

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF ETHICS.

The evolutionary point of view has had more than one important result for philosophical thought. Not the least important among these has been the conception of the evolution of evolution. Not only can we trace in the history of thought the evolution of the conception of evolution, but we find ourselves with a consciousness which we conceive of as evolved; the contents and the forms of these contents can be looked upon as the products of development. Among these contents and forms are found the temporal and spatial qualities of things, of the world. The very time process as well as the space of the universe lies in experience which is itself presented as the result of an evolution that arises in and through spatial conditions, which is first and foremost a temporal process.

The peculiarity of this situation lies in the fact that the involution appears in the immediate findings of science. Our

^a Winslow Hall, "Applied Religion," p. 122.

geological and biological sciences unhesitatingly present epochs antedating man in terms of man's consciousness, and biology and scientific psychology as unhesitatingly present that consciousness as an evolution within which all the distinctions must be explained by the same general laws as those which are appealed to to account for animal organs and functions. It is true that occasionally a scientist such as Poincaré recognizes that even the number system, as well as Euclidean space, is but a construction which has arisen and maintained itself because of its practical advantages, though we can draw no conclusions from these practical advantages to their metaphysical reality. If this position be generalized, there results the conception of an evolution within which the environment—that which our science has presented as a fixed datum in its physical nature—has been evolved as well as the form which has adapted itself to that environment; that the space within which evolution has taken place has arisen by the same laws; that the very time which makes an evolution presentable has arisen in like manner. Now, to a certain extent the conception of an evolution of environment as well as of the form has domesticated itself within our biological science. It has become evident that an environment can exist for a form only in so far as the environment answers to the susceptibilities of the organism; that the organism determines thus its own environment; that the effect of every adaptation is a new environment which must change with that which responds to it. The full recognition, however, that form and environment must be phases that answer to each other, character for character, appears in ethical theory.

In a certain sense this is found in the statement which genetic psychology makes of the development of the consciousness of the individual. Here there can be no evolution of the intelligence except in so far as the child's world answers to increased powers of conscious control. The world and the individual must keep pace with each other in the life history of the individual. But the child comes into a world which receives him as a child. The world of the adult,

from the point of view of descriptive psychology, is an independent environment within which the child and his world evolve. Within the field of ethics, on the other hand, the moral individual and his world cannot consistently be presented as themselves lying inside another moral field. The growth of moral consciousness must be coterminous with that of the moral situation. The moral life lies in the interaction of these two; the situation rises up in accusation of the moral personality which is unequal to it, and the personality rises to the situation only by a process which reconstructs the situation as profoundly as it reconstructs the self. No man has found moral power within himself except in so far as he has found a meaning in his world that answered to the new-found power, or discovered a deeper ethical meaning in his environment that did not reveal new capacities for activities within himself. Moral evolution takes place then as does that of the child; the moral personality and its world must arise *pari passu*, but, unlike the psychologist's statement of the development of the child, it does not lie inside a larger determining environment.

I am not ignorant of evolutionary ethics, nor that every type of ethical theory in these days has felt itself bound to interpret the development of moral consciousness in terms of custom and institutions. Thus we seem to postulate not only a community moral consciousness, a moral world which determines the growth of the moral consciousness of the individual, but also we imply that this determining moral environment goes back into a past that antedates moral consciousness itself. From this point of view, morality, *i. e.*, control by community habit, has determined the development of individual moral consciousness as tyrannically as the intellectual world has controlled the growth of intelligence in the members of society. But this paradox disappears when we recognize that this control by the community over its members provides indeed the material out of which reflective moral consciousness builds up its own situation, but cannot exist as a situation until the moral consciousness of the individual constructs it.

It is another statement of the same thing that moral consciousness is the most concrete consciousness—the most inclusive statement which can be given of immediate experience. There is no phase of activity, intellectual or physical, no type of inner experience, no presentation of outer reality, which does not find its place within the moral judgment. There is nothing which may not be a condition or an element of conduct, and moral consciousness reaches its climax in the estimation of every possible content of the individual and his situation. There is no other type of consciousness which must not abstract from other phases to assure its own existence. One cannot carry out an acute analysis and respond to the beauty of the object of analysis, one cannot swell with emotion and dispassionately observe. But we place every phase of our experience within the sweep of conscience; there is no one of these phases of consciousness which has not its legitimate function within the activity when viewed as moral. It is but a step further to claim that the abstractions of science and the expressions of the emotion and the direction of attention in perception and inference must find their functions, and hence their reason for existence, in the act; and that morality inheres in the act alone, but in none of these functions of the act (if I may be allowed two meanings of function in the same sentence).

It is, of course, possible to make this a metaphysical doctrine. If one finds reality in immediate experience and admits that the various intellectual, æsthetic, and perceptual processes exist only as parts and functions of an act which is the ultimate form of immediate experience, then the recognition of the ethical statement of this act as its fullest statement would found metaphysics upon ethics. The presentation of such a doctrine, however, would demand first of all a discussion of the meaning of the terms "immediate experience," of "reality," and the "cognitive state" that answers to it. I have no wish to enter this debatable field, that is loosely defined by the term pragmatism.

There are, however, certain implications of modern ethical doctrine which fall within the lines which I have indicated

above; that are of interest quite apart from their relation to metaphysical and logical speculations. The implications to which I refer are those that flow from evolutionary doctrine on the one side and from the identification of purposive activity with moral activity, and the recognition that our intelligence is through and through purposive. The first implication that flows from this position is that the fundamental necessity of moral action is simply the necessity of action at all; or stated in other terms, that the motive does not arise from the relations of antecedently given ends of activities, but rather that the motive is the recognition of the end as it arises in consciousness. The other implication is that the moral interpretation of our experience must be found within the experience itself.¹

We are familiar with three ethical standpoints, that which finds in conscious control over action only the further development of conduct which has already unconsciously been determined by ends, that which finds conduct only where reflective thought is able to present a transcendental end, and that which recognizes conduct only where the individual and the environment—the situation—mutually determine each other. In the first case, moral necessity in conduct, for the conscious individual, is quite relative. It depends upon the degree of recognition which he reaches of the forces operating through him. Furthermore, the motive to act with reference to the end of the fullest life of the species is one which is primarily quite narrowly individualistic, and depends for a social interpretation upon the community of which the individual is a member. Moral necessity in conduct from this point of view is quite independent of the activity itself. So far from being the most fundamental reality it is a derivative by which, through what it is hard not to call a hocus pocus, the individual acts, for what is only indirectly his own—a distant end, through a social

¹ The full analysis of position assumed here has been given by Prof. John Dewey in his article, "The Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality," in Vol. III, of the Decennial Publications of the University of Chicago.

dressur. It is, of course, natural that this point of view should mediate the process of training by which men are to be led unwittingly to socially worthy action, rather than the immediate conduct of the individual who finds himself face to face with a moral problem. It is the standpoint of the publicist and the reformer of social institutions.

But if we admit that the evolutionary process consists in a mutual determination of the individual and his environment—not the determination of the individual by his environment, moral necessity in conduct is found in the very evolutionary situation. The possibility of intelligent action waits upon the determination of the conditions under which that action is to take place. The statement of these conditions becomes the end, when it is recognized that the statement is in terms of the activities that make up the personality of the individual. The content of the end is the mutuality of statement of personality, *i. e.*, the tendencies to activity, in terms of the personalities who make up the environment, *i. e.*, the conditions of the expression of the activities. It is because the man must recognize the public good in the exercise of his powers, and state the public good in terms of his own outgoing activities that his ends are moral. But it is not the public good which comes in from outside himself and lays a moral necessity upon him, nor is it a selfish propensity that drives him on to conduct.

It is inconceivable that such an outside end should have any but an extraneous position. It could never come into a personality except by the door of its own interest. The end could not be a social end. Nor could a purely individual propensity through the agency of community training become social. The moral necessity lies not in the end acting from without, nor in the push of inclination from within, but in the relation of the conditions of action to the impulses to action. The motive is neither a purely rational, external end, nor a private inclination, but the impulse presented in terms of its consequences over against the consequences of the other impulses. The impulse so conditioned, so interpreted, becomes a motive to conduct. The moral necessity is that all

activity which appears as impulse and environment should enter into the situation, and there is nothing which ensures this completeness of expression except the full interrelationship of the self and the situation. That one fully recognized the conflict which the impulse involves in its consequences with the consequences of all the other social processes that go to make him up, is the moral dictum. From the reconstructions that this recognition involves the immediate statement of the end appears. To enforce this dictum is simply to live as fully and consciously and as determinedly as possible.

The moral necessity for education is not an ideal of intelligence that lies before us of the clear refulgence of the intellect. It is the necessity of knowledge to do what is trying to be done, the dependence of the uninformed impulse upon means, method, and interpretation. The necessity of uprightness in public affairs does not rest upon a transcendental ideal of perfection of the self, nor upon the attainment of the possible sum of human happiness, but upon the economy and effectiveness, and consistency demanded in the industrial, commercial, social, and æsthetic activities of those that make up the community. To push reform is to give expression to all these impulses and present them in their consequences over against those of all the other social impulses out of which an organism of personalities arises.

There is abroad a feeling of lack of moral force; we look before and after—to our ancestors, our posterity—for incentive to right conduct, when in fact there is no moral necessity which is not involved in the impulses to conduct themselves. To correct one abuse we must emphasize the interests it jeopardizes. There is no reservoir of moral power, except that which lies in the impulses behind these interests. To correct the sin of the individual is to awaken through the consequences of the sin the normal activities which are inhibited by the excess. It is this healthful, aggressive, moral attitude, which it seems to me is encouraged by the recognition that moral consciousness is the most concrete, the most inclusive of all. Here we must abstract from nothing, and

here we cannot appeal from ourselves to a power without ourselves that makes for righteousness. In the fulness of immediate experience, with the consciousness that out of the struggle to act must arise all power to mediate action, lies salvation. In like manner evolution in moral conduct can appeal to no environment without to stamp itself upon the individual; nor to him to adapt himself to a fixed order of the universe, but environment as well as individual appears in immediate experience; the one coterminous with the other, and moral endeavor appears in the mutual determination of one by the other.

Nowhere is this point of view more needed than in the struggles which fill our industrial and commercial life. The individual is treated as if he were quite separable from his environment; and still more is the environment conceived as if it were quite independent of the individual. Both laborer and the society which employs him are exhorted to recognize their obligations to each other, while each continues to operate within its own narrow radius; and because the employer regards the labor union as a fixed external environment of his activity, and would have all the relations between laborer and employer determined by the method in which he bargains and does business, he becomes a narrow individualist; and because the laborer would determine these same relations by the methods which he has used in building up this union, he becomes a socialist. What will take that and other allied problems out of the vicious circles in which they are at present found, is the recognition that it is the incompleteness with which the different social interests are present that is responsible for the inadequacy of the moral judgments. If the community educated and housed its members properly, and protected machinery, food, market, and thoroughfares adequately, the problems at present vexing the industrial world would largely disappear. We resent the introduction of the standard of life into the question of the wages; and yet if the social activities involved in the conception of the standard of life were given full expression, the wage question would be nearly answered. Every such problem is the

inevitable indication of what has been left undone, of impulses checked, or interest overlooked. We turn back to history and talk about the evolution of man as if his environment were not the projection of himself in the conditions of conduct, as if the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets were not the realization of all that is in us. The sources of power lie in that which has been overlooked. Again and again we are surprised to find that the moral advance has not been along the straight line of the moral struggles in which a sin seemed to be faced by righteous effort, but by the appearance of a novel interest which has changed the whole nature of the problem. If we were willing to recognize that the environment which surrounds the moral self is but the statement of the conditions under which his different conflicting impulses may get their expression, we would perceive that the reorganization must come from a new point of view which comes to consciousness through the conflict. The environment must change *pari passu* with the consciousness. Moral advance consists not in adapting individual natures to the fixed realities of a moral universe, but in constantly reconstructing and recreating the world as the individuals evolve.

The second implication to which reference has been made, is that we must find the interpretation of moral consciousness within the act. The appeal to a moral order which transcends either metaphysically or temporally the moral situation; the besetting assumption of the moralist that a moral reconstruction can be made intelligible only by a perfect moral order from which we have departed, or toward which we are moving, have very grave practical consequences which it becomes us to consider. In the first place these assumptions rob our moral consciousness of the intellectual interest which belongs to them of right. If morality connotes merely conformity to a given order, our intellectual reaction is confined to the recognition of agreement and disagreement, beyond that the moral reaction can be only emotional and instinctive. There may be, indeed, intellectual processes involved in stating this moral order, but such statement is con-

fined, in the nature of the case, to apologetic and speculative thought to thought which cannot be a part of the immediate moral consciousness.

A moral order to which we must conform can never be built up in thought in the presence of an exigency. There are only two types of reaction in a practical situation. One may respond to well-recognized cues by well-formed habits, or one may adapt and reconstruct his habits by new interpretation of the situation. In the first instance we have habitual conduct, in the second that type of reaction which has been most explicitly worked out by the natural sciences. Most of our action, of course, falls within the first category, and involves no moral struggle. The second type, on the other hand, is that in which practically all our moral issues arise. If a practical scientific problem arises, such as the engineering problems in constructing railroads or driving tunnels, we recognize that the intellectual process by which the problem is solved cannot be a mere reference to a perfect model of conduct already in existence. On the contrary, just because the engineer is face to face with a real problem he must find in the physical situation facts of which he is at present ignorant, and at the same time readjust his habits; in fact, it is the possible readjustment of the habit that directs his attention in investigating the situation, and, on the other hand, what is discovered serves to mediate the formation of the new habit. In a word, there is the typical play of attention back and forth between perception and response. In any such process the criterion which governs the whole and its two phases—three phases if we distinguish between perception of the new data and the formation of the hypothesis by which they are interpreted and mediated in the response—can never be external to the process. There exists as yet no plan of procedure which the engineer discovers or receives as a vision in the mount. The control is found in the relation of the different phases of the act which have been sketched above. It is the possibility of reaction to a stimulus that holds the reaction in the field of investigation and it is the continued investigation of the field of stimulus which

keeps the reaction continuous and pertinent. The control is then that which was earlier referred to as the process of evolution in which individual and environment mutually determine each other. It is the criterion of action, which uses working hypotheses, but which cannot possibly be identified with an external ideal. This process, whether met in the field of mechanical invention, or the range of engineering, or that of scientific research, is recognized as the most absorbing, most interesting, most fascinating intellectually with which the mind of man can occupy itself, and this interest belongs legitimately to the solution of every moral problem, for the procedure is identical intellectually.

Yet we succeed in robbing our reflective moral consciousness of a great part of this interest. For there is and can be no interest in merely identifying certain types of conduct with those found in a given theory. For example, there is no intellectual interest involved in merely identifying the control exercised by a financier over an industry with the concept of property, and justifying him in doing what he will, within the limits of the law, with his own. There may be a very vigorous emotional reaction against the suggestion that he be interfered with in these vested rights; or, on the other hand, against an institution of property which permits such individualistic exploitation of social values, but there is no intellectual interest except that which is either apologetic or purely speculative. It does not come into the moral reaction to the situation. And yet the enormous content of interest which does attach to these moral questions is attested by the social sciences which have sprung up and expanded in every college and university.

It is interesting to compare the intellectual treatment which such problems receive at the hands of the scientific investigator and the pulpit. In the latter there is at present no apparatus for investigation. The pulpit is committed to a right and wrong which are unquestioned, and from its point of view unquestionable. Its function then is not the intellectual one of finding out what in the new situation is right, but in inspiring to a right conduct which is supposed

to be so plain that he who runs may read. The result has been that in the great moral issues of recent industrial history, such as the child labor, woman's labor, protection of machinery, and a multitude more, the pulpit has been necessarily silent. It had not the means nor the technique for finding out what was the right thing to do. The science of hygiene threatens the universal issue of temperance, while we can look forward to the time when investigation may enable us to approach understandingly the prostitute and her trade, and change the social conditions which have made her possible instead of merely scourging an abstract sin.

The loss to the community from the elimination of the intellectual phase of moral conduct it would be difficult to overestimate and this loss is unavoidable as long as the interpretation of conduct lies outside the immediate experience, as long as we must refer to a moral order without, to intellectually present the morality of conduct.

In conclusion may I refer to another loss which moral conduct dependent upon an external ideal involves. The interpretation of sin and wrong with reference to a moral order external to the conduct fails to identify the moral defect with the situation out of which it springs and by whose reconstruction it may be eliminated. An illustration will at once indicate, I think, what I have in mind. The responsibility for death and accident upon our railroads cannot be laid at the doors of the system and those that work it, if an abstract doctrine of property and contract is used to judge the conduct of railroad managers and directors. The imperative necessity of the situation is that responsibility should be tested by the consequences of an act; that the moral judgment should find its criterion in the mutual determination of the individual and the situation. As it is, men who would risk their own lives to save a drowning man, regard themselves as justified in slaughtering others by the thousand to save money. Abstract valuations take the place of concrete valuations, and as the abstract external valuations are always the precipitations of earlier conduct, they are pretty uniformly inadequate.

But not only does an external moral ideal rob immediate moral conduct of its most important values, but it robs human nature of the most profound solace which can come to those who suffer—the knowledge that the loss and the suffering, with its subjective poignancy, has served to evaluate conduct, to determine what is and what is not worth while.

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