelessly dull, says the same thing day after day, and never can say anything else.

Now though this coarse form of monotonous process nowhere appears in what we call the world of nature, a restriction substantially similar does; for natural objects vary slowly and within the narrowest limits. Outside such orderly variations, they are subjected to external and distorting agencies effecting changes in them regardless of their gains. Branches of trees have their wayward and subtle curvatures, and are anything but mechanical in outline. But none the less are they helpless, unprogressive, and incapable of learning. The forces which play upon them, being various, leave a truly varied record. But each of these forces was an invariable one, and their several influences cannot be sorted, judged, and selected by the tree with reference to its future growth. Criticism and choice have no place here, and accordingly anything like improvement from year to year is impossible.

The case of us human beings would be the same if we were altogether managed by the sure, swift, and easy forces of nature. Progress would cease. We should move on our humdrum round as fixedly constituted, as submissive to external influence, and with as little exertion of intelligence as the dumb objects we behold. Every power within us would be actual, displayed in its full extent, and involving no variety of future possibility. We should live altogether in the present, and no changes would be imagined or sought. From this dull routine we are saved by the admixture of consciousness. For a gain so great we may well be ready to encounter those difficulties of conscious guidance which my last chapter detailed. Let the process of advance be inaccurate, slow, and severe, so only there be advance. For progress no cost is too great. I am sometimes inclined to congratulate those who are acute sufferers through self−consciousness, because to them the door of the future is open. The instinctive, uncritical person, who takes life about as it comes, and with ready acceptance responds promptly to every suggestion that calls, may be as popular as the sunshine, but he is as incapable of further advance. Except in attractiveness, such a one is usually in later life about what he was in youth; for progress is a product of forecasting intelligence. When any new creation is to be introduced, only consciousness can prepare its path.

Evidently, then, there are strong advantages in guidance through the spirit. But natural guidance has advantages no less genuine. Human life is a complex and demanding affair, requiring for its ever− enlarging good whatever strength can be summoned from every side. Probably we must abandon that magnificent conception of our ancestors, that spirit is all in all and nature unimportant. But must we, in deference to the temper of our time, eliminate conscious guidance altogether? May not the disparagement of recent ages have arisen in reaction against attempts to push conscious guidance into regions where it is unsuitable? Conceivably the two agencies may be

supplementary. Possibly we may call on our fellow of the natural world for aid in spiritual work. The complete ideal, at any rate, of good conduct unites the swiftness, certainty, and ease of natural action with the selective progressiveness of spiritual. Till such a combination is found, either conduct will be insignificant or great distress of self−consciousness will be incurred. Both of these evils will be avoided if nature can be persuaded to do the work which we clearly intend. That is what goodness calls on us to effect. To showing the steps through which it may be reached the remainder of this chapter will be given.

II

Let us, then, take a case of action where we are trying to create a new power, to develop ourselves in some direction in which we have not hitherto gone. For such an undertaking consciousness is needed, but let us see how far we are able to hand over its work to unconsciousness. Suppose, when entirely ignorant of music, I decide to learn to play the piano. Evidently it will require the minutest watchfulness. Approaching the strange instrument with some uneasiness, I try to secure exactly that position on the stool which will allow my arms their proper range along the keyboard. There is difficulty in getting my sheet of music to stand as it should. When it is adjusted, I examine it anxiously. What is that little mark? Probably the note C. Among these curious keys there must also be a C. I look up and down. There it is! But can I bring my finger down upon it at just the right angle? That is accomplished, and gradually note after note is captured, until I have conquered the entire score. If now during my laborious performance a friend enters the room, he might well say, “I do not like spiritual music. Give me the natural kind which is not consciously directed.” But let him return three years later. He will find me sitting at the piano quite at my ease, tossing off notes by the unregarded handful. He approaches and enters into conversation with me. I do not cease my playing; but as I talk, I still keep my mind free enough to observe the swaying boughs outside the window and to enjoy the fragrance of the flowers which my friend has brought. The musical phrases which drop from my fingers appear to regulate themselves and to call for little conscious regard.

Yet if my friend should try to show me how mistaken I had been in the past, attempting to manage consciously what should have been left to nature, if he should eulogize my natural action now and contrast it with my former awkwardness, he would plainly be in error. My present naturalness is the result of long spiritual endeavor, and cannot be had on cheaper terms; and the unconsciousness which is now noticeable in me is not the same thing as that which was with me when I began to play. It is true the incidental hardships connected with my first attack on the piano have ceased. I find myself in possession of a new and seemingly unconscious power. An automatic train of movements has been constructed which I now direct as a whole, its parts no longer requiring special volitional prompting. But I still direct it, only that a larger unit has been constituted for consciousness to act upon. The naturalness which thus becomes possible is accordingly of an altogether new sort; and since the result is a completer expression of conscious intention, it may as truly be called spiritual as natural.

III

It has now become plain that our early reckoning of actions as either natural or spiritual was too simple and incomplete. Conduct has three stages, not two. Let us get them clearly in mind. At the beginning of life we are at the beck and call of every impulse, not having yet attained reflective command of ourselves. This first stage we may rightly call that of nature or of unconsciousness, and manifestly most of us continue in it to some extent and as regards certain tracts of action throughout life. Then reflection is aroused; we become aware of what we are doing. The many details of each act and the relations which surround it come separately into conscious attention for assessment, approval, or rejection. This is the stage of spirit, or consciousness. But it is not the final stage. As we have seen in our example, a stage is possible when action runs swiftly to its intended end, but with little need of conscious supervision. This mechanized, purposeful action presents conduct in its third stage, that of second nature or negative consciousness. As this third is least understood, is often confused with the first, and yet is in reality the complete expression of the moral ideal and of that reconciliation of nature and spirit of which we are in search, I will devote a few pages to its explanation.

The phrase negative consciousness describes its character most exactly, though the meaning is not at once apparent. Positive consciousness marks the second stage. There we are obliged to think of each point involved, in order to bring it into action. In piano− playing, for example, I had to study my seat at the piano, the music on the rack, the letters of the keyboard, the position of my fingers, and the coordination of all these with one another. To each such matter a separate and positive attention is given. But even at the last, when I am playing at my ease, we cannot say that consciousness is altogether absent. I am conscious of the harmony, and if I do not direct, I still verify results. As an entire phrase of music rolls off my rapid fingers, I judge it to be good. But if one of the notes sticks, or I perceive that the phrase might be improved by a slightly changed stress, I can check my spontaneous movements and correct the error. There is therefore a watchful, if not a prompting, consciousness at work. It is true that, the first note started, all the others follow of themselves in natural sequence. Though I withdraw attention from my fingers, they run their round as a part of the associated train. But if they go awry, consciousness is ready with its inhibition. I accordingly call this the stage of negative consciousness. In it consciousness is not employed as a positive guiding force, but the moment inhibition or check is required for reaching the intended result, consciousness is ready and asserts itself in the way of forbiddal. This third stage, therefore, differs from the first through having its results embody a conscious purpose; from the second, through having consciousness superintend the process in a negative and hindering, rather than in a positive and prompting way. It is the stage of habit. I call it second nature because it is worked, not by original instincts, but by a new kind of associative mechanism which must first be laboriously constructed.

Years ago when I began to teach at Harvard College, we used to regard our students as roaring animals, likely to destroy whatever came in their way. We instructors were warned to keep the doors of our lecture rooms barred. As we came out, we must never fail to lock them. So always in going to a lecture, as I passed through the stone entry and approached the door my hand sought my pocket, the key came out, was inserted in the keyhole, turned, was withdrawn, fell back into my pocket, and I entered the room. This series of acts repeated day after day had become so mechanized that if on entering the room I had been asked whether on that particular day I had really unlocked the door, I could not have told. The train took care of itself and I was not concerned in it sufficiently for remembrance. Yet it remained my act. On one or two occasions, after shoving in the key in my usual unconscious fashion, I heard voices in the room and knew that it would be inappropriate to enter. Instantly I stopped and checked the remainder of the train. Habitual though the series of actions was, and ordinarily executed without conscious guidance, it as a whole was aimed at a definite end. If this were unattainable, the train stopped.

All are aware how large a part is played by such mechanization of conduct. Without it, life could not go on. When a man walks to the door, he does not decide where to set his foot, what shall be the length of his step, how he shall maintain his balance on the foot that is down while the other is raised. These matters were decided when he was a child. In those infant years which seem to us intellectually so stationary, a human being is probably making as large acquisitions as at any period of his later life. He is testing alternatives and organizing experience into ordered trains. But in the rest of us a consolidation substantially similar should be going on in some section of

our experience as long as we live. For this is the way we develop: not the total man at once, but this year one tract of conduct is surveyed, judged, mechanized; and next year another goes through the same maturing process. Not until such mechanization has been accomplished is the conduct truly ours. When, for example, I am winning the power of speech, I gradually cease to study exactly the word I utter, the tone in which it is enunciated, how my tongue, lips, and teeth shall be adjusted in reference to one another. While occupied with these things, I am no speaker. I become such only when, the moment I think of a word, the actions needed for its utterance set themselves in motion. With them I have only a negative concern. Indeed, as we grow maturer of speech, collocations of words stick naturally together and offer themselves to our service. When we require a certain range of words from which to draw our means of communication, there they stand ready. We have no need to rummage the dimness of the past for them. Mechanically they are prepared for our service.

Of course this does not imply that at one period we foolishly believed consciousness to be an important guide, but subsequently becoming wiser, discarded its aid. On the contrary, the mechanization of second nature is simply a mode of extending the influence of consciousness more widely. The conclusions of our early lectures were sound. The more fully expressive conduct can be of a self−conscious personality, so much the more will it deserve to be called good. But in order that it may in any wide extent receive this impress of personal life, we must summon to our aid agencies other than spiritual. The more we mechanize conduct the better. That is what maturing ourselves means. When we say that a man has acquired character, we mean that he has consciously surveyed certain large tracts of life, and has decided what in those regions it is best to do. There, at least, he will no longer need to deliberate about action. As soon as a case from this region presents itself, some electric button in his moral organism is touched, and the whole mechanism runs off in the surest, swiftest, easiest possible way. Thus his consciousness is set free to busy itself with other affairs. For in this third stage we do not so much abandon consciousness as direct it upon larger units; and this not because smaller units do not deserve attention, but because they have been already attended to. Once having decided what is our best mode of action in regard to them, we wisely turn them over to mechanical control.

IV

Such is the nature of moral habit. Before goodness can reach excellence, it must be rendered habitual. Consideration, the mark of the second stage, disappears in the third. We cannot count a person honest so long as he has to decide on each occasion whether to take advantage of his neighbor. Long ago he should have disciplined himself into machine−like action as regards these matters, so that the dishonest opportunity would be instinctively and instantly dismissed, the honest deed appearing spontaneously. That man has not an amiable character who is obliged to restrain his irritation, and through all excitement and inner rage curbs himself courageously. Not until conduct is spontaneous, rooted in a second nature, does it indicate the character of him from whom it proceeds.

That unconsciousness is necessary for the highest goodness is a cardinal principle in the teaching of Jesus. Other teachers of his nation undertook clearly to survey the entirety of human life, to classify its situations and coolly to decide the amount of good and evil contained in each. Righteousness according to the Pharisees was found in conscious conformity to these decisions. Theirs was the method of casuistry, the method of minute, critical, and instructed judgment. The fields of morality and the law were practically identified, goodness becoming externalized and regarded as everywhere substantially the same for one man as for another. Pharisaism, in short, stuck in the second stage. Jesus emphasized the unconscious and subjective factor. He denounced the considerate conduct of the Pharisees as not righteousness at all. It was mere will−worship. Jesus preached a religion of the heart, and taught that righteousness must become an individual passion, similar to the passions of hunger and thirst, if it would attain to any worth. So long as evil is easy and natural for us, and good difficult, we are evil. We must be born again. We must attain a new nature. Our right hand must not know what our left hand does. We must become as little children, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The chief difficulty in comprehending this doctrine of the three stages lies in the easy confusion of the first and the third. Jesus guards against this, not bidding us to be or to remain children, but to become such. The unconsciousness and simplicity of childhood is the goal, not the starting−point. The unconsciousness aimed at is not of the same kind as that with which we set out. In early life we catch the habits of our home or even derive our conduct from hereditary bias. We begin, therefore, as purely natural creatures, not asking whether the ways we use are the best. Those ways are already fixed in the usages of speech, the etiquettes of society, the laws of our country. These things make up the uncriticised warp and woof of our lives, often admirably beautiful lives. When speaking in my last chapter of the way in which our age has come to eulogize guidance by natural conditions, I might have cited as a striking illustration the prevalent worship of childhood. Only within the last century has the child cut much of a figure in literature. He is an important enough figure to−day, both in and out of books. In him nature is displayed within the spiritual field, nature with the possibilities of spirit, but those possibilities not yet realized. We accordingly reverence the child and delight to watch him. How charming he is, graceful in movement, swift of speech, picturesque in action! Enviable little being! The more so because he is able to retain his perfection for so brief a time.

But we all know the unhappy period from seven to fourteen when he who formerly was all grace and spontaneity discovers that he has too many arms and legs. How disagreeable the boy then becomes! Before, we liked to see him playing about the room. Now we ask why he is allowed to remain. For he is a ceaseless disturber; constantly noisy and constantly aware of making a noise, his excuses are as bad as his indiscretions. He cannot speak without making some awkward blunder. He is forever asking questions without knowing what to do with the answers. A confused and confusing creature! We say he has grown backward. Where before he was all that is estimable, he has become all that we do not wish him to be.

All that *we* do not wish him to be, but certainly much more what God wishes him to be. For if we could get rid of our sense of annoyance, we should see that he is here reaching a higher stage, coming into his heritage and obtaining a life of his own. Formerly he lived merely the life of those about him. He laid a self−conscious grasp on nothing of his own. When now at length he does lay that grasp, we must permit him to be awkward, and to us disagreeable. We should aid him through the inaccurate, slow, and fatiguing period of his existence until, having tested many tracts of life and learned in them how to mechanize desirable conduct, he comes back on their farther side to a childhood more beautiful than the original. Many a man and woman possesses this disciplined childhood

through life. Goodness seems the very atmosphere they breathe, and everything they do to be exactly fitting. Their acts are performed with full self−expression, yet without strut or intrusion of consciousness. Whatever comes from them is happily blended and organized into the entirety of life. Such should be our aim. We should seek to be born again, and not to remain where we were originally born.

V

In what has now been said there is a good deal of comfort for those who suffer the pains of self−consciousness, previously described. They need not seek a lower degree of self−consciousness, but only to distribute more wisely what they now possess. In fullness of consciousness they may well rejoice, recognizing its possession as a power. But they should take a larger unit for its exercise. In meeting a friend, for example, we are prone to think of ourselves, how we are speaking or poising our body. But suppose we transfer our consciousness to the subject of our talk, and allow ourselves a hearty interest in that. Leaving the details of speech and posture to mechanized past habits, we may turn all the force of our conscious attention on the fresh issues of the discussion. With these we may identify ourselves, and so experience the enlargement which new materials bring. When we were studying the intricacies of self− sacrifice, we found that the generous man is not so much the self− denier or even the self−forgetter, but rather he who is mindful of his larger self. He turns consciousness from his abstract and isolated self and fixes it upon his related and conjunct self. But that is a process which may go on everywhere. Our rule should be to withdraw attention from isolated minutiae, for which a glance is sufficient. Giving merely that glance, we may then leave them to themselves. Encouraging them to become mechanized, we should use these mechanized trains in the higher ranges of living. The cure for self−consciousness is not suppression, but the turning of it upon something more significant.

VI

Every habit, however, requires perpetual adjustment, or it may rule us instead of allowing us instead to rule through it. We do well to let alone our mechanized trains while they do not lead us into evil. So long as they run in the right direction, instincts are better than intentions. But repeatedly we need to study results,—and see if we are arriving at the goal where we would be. If not, then habit requires readjustment. From such negative control a habit should never be allowed to escape. This great world of ours does not stand still. Every moment its conditions are altering. Whatever action fits it now will be pretty sure to be a slight misfit next year. No one can be thoroughly good who is not a flexible person, capable of drawing back his trains, reexamining them, and bringing them into better adjustment to his purposes.

It is meaningless, then, to ask whether we should be intuitive and spontaneous, or considerate and deliberate. There is no such alternative. We need both dispositions. We should seek to attain a condition of swift spontaneity, of abounding freedom, of the absence of all restraint, and should not rest satisfied with the conditions in which we were born. But we must not suffer that even the new nature should be allowed to become altogether natural. It should be but the natural engine for spiritual ends, itself repeatedly scrutinized with a view to their better fulfillment.

VII

The doctrine of the three stages of conduct, elaborated in this chapter, explains some curious anomalies in the bestowal of praise, and at the same time receives from that doctrine farther elucidation. When is conduct praiseworthy? When may we fairly claim honor from our fellows and ourselves? There is a ready answer. Nothing is praiseworthy which is not the result of effort. I do not praise a lady for her beauty, I admire her. The athlete's splendid body I envy, wishing that mine were like it. But I do not praise him. Or does the reader hesitate; and while acknowledging that admiration and envy may be our leading feelings here, think that a certain measure of praise is also due? It may be. Perhaps the lady has been kind enough by care to heighten her beauty. Perhaps those powerful muscles are partly the result of daily discipline. These persons, then, are not undeserving of praise, at least to the extent that they have used effort. Seeing a collection of china, I admire the china, but praise the collector. It is hard to obtain such pieces. Large expense is required, long training too, and constant watchfulness. Accordingly I am interested in more than the collection. I give praise to the owner. A learned man we admire, honor, envy, but also praise. His wisdom is the result of effort.

Plainly, then, praise and blame are attributable exclusively to spiritual beings. Nature is unfit for honor. We may admire her, may wish that our ways were like hers, and envy her great law−abiding calm. But it would be foolish to praise her, or even to blame when her volcanoes overwhelm our friends. We praise spirit only, conscious deeds. Where self−directed action forces its path to a worthy goal, we rightly praise the director.

Now, if all this is true, there seems often−times a strange unsuitableness in praise. We may well decline to receive it. To praise some of our good qualities, pretty fundamental ones too, often strikes us as insulting. You are asked a sudden question and put in a difficult strait for an answer. “Yes,” I say, “but you actually did tell the truth. I wish to congratulate you. You were successful and deserve much praise.” But who would feel comfortable under such eulogy? And why not? If telling the truth is a spiritual excellence and the result of effort, why should it not be praised? But there lies the trouble. I assumed that to be a truth−teller required strain on your part. In reality it would have required greater strain for falsehood. It might then seem that I should praise those who are not easily excellent, since I am forbidden to praise those who are. And something like this seems actually approved. If a boy on the street, who has been trained hardly to distinguish truth from lies, some day stumbles into a bit of truth, I may justly praise him. “Splendid fellow! No word of falsehood there!” But when I see the father of his country bearing his little hatchet, praise is unfit; for George Washington cannot tell a lie.

Absurd as this conclusion appears, I believe it states our soundest moral judgment; for praise never escapes an element of disparagement. It implies that the unexpected has happened. If I praise a man for learning, it is because I had supposed him ignorant; if for helping the unfortunate, I hint that I did not anticipate that he would regard any but himself. Wherever praise appears, we cannot evade the suggestion that excellence is a matter of surprise. And as nobody likes to be thought ill−adapted to excellence, praise may rightly be resented.

It is true, there is a group of cases where praise seems differently employed. We can praise those whom we recognize as high and lifted up. “Sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises,” the Psalmist says. And our hearts respond. We feel it altogether appropriate. We do not disparage God by daily praise. No, but the element of disparagement is still present, for we are really disparaging ourselves. That is the true significance of praise offered to the confessedly great. For them, the praise is inappropriate. But it is, nevertheless, appropriate that it should be offered by us little people who stand below and look up. Praising the wise man, I really declare my ignorance to be so great that I have difficulty in conceiving myself in his place. For me, it would require long years of forbidding work before I could attain to his wisdom. And even in the extreme form of this praise of superiors, substantially the same meaning holds. We praise God in order to abase ourselves. Him we cannot really praise. That we understand at the start. He is beyond commendation. Excellence covers him like a garment, and is not attained, like ours, by struggle through obstacles. Yet this difference between him and us we can only express by trying to imagine ourselves like him, and saying how difficult such excellence would then be. We have here, therefore, a sort of reversed praise, where the disparagement which praise always carries falls exclusively on the praiser. And such cases are by no means uncommon, cases in which there is at least a pretense on the praiser's part of setting himself below the one praised. But praise usually proceeds down from above, and then, implicitly, we

disparage him whom we profess to exalt.

Nor do I see how this is to be avoided; for praise belongs to goodness gained by effort, while excellence is not reached till effort ceases in second nature. To assert through praise that goodness is still a struggle is to set the good man back from our third stage to our second. In fact by the time he really reaches excellence praise has lost its fitness, goodness now being easier than badness, and no longer something difficult, unexpected, and demanding reward. For this reason those persons are usually most greedy of praise who have a rather low opinion of themselves. Being afraid that they are not remarkable, they are peculiarly delighted when people assure them that they are. Accordingly the greatest protection against vanity is pride. The proud man, assured of his powers, hears the little praisers and is amused. How much more he knows about it than they! Inner worth stops the greedy ear. When we have something to be vain about, we are seldom vain.

VIII

But if all this is true, why should praise be sweet? In candor most of us will own that there is little else so desired. When almost every other form of dependence is laid by, to our secret hearts the good words of neighbors are dear. And well they may be! Our pleasure testifies how closely we are knitted together. We cannot be satisfied with a separated consciousness, but demand that the consciousness of all shall respond to our own. A glorious infirmity then! And the peculiar sweetness which praise brings is grounded in the consciousness of our weakness. In certain regions of my life, it is true, goodness has become fairly natural; and there of course praise strikes me as ill−adjusted and distasteful. I do not like to have my manners praised, my honesty, or my diligence. But there are other tracts where I know I am still in the stage of conscious effort. In this extensive region, aware of my feebleness and hearing an inward call to greater heights, it will always be cheering to hear those about me say, “Well done!” Of course in saying this they will inevitably hint that I have not yet reached an end, and their praises will displease unless I too am ready to acknowledge my incompleteness. But when this is acknowledged, praise is welcome and invigorating. I suspect we deal in it too little. If imagination were more active, and we were more willing to enter sympathetically the inner life of our struggling and imperfect comrades, we should bestow it more liberally. Occasion is always at hand. None of us ever quite passes beyond the deliberate, conscious, and praise−deserving line. In some parts of our being we are farther advanced, and may there be experiencing the peace and assurance of a considerable second nature. But there too perpetual verification is necessary. And so many tracts remain unsubdued or capable of higher cultivation that throughout our lives, perhaps on into eternity, effort will still find room for work, and suitable praises may attend it.

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