

Moral Judgment and Knowledge

From *Ethics* (1932)

I. MORAL JUDGMENTS AS INTUITIVE OR DEVELOPED

That reflective morality, since it is reflective, involves thought and knowledge is a truism. The truism raises, however, important problems of theory. What is the nature of knowledge in its moral sense? What is its function? How does it originate and operate? To these questions, writers upon morals have given different answers. Those, for example, who have dwelt upon approval and resentment as the fundamental ethical factor have emphasized its spontaneous and "instinctive" character—that is, its non-reflective nature—and have assigned a subordinate position to the intellectual factor in morals. Those who, like Kant, have made the authority of duty supreme, have marked off Moral Reason from thought and reasoning as they show themselves in ordinary life and in science. They have erected a unique faculty whose sole office is to make us aware of duty and of its imperatively rightful authority over conduct. The moralists who have insisted upon the identity of the Good with ends of desire have, on the contrary, made knowledge, in the sense of insight into the ends which bring enduring satisfaction, the supreme thing in conduct; ignorance, as Plato said, is the root of all evil. And yet, according to Plato, this assured insight into the true End and Good implies a kind of rationality which is radically different from that involved in the ordinary affairs of life. It can be directly attained only by the few who are gifted with those peculiar qualities which enable them to rise to metaphysical understanding of the ultimate constitution of the universe; others must take it on faith or as it is embodied, in a derived way, in laws and institutions. Without going into all the recondite problems associated with the conflict of views, we may say that two significant questions emerge. First, are thought and knowledge mere servants and attendants of emotion, or do they exercise a positive and transforming influence? Secondly, are the thought and judgment employed in connection with moral matters the same that are used in ordinary practical affairs, or are they something separate, having an *exclusively*

moral significance? Putting the question in the form which it assumed in discussion during the nineteenth century: Is conscience a faculty of intuition independent of human experience, or is it a product and expression of experience?

The questions are stated in a theoretical form. They have, however, an important practical bearing. They are connected, for example, with the question discussed in the last chapter. Are praise and blame, esteem and condemnation, not only original and spontaneous tendencies, but are they also *ultimate*, incapable of being modified by the critical and constructive work of thought? Again, if conscience is a unique and separate faculty it is incapable of education and modification; it can only be directly appealed to. Most important of all, practically, is that some theories, like the Kantian, make a sharp separation between conduct that is moral and everyday conduct which is morally indifferent and neutral.

It would be difficult to find a question more significant for actual behavior than just this one: Is the moral region isolated from the rest of human activity? Does only one special class of human aims and relations have moral value? This conclusion is a necessary result of the view that our moral consciousness and knowledge is unique in kind. But if moral consciousness is not separate, then no hard and fast line can be drawn within conduct shutting off a moral realm from a non-moral. Now our whole previous discussion is bound up with the latter view. For it has found moral good and excellence in objects and activities which develop out of natural desires and normal social relations in family, neighborhood, and community. We shall accordingly now proceed to make explicit the bearing of this idea upon the nature of moral insight, comparing our conclusions with those arrived at by some other typical theories.

Moral judgments, whatever else they are, are a species of judgments of *value*. They characterize acts and traits of character as having *worth*, positive or negative. Judgments of value are not confined to matters which are explicitly moral in significance. Our estimates of poems, pictures, landscapes, from the standpoint of their esthetic quality, are value-judgments.

Business men are rated with respect to their economic standing in giving of credit, etc. We do not content ourselves with a purely external statement about the weather as it is measured scientifically by the thermometer or barometer. We term it fine or nasty: epithets of value. Articles of furniture are judged useful, comfortable, or the reverse. Scientifically, the condition of the body and mind can be described in terms which neglect entirely the difference between health and disease, in terms, that is, of certain physical and chemical processes. When we pronounce the judgment, "well" or "ill" we estimate in value terms. When we judge the statements of others, whether made in casual conversation or in scientific discourse and pronounce them "true" or "false" we are making judgments of value. Indeed, the chief embarrassment in giving illustrations of value-judgments is that we are so constantly engaged in making them. In its popular sense, *all* judgment is estimation, appraisal, assigning value to something; a discrimination as to advantage, serviceability, fitness for a purpose, enjoyability, and so on.

There is a difference which must be noted between valuation as judgment (which involves thought in placing the thing judged in its relations and bearings) and valuing as a direct emotional and practical act. There is difference between esteem and estimation, between prizing and appraising. To esteem is to prize, hold dear, admire, approve; to estimate is to measure in intellectual fashion. One is direct, spontaneous; the other is reflex, reflective. We esteem before we estimate, and estimation comes in to consider whether and to what extent something is *worthy* of esteem. Is the object one which we *should* admire? Should we really prize it? Does it have the qualities which *justify* our holding it dear? All growth in maturity is attended with this change from a spontaneous to a reflective and critical attitude. First, our affections go out to something in attraction or repulsion; we like and dislike. Then experience raises the question whether the object in question is what our esteem or disesteem took it to be, whether it is such as to justify our reaction to it.

The obvious difference between the two

attitudes is that direct admiration and prizing are absorbed in the object, a person, act, natural scene, work of art or whatever, to the neglect of its place and effects, its connections with other things. That a lover does not see the beloved one as others do is notorious, and the principle is of universal application. For to think is to look at a thing in its *relations* with other things, and such judgment often modifies radically the original attitude of esteem and liking. A commonplace instance is the difference between natural liking for some object of food, and the recognition forced upon us by experience that it is not "good" for us, that it is not healthful. A child may like and prize candy inordinately; an adult tells him it is not good for him, that it will make him ill. "Good" to the child signifies that which tastes good; that which satisfies an immediate craving. "Good" from the standpoint of the more experienced person is that which serves certain ends, that which stands in certain connections with consequences. Judgment of value is the name of the act which searches for and takes into consideration these connections.

There is an evident unity between this point and what was said in the last chapter about approval and reprobation, praise and blame. A normal person will not witness an act of wanton cruelty without an immediate response of disfavor; resentment and indignation immediately ensue. A child will respond in this way when some person of whom he is fond is made to suffer by another. An adult, however, may recognize that the one inflicting the suffering is a physician who is doing what he does in the interest of a patient. The child takes the act for what is immediately present to him and finds it bad; the other interprets it as one element in a larger whole and finds it good in that connection. In this change is illustrated in a rudimentary way the processes through which, out of spontaneous acts of favor and disfavor, there develops the idea of a *standard* by which approval and disapproval should be regulated. The change explains the fact that judgments of value are not mere registrations (see p. 253) of previous attitudes of favor and disfavor, liking and aversion, but have a reconstructive and transforming effect

upon them, by determining the objects that are worthy of esteem and approbation.

2. THE IMMEDIATE SENSE OF VALUE AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The distinction between direct *valuing*, in the sense of prizing and being absorbed in an object or person, and *valuation* as reflective judgment, based upon consideration of a comprehensive scheme, has an important bearing upon the controversy as to the *intuitive* character of moral judgments. Our immediate responses of approval and reprobation may well be termed intuitive. They are not based upon any thought-out reason or ground. We just admire and resent, are attracted and repelled. This attitude is not only original and primitive but it persists in acquired dispositions. The reaction of an expert in any field is, relatively at least, intuitive rather than reflective. An expert in real estate will, for example, "size up" pecuniary values of land and property with a promptness and exactness which are far beyond the capacity of a layman. A scientifically trained person will see the meaning and possibilities of some line of investigation, where the untrained person might require years of study to make anything out of it. Some persons are happily gifted in their direct appreciation of personal relations; they are noted for tact, not in the sense of a superficial amiability but of real insight into human needs and affections. The results of prior experience, including previous conscious thinking, get taken up into direct habits, and express themselves in direct appraisals of value. Most of our moral judgments are intuitive, but this fact is not a proof of the existence of a separate faculty of moral insight, but is the result of past experience funded into direct outlook upon the scene of life. As Aristotle remarked in effect a long time ago, the immediate judgments of good and evil of a good man are more to be trusted than many of the elaborately reasoned out estimates of the inexperienced.

The immediate character of moral judgments is reenforced by the lessons of childhood and youth. Children are surrounded by adults who constantly pass judgments of

value on conduct. And these comments are not coldly intellectual; they are made under conditions of a strongly emotional nature. Pains are taken to stamp them in by impregnating the childish response with elements of awe and mystery, as well as ordinary reward and punishment. The attitudes remain when the circumstances of their origin are forgotten; they are made so much a part of the self that they seem to be inevitable and innate.

This fact, while it explains the intuitive character of reactions, also indicates a limitation of direct valuations. They are often the result of an education which was misdirected. If the conditions of their origin were intelligent, that is, if parents and friends who took part in their creation, were morally wise, they are likely to be intelligent. But arbitrary and irrelevant circumstances often enter in, and leave their impress as surely as do reasonable factors. The very fact of the early origin and now unconscious quality of the attendant intuitions is often distorting and limiting. It is almost impossible for later reflection to get at and correct that which has become unconsciously a part of the self. The warped and distorted will seem natural. Only the conventional and the fanatical are always immediately sure of right and wrong in conduct.

There is a permanent limit to the value of even the best of the intuitive appraisals of which we have been speaking. These are dependable in the degree in which conditions and objects of esteem are fairly uniform and recurrent. They do not work with equal sureness in the cases in which the new and unfamiliar enters in. "New occasions teach new duties." But they cannot teach them to those who suppose that they can trust without further reflection to estimates of the good and evil which are brought over from the past to the new occasion. Extreme intuitionism and extreme conservatism often go together. Dislike to thoughtful consideration of the requirements of new situations is frequently a sign of fear that the result of examination will be a new insight which will entail the changing of settled habits and will compel departure from easy grooves in behavior—a process which is uncomfortable.

Taken in and of themselves, intuitions or immediate feelings of what is good and bad are of psychological rather than moral import. They are indications of formed habits rather than adequate evidence of what should be approved and disapproved. They afford at most, when habits already existing are of a good character, a *presumption* of correctness, and are guides, clews. But (a) nothing is more immediate and seemingly sure of itself than inveterate prejudice. The morals of a class, clique, or race when brought in contact with those of other races and peoples, are usually so sure of the rectitude of their own judgments of good and bad that they are narrow and give rise to misunderstanding and hostility. (b) A judgment which is adequate under ordinary circumstance may go far astray under changed conditions. It goes without saying that false ideas about values have to be emended; it is not so readily seen that ideas of good and evil which were once true have to be modified as social conditions change. Men become attached to their judgments as they cling to other possessions which familiarity has made dear. Especially in times like the present, when industrial, political, and scientific transformations are rapidly in process, a revision of old appraisals is especially needed. (c) The tendency of undiluted intuitionist theory is in the direction of an unquestioning dogmatism, what Bentham called *ipse dixitism*. Every intuition, even the best, is likely to become perfunctory and second-hand unless revitalized by consideration of its meaning—that is, of the consequences which will accrue from acting upon it. There is no necessary connection between a conviction of right and good in general and *what* is right and good in particular. A man may have a strong conviction of duty without enlightenment as to just where his duty lies. When he assumes that because he is actuated by consciousness of duty in general, he can trust without reflective inquiry to his immediate ideas of the particular thing which is his duty, he is likely to become socially dangerous. If he is a person of strong will he will attempt to impose his judgments and standards upon others in a ruthless way, convinced that he is supported by the authority of Right and the Will of God.

3. SENSITIVITY AND THOUGHTFULNESS

The permanent element of value in the intuitional theory lies in its implicit emphasis upon the importance of direct responsiveness to the qualities of situations and acts. A keen eye and a quick ear are not in themselves guarantees of correct knowledge of physical objects. But they are conditions without which such knowledge cannot arise. Nothing can make up for the absence of immediate sensitiveness; the insensitive person is callous, indifferent. Unless there is a direct, mainly unreflective appreciation of persons and deeds, the data for subsequent thought will be lacking or distorted. A person must *feel* the qualities of acts as one feels with the hands the qualities of roughness and smoothness in objects, before he has an inducement to deliberate or material with which to deliberate. Effective reflection must also terminate in a situation which is directly appreciated, if thought is to be effective in action. "Cold blooded" thought may reach a correct conclusion, but if a person remains anti-pathetic or indifferent to the considerations presented to him in a rational way, they will not stir him to act in accord with them (see p. 190).

This fact explains the element of truth in the theories which insist that in their root and essence moral judgments are emotional rather than intellectual. A moral judgment, however intellectual it may be, must at least be colored with feeling if it is to influence behavior. Resentment, ranging from fierce abhorrence through disgust to mild repugnance, is a necessary ingredient of knowledge of evil which is genuine knowledge. Affection, from intense love to mild favor, is an ingredient in all operative knowledge, all full apprehension, of the good. It is, however, going too far to say that such appreciation can dispense with every cognitive element. There may be no knowledge of why a given act calls out sympathy or antipathy, no knowledge of the grounds upon which it rests for justification. In fact a strong emotional appreciation seems at the time to be its own reason and justification. But there must at least be an idea of the object which is admired or despised, there must be some perceived

cause, or person, that is cared for, and that solicits concern. Otherwise we have mere brute anger like the destructive rage of a beast, or mere immediate gratification like that of an animal in taking food.

Our sensory reactions, of eye, ear, hand, nose, and tongue supply material of our knowledge of qualities of physical things, sticks, stones, fruits, etc. It is sometimes argued that they afford also the material of our knowledge of persons; that, seeing certain shapes and colors, hearing certain sounds, etc., we infer by analogy that a particular physical body is inhabited by a sentient and emotional being such as we associate with the forms and contacts which compose our own body. The theory is absurd. *Emotional* reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and of others. Just as ideas of physical objects are constituted out of sensory material, so those of persons are framed out of emotional and affectional materials. The latter are as direct, as immediate as the former, and more interesting, with a greater hold on attention. The animism of primitive life, the tendency to personify natural events and things (which survives in poetry), is evidence of the original nature of perception of persons; it is inexplicable on the theory that we infer the existence of persons through a round-about use of analogy. Whenever we strongly hate or love, we tend to predicate directly a lovely and loving, a hateful and hating being. Without emotional behavior, all human beings would be for us only animated automatons. Consequently all actions which call out lively esteem or disfavor are perceived as acts of persons: we do not make a distinction in such cases between the doer and the deed. A noble act signifies a noble person; a mean act a mean person.

On this account, the reasonable act and the generous act lie close together. A person entirely lacking in sympathetic response might have a keen calculating intellect, but he would have no spontaneous sense of the claims of others for satisfaction of their desires. A person of narrow sympathy is of necessity a person of confined outlook upon the scene of human good. The only truly *general* thought is the *generous* thought. It is sympathy which carries thought out beyond the self and which

extends its scope till it approaches the universal as its limit. It is sympathy which saves consideration of consequences from degenerating into mere calculation, by rendering vivid the interests of others and urging us to give them the same weight as those which touch our own honor, purse, and power. To put ourselves in the place of others, to see things from the standpoint of their purposes and values, to humble, contrariwise, our own pretensions and claims till they reach the level they would assume in the eye of an impartial sympathetic observer, is the surest way to attain objectivity of moral knowledge. Sympathy is the animating mold of moral judgment not because its dictates take precedence in action over those of other impulses (which they do not do), but because it furnishes the most efficacious *intellectual* standpoint. It is the tool, *par excellence*, for resolving complex situations. Then when it passes into active and overt conduct, it does so fused with other impulses and not in isolation and is thus protected from sentimentality. In this fusion there is broad and objective survey of all desires and projects because there is an expanded personality. Through sympathy the cold calculation of utilitarianism and the formal law of Kant are transported into vital and moving realities.

One of the earliest discoveries of morals was the similarity of judgment of good and bad in conduct with the recognition of beauty and ugliness in conduct. Feelings of the repulsiveness of vice and the attractiveness of virtuous acts root in esthetic sentiment. Emotions of admiration and of disgust are native; when they are turned upon conduct they form an element which furnishes the truth that lies in the theory of a moral sense. The sense of justice, moreover, has a strong ally in the sense of symmetry and proportion. The double meaning of the term "fair" is no accident. The Greek *sophrosyne* (of which our temperance, through the Latin *temperantia*, is a poor representation), a harmonious blending of affections into a beautiful whole, was essentially an artistic idea. Self-control was its inevitable result, but self-control as a deliberate cause would have seemed as abhorrent to the Athenian as would "control" in a building or statue where control signified anything other than the idea of the

whole permeating all parts and bringing them into order and measured unity. The Greek emphasis upon *Kalokagathos*, the Aristotelian identification of virtue with the proportionate mean, are indications of an acute estimate of grace, rhythm, and harmony as dominant traits of good conduct (p. 98). The modern mind has been much less sensitive to esthetic values in general and to these values in conduct in particular. Much has been lost in direct responsiveness to right. The bleakness and harshness often associated with morals is a sign of this loss.

The direct valuing which accompanies immediate sensitive responsiveness to acts has its complement and expansion in valuations which are deliberate, reflective. As Aristotle pointed out, only the good man is a good judge of what is truly good; it takes a fine and well-grounded character to react immediately with the right approvals and condemnations. And to this statement must be added two qualifications. One is that even the good man can trust for enlightenment to his direct responses of values only in simpler situations, in those which are already upon the whole familiar. The better he is, the more likely he is to be perplexed as to what to do in novel, complicated situations. Then the only way out is through examination, inquiry, turning things over in his mind till something presents itself, perhaps after prolonged mental fermentation, to which he can directly react. The other qualification is that there is no such thing as a good man—in an absolute sense. Immediate appreciation is liable to be warped by many considerations which can be detected and uprooted only through inquiry and criticism. To be completely good and an infallible judge of right a man would have had to live from infancy in a thoroughly good social medium free from all limiting and distorting influences. As it is, habits of liking and disliking are formed early in life, prior to ability to use discriminating intelligence. Prejudices, unconscious biases, are generated; one is uneven in his distribution of esteem and admiration; he is unduly sensitive to some values, relatively indifferent to others. He is set in his ways, and his immediate appreciations travel in the grooves laid down by his unconsciously formed habits.

Hence the spontaneous "intuitions" of value have to be entertained subject to correction, to confirmation and revision, by personal observation of consequences and cross-questioning of their quality and scope.

4. CONSCIENCE AND DELIBERATION

The usual name for this process is deliberation; the name given moral deliberativeness when it is habitual is conscientiousness. This quality is constituted by scrupulous attentiveness to the potentialities of any act or proposed aim. Its possession is a characteristic of those who do not allow themselves to be unduly swayed by immediate appetite and passion, nor to fall into ruts of routine behavior. The "good" man who rests on his oars, who permits himself to be propelled simply by the momentum of his attained right habits, loses alertness; he ceases to be on the lookout. With that loss, his goodness drops away from him. There is, indeed, a quality called "overconscientiousness," but it is not far from a vice. It signifies constant anxiety as to whether one is really good or not, a moral "self-consciousness" which spells embarrassment, constraint in action, morbid fear. It is a caricature of genuine conscientiousness. For the latter is not an anxious prying into motives, a fingering of the inner springs of action to detect whether or not a "motive" is good. Genuine conscientiousness has an objective outlook; it is intelligent attention and care to the quality of an act in view of its consequences for general happiness; it is not anxious solicitude for one's own virtuous state.

Perhaps the most striking difference between immediate sensitiveness, or "intuition," and "conscientiousness" as reflective interest, is that the former tends to rest upon the plane of achieved goods, while the latter is on the outlook for something *better*. The truly conscientious person not only uses a standard in judging, but is concerned to revise and improve his standard. He realizes that the value resident in acts goes beyond anything which he has already apprehended, and that therefore there must be something inadequate in any standard which has been definitely formulated. He is on the *lookout* for good not already

achieved. Only by thoughtfulness does one become sensitive to the far-reaching implications of an act; apart from continual reflection we are at best sensitive only to the value of special and limited ends.

The larger and remoter values of an act form what is ordinarily termed an ideal. About nothing, perhaps, is misconception more current than as to the nature of ideals. They are thought of sometimes as fixed, remote goals, too far away to be ever realized in conduct and sometimes as vague emotional inspirations which take the place of thought in directing conduct. Thus the "idealist" is thought of as either an impractical person, concerned with the unattainable, or else as a person who is moved by aspirations for something intangible of a vague spiritual sort having no concrete reference to actual situations. The trouble with ideals of remote "perfection" is that they tend to make us negligent of the significance of the special situations in which we have to act; they are thought of as trivial in comparison with the ideal of perfection. The genuine ideal, on the contrary, is the sense that each of these special situations brings with it its own inexhaustible meaning, that its value reaches far beyond its direct local existence. Its nature is perhaps best expressed in the verses of George Herbert:

Who sweeps a room as for Thy Laws
Makes that and th' action fine.

As we have said, reflection when directed to practical matters, to determination of what to do, is called deliberation. A general deliberates upon the conduct of a campaign, weighing possible moves of the enemy and of his own troops, considering pros and cons; a business man deliberates in comparing various modes of investment; a lawyer deliberates upon the conduct of his case, and so on. In all cases of deliberation, judgment of *value* enters; the one who engages in it is concerned to weigh values with a view to discovering the better and rejecting the worse. In some cases, the value of ends is thought of and in other cases the value of means. Moral deliberation differs from other forms not as a process of forming a judgment and arriving at knowledge but in the kind of value which is thought about. The value is technical, professional, eco-

conomic, etc., as long as one thinks of it as something which one can aim at and attain by way of having, *possessing*; as something to be got or to be missed. Precisely the same object will have a moral value when it is thought of as making a difference in the *self*, as determining what one will *be*, instead of merely what one will *have*. Deliberation involves doubt, hesitation, the need of making up one's mind, of arriving at a decisive choice. The choice at stake in a moral deliberation or valuation is the worth of this and that kind of character and disposition. Deliberation is not then to be identified with calculation, or a quasi-mathematical reckoning of profit and loss. Such calculation assumes that the nature of the self does not enter into question, but only how much the self is going to *get* of this and that. Moral deliberation deals not with quantity of value but with quality.

We estimate the import or significance of any present desire or impulse by forecasting what it will come or amount to if carried out; literally its consequences define its *consequence*, its meaning or import. But if these consequences are conceived *merely as remote*, if their picturing does not arouse a present sense of peace, of fulfillment, or of dissatisfaction, of incompleteness and irritation, the process of thinking out consequences remains purely intellectual. It is as barren of influence upon behavior as the mathematical speculations of a disembodied angel. Any actual experience of reflection upon conduct will show that every foreseen result at once stirs our present affections, our likes and dislikes, our desires and aversions. There is developed a running commentary which stamps objects at once as good or evil. It is this direct sense of value, not the consciousness of general rules or ultimate goals, which finally determines the worth of the act to the agent. Here is an inexpugnable element of truth in the intuitional theory. Its error lies in conceiving this immediate response of appreciation as if it excluded reflection instead of following directly upon its heels. Deliberation is actually an imaginative rehearsal of various courses of conduct. We give way, *in our mind*, to some impulse; we try, *in our mind*, some plan. Following its career through various steps, we find ourselves

in imagination in the presence of the consequences that would follow: and as we then like and approve, or dislike and disapprove, these consequences, we find the original impulse or plan good or bad. Deliberation is dramatic and active, not mathematical and impersonal; and hence it has the intuitive, the direct factor in it. The advantage of a mental trial, prior to the overt trial (for the act after all is itself also a trial, a proving of the idea that lies back of it), is that it is retrievable, whereas overt consequences remain. They cannot be recalled. Moreover, many trials may mentally be made in a short time. The imagining of various plans carried out furnishes an opportunity for many impulses which at first are not in evidence at all, to get under way. Many and varied direct sensings, appreciations, take place. When many tendencies are brought into play, there is clearly much greater probability that the capacity of self which is really needed and appropriate will be brought into action, and thus a truly reasonable happiness result. The tendency of deliberation to "polarize" the various lines of activity into opposed alternatives, into incompatible "either this or that," is a way of forcing into clear recognition the importance of the issue.

5. THE NATURE AND OFFICE OF PRINCIPLES

It is clear that the various situations in which a person is called to deliberate and judge have common elements, and that values found in them resemble one another. It is also obvious that general ideas are a great aid in judging particular cases. If different situations were wholly unlike one another, nothing could be learned from one which would be of any avail in any other. But having like points, experience carries over from one to another, and experience is intellectually cumulative. Out of resembling experiences general ideas develop; through language, instruction, and tradition this gathering together of experiences of value into generalized points of view is extended to take in a whole people and a race. Through intercommunication the experience of the entire human race is to some extent pooled and crystallized in general ideas. These ideas con-

stitute *principles*. We bring them with us to deliberation on particular situations.

These generalized points of view are of great use in surveying particular cases. But as they are transmitted from one generation to another, they tend to become fixed and rigid. Their origin in experience is forgotten and so is their proper use in further experience. They are thought of as if they existed in and of themselves and as if it were simply a question of bringing action under them in order to determine what is right and good. Instead of being treated as aids and instruments in judging values as the latter actually arise, they are made superior to them. They become prescriptions, rules. Now a genuine principle differs from a rule in two ways: (a) A principle evolves in connection with the course of experience, being a generalized statement of what sort of consequences and values tend to be realized in certain kinds of situations; a rule is taken as something ready-made and fixed. (b) A principle is primarily intellectual, a method and scheme for judging, and is practical secondarily because of what it discloses; a rule is primarily practical.

Suppose that one is convinced that the rule of honesty is made known just in and of itself by a special faculty, and has absolutely nothing to do with recollection of past cases or forecast of possible future circumstances. How would such a rule apply itself to any particular case which needed to be judged? What bell would ring, what signal would be given, to indicate that just *this* case is the appropriate case for the application of the rule of honest dealing? And if by some miracle this question were answered, if we could know that here is a case for the rule of honesty, how should we know just what course in detail the rule calls for? For the rule, to be applicable to all cases, must omit the conditions which differentiate one case from another; it must contain only the very few similar elements which are to be found in all honest deeds. Reduced to this skeleton, not much would be left save the bare injunction to be honest whatever happens, leaving it to chance, the ordinary judgment of the individual, or to external authority to find out just *what* honesty specifically means in the given case.

This difficulty is so serious that all systems which have committed themselves to belief in a number of hard and fast rules having their origin in conscience, or in the word of God impressed upon the human soul or externally revealed, always have had to resort to a more and more complicated procedure to cover, if possible, all the cases. The moral life is finally reduced by them to an elaborate formalism and legalism.

Suppose, for example, we take the Ten Commandments as a starting-point. They are only ten, and naturally confine themselves to general ideas, and ideas stated mainly in negative form. Moreover, the same act may be brought under more than one rule. In order to resolve the practical perplexities and uncertainties which inevitably arise under such circumstances, *Casuistry* is built up (from the Latin *casus*, case). The attempt is made to foresee all the different cases of action which may conceivably occur, and provide in advance the exact rule for each case. For example, with reference to the rule "do not kill," a list will be made of all the different situations in which killing might occur:—accident, war, fulfillment of command of political superior (as by a hangman), self-defense (defense of one's own life, of others, of property), deliberate or premeditated killing with its different motives (jealousy, avarice, revenge, etc.), killing with slight premeditation, from sudden impulse, from different sorts and degrees of provocation. To each one of these possible cases is assigned its exact moral quality, its exact degree of turpitude and innocency. Nor can this process end with overt acts; all the inner springs of action which affect regard for life must be similarly classified: envy, animosity, sudden rage, sullenness, cherishing of sense of injury, love of tyrannical power, hardness or hostility, callousness—all these must be specified into their different kinds and the exact moral worth of each determined. What is done for this one kind of case must be done for every part and phase of the entire moral life until it is all inventoried, catalogued, and distributed into pigeon-holes definitely labeled.

Dangers and evils attend this way of conceiving the moral life. (a) *It tends to magnify the letter of morality at the expense of its spirit.* It

fixes attention not upon the positive good in an act, not upon the underlying agent's disposition which forms its spirit, nor upon the unique occasion and context which form its atmosphere, but upon its literal conformity with Rule A, Class I., Species I., subhead (1), etc. The effect of this is inevitably to narrow the scope and lessen the depth of conduct. (i.) It tempts some to hunt for that classification of their act which will make it the most convenient or profitable for themselves. In popular speech, "casuistical" has come to mean a way of judging acts which splits hairs in the effort to find a way of acting that conduces to personal interest and profit, and which yet may be justified by some moral principle. (ii.) With others, this regard for the letter makes conduct formal and pedantic. It gives rise to a rigid and hard type of character conventionally attributed to the Pharisees of olden and the Puritans of modern time—the moral schemes of both classes being strongly impregnated with the notion of fixed moral rules.

(b) *This ethical system also tends in practice to a legal view of conduct.* Historically it always has sprung from carrying over legal ideas into morality. In the legal view liability to blame and to punishment inflicted from without by some superior authority, is necessarily prominent. Conduct is regulated through specific injunctions and prohibitions: Do this, Do not do that. Exactly the sort of analysis of which we have spoken above (p. 277) in the case of killing is necessary, so that there may be definite and regular methods of measuring guilt and assigning blame. Now liability, punishment, and reward are important factors in the conduct of life, but any scheme of morals is defective which puts the question of avoiding punishment in the foreground of attention, or which tends to create a pharisaical complacency in the mere fact of having conformed to command or rule.

(c) *Probably the worst evil of this moral system is that it tends to deprive moral life of freedom and spontaneity* and to reduce it (especially for the conscientious who take it seriously) to a more or less anxious and servile conformity to externally imposed rules. Obedience as loyalty to principle is a good, but this scheme practically makes it the only good and

conceives it not as loyalty to ideals, but as conformity to commands. Moral rules exist just as independent deliverances on their own account, and the right thing is merely to follow them. This puts the centre of moral gravity outside the concrete processes of living. All systems which emphasize the letter more than the spirit, legal consequences more than vital motives, put the individual under the weight of external authority. They lead to the kind of conduct described by St. Paul as under the law, not in the spirit, with its constant attendant weight of anxiety, uncertain struggle, and impending doom.

Many who strenuously object to all of these schemes of conduct, to everything which hardens it into forms by emphasizing external commands, authority, and punishments and rewards, fail to see that such evils are logically connected with any acceptance of the finality of fixed rules. They hold certain bodies of people, religious officers, political or legal authorities, responsible for what they object to in the scheme; while they still cling to the idea that morality is an effort to apply to particular deeds and projects a certain number of absolute unchanging moral rules. They fail to see that, if this were its nature, those who attempt to provide the machinery which would render it practically workable deserve praise rather than blame. In fact, the notion of absolute rules or precepts cannot be made workable except through certain superior authorities who declare and enforce them. Said Locke: "It is no small power it gives one man over another to be the dictator of principles and teacher of unquestionable truths."

There is another practically harmful consequence which follows from the identification of principles with rules. Take the case of, say, justice. There may be all but universal agreement in the notion that justice is the proper rule of conduct—so universal as to be admitted by all but criminals. But just what does justice demand in the concrete? The present state of such things as penology, prison reform, the tariff, sumptuary laws, trusts, the relation of capital and labor, collective bargaining, democratic government, private or public ownership of public utilities, communal versus private property, shows that persons

of equally well-meaning dispositions find that justice means opposite things in practice, although all proclaim themselves devoted to justice as the rule of action. Taken as a principle, not as a rule, justice signifies the will to *examine* specific institutions and measures so as to find out how they operate with the view of introducing greater impartiality and equity into the consequences they produce.

This consideration brings us to the important fact regarding the nature of true moral principles. *Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things. But principles are intellectual; they are the final methods used in judging suggested courses of action.* The fundamental error of the intuitionist is that he is on the outlook for rules which will of themselves tell agents just what course of action to pursue; *whereas the object of moral principles is to supply standpoints and methods which will enable the individual to make for himself an analysis of the elements of good and evil in the particular situation in which he finds himself.* No genuine moral principle prescribes a specific course of action; rules,¹ like cooking recipes, may tell just what to do and how to do it. A moral principle, such as that of chastity, of justice, of the Golden Rule, gives the agent a basis for looking at and examining a particular question that comes up. It holds before him certain possible aspects of the act; it warns him against taking a short or partial view of the act. It economizes his thinking by supplying him with the main heads by reference to which to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important considerations for which he should be on the lookout.

A moral principle, then, is not a command to act or forbear acting in a given way: *it is a tool for analyzing a special situation*, the right or wrong being determined by the situation in its entirety, and not by the rule as such. We sometimes hear it stated, for example, that the universal adoption of the Golden Rule would at once settle all industrial disputes and difficulties. But suppose that the principle were accepted in good faith by everybody; it would not at once tell everybody just what to do in all the complexities of his relations to others. When individuals are still uncertain of what

their real good may be, it does not finally decide matters to tell them to regard the good of others as they would their own. Nor does it mean that whatever in detail we want for ourselves we should strive to give to others. Because I am fond of classical music it does not follow that I should thrust as much of it as possible upon my neighbors. But the "Golden Rule" does furnish us a *point of view from which to consider acts*; it suggests the necessity of considering how our acts affect the interests of others as well as our own; it tends to prevent partiality of regard; it warns against setting an undue estimate upon a particular consequence of pain or pleasure, simply because it happens to affect us. In short, the Golden Rule does not issue special orders or commands; but it does clarify and illuminate the situations requiring intelligent deliberation.

The same distinction is implied in what was brought out in the last chapter between happiness (in the sense of general welfare) as an end and as a standard. If it were regarded as the direct end of acts, it might be taken to be something fixed and inflexible. As a standard it is rather a cautionary direction, saying that when we judge an act, accomplished or proposed, with reference to approval and disapproval, we should first consider its consequences in general, and then its special consequences with respect to whatever affects the well-being of others. As a standard it provides a consistent point of view to be taken in all deliberation, but it does not pretend to determine in advance precisely what constitutes the general welfare or common good. It leaves room open for discovery of new constituents of well-being, and for varying combinations of these constituents in different situations. If the standard were taken as a rule, in the sense of a recipe, it would signify that one comes to each case with a prior hard and fast, Procrustean, and complete conception of just and only what elements form happiness, so that this conception can be applied like a mathematical formula. "Standards" interpreted after this fashion breed self-righteousness, moral conceit, and fanaticism. The standard as a standpoint for survey of situations allows free play to the imagination in reaching new insights. It requires, rather than merely permits,

continual advance in the conception of what constitutes happiness in the concrete.

It follows accordingly that the important thing about knowledge in its moral aspect is not its actual extent so much as it is the *will to know*—the active desire to examine conduct in its bearing upon the general good. Actual information and insight are limited by conditions of birth, education, social environment. The notion of the intuitionist theory that all persons possess a uniform and equal stock of moral judgments is contrary to fact. Yet there are common human affections and impulses which express themselves within every social environment;—there is no people the members of which do not have a belief in the value of human life, of care of offspring, of loyalty to tribal and community customs, etc., however restricted and one-sided they may be in the application of these beliefs. Beyond this point, there is always, on whatever level of culture, the possibility of being on the alert for opportunities to widen and deepen the meaning of existing moral ideas. The attitude of *seeking* for what is good may be cultivated under any conditions of race, class, and state of civilization. Persons who are ignorant in the conventional sense of education may display an interest in discovering and considering what is good which is absent in the highly literate and polished. From the standpoint of this interest, class divisions vanish. The moral quality of knowledge lies not in possession but in concern with increase. The essential evil of fixed standards and rules is that it tends to render men satisfied with the existing state of affairs and to take the ideas and judgments they already possess as adequate and final.

The need for constant revision and expansion of moral knowledge is one great reason why there is no gulf dividing non-moral knowledge from that which is truly moral. At any moment conceptions which once seemed to belong exclusively to the biological or physical realm may assume moral import. This will happen whenever they are discovered to have a bearing on the common good. When knowledge of bacteria and germs and their relation to the spread of disease was achieved, sanitation, public and private, took on a moral significance it did not have before. For they were

seen to affect the health and well-being of the community. Psychiatrists and psychologists working within their own technical regions have brought to light facts and principles which profoundly affect old conceptions of, say, punishment and responsibility, especially in their place in the formation of disposition. It has been discovered, for example, that "problem children" are created by conditions which exist in families and in the reaction of parents to the young. In a rough way, it may be asserted that most of the morbid conditions of mind and character which develop later have their origin in emotional arrests and maladjustments of early life. These facts have not as yet made their way very far into popular understanding and action, but their ultimate moral import is incalculable. Knowledge once technically confined to physics and chemistry is applied in industry and has an effect on the lives and happiness of individuals beyond all estimate. The list of examples might be extended indefinitely. The important point is that any restriction of moral knowledge and judgments to a definite realm necessarily limits our perception of moral significance. A large part of the difference between those who are stagnant and reactionary and those who are genuinely progressive in social matters comes from the fact that the former think of morals as confined, boxed, within a round of duties and sphere of values which are fixed and final. Most of the serious moral problems of the present time are dependent for their solution upon a general realization that the contrary is the case. Probably the great need of the present time is that the traditional barriers between scientific and moral knowledge be broken down, so that there will be organized and consecutive endeavor to use all available scientific knowledge for humane and social ends.

There is, therefore, little need of calling attention to the point with which we have concluded the previous chapters: namely, the influence of the social environment upon the chief ethical concepts. Only if some rigid form of intuitionism were true, would the state of culture and the growth of knowledge in forms usually called non-moral, be without significance for distinctively moral knowledge and judgment. Because the two things are con-

nected, each generation, especially one living in a time like the present, is under the responsibility of overhauling its inherited stock of moral principles and reconsidering them in relation to contemporary conditions and needs. It is stupid to suppose that this signifies that all moral principles are so relative to a particular state of society that they have no binding force in any social condition. The obligation is to discover *what* principles *are* relevant to our own social estate. Since this social condition is a fact, the principles which are related to it are real and significant, even though they be not adapted to some other set and style of social institutions, culture, and scientific knowledge. It is the insistence on a uniform and unchanging code of morals, the

same at all times and places, which brings about the extreme revolt which says that they are all conventional and of no validity. Recognition of their close and vital relationship to social forces will create and reenforce search for the principles which are truly relevant in our own day.

NOTES

[LW 7:262-283.]

1. Of course, the word "rule" is often used to designate a principle—as in the case of the phrase "Golden Rule." We are speaking not of the words, but of their underlying ideas.