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THE THEORETICAL VALUE OF MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

I.

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The significance of this theme may be otherwise expressed in such questions as these: Is morality ultimate? What is the final meaning of moral and religious experience, so far, at least, as religion is related to morality? How should the facts of the moral consciousness be valued by him who would construct a philosophical system?

A word as to the conditions under which morality might be regarded as ultimate. The moral good cannot be defined except in terms of itself; the moral good is that which satisfies the desire of a moral agent; the moral good is "the realization of the moral capability."* Note also the distinction between ultimate morality and morality as ultimate. We cannot know because of the limitations of our developing life what the final state of moral beings would be. We may know, I think, that the ethical Ideal is finally real, that that for which a man strives is realized in a living existence and is a controlling principle of reality, indeed, is an attribute of the World-Ground and an essential factor, although perhaps not the only factor, in the supreme end.

The following positions may be taken: First, that we cannot know the Absolute and so cannot say that morality is ultimate; secondly, that morality has an ultimate significance but only when transmitted into some higher experience; thirdly, that theoretically we do not know whether morality is ultimate or not, but that through the soul's unique function of faith, we know that it is and that the Divine Being is moral; fourthly, that a philosophical investigation of our experience of both the real and the ideal can only lead to the conclusion that the

* T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Secs. 171-2.

Absolute is a moral Personality realizing himself in a society of moral selves, in consequence of which it may be said that morality is ultimate. It is the purpose of this paper to offer some considerations as to the manner in which this last view may be successfully maintained in a philosophical system.

But what, after all, is philosophy? It is not easy to define it nor is it easy to be convinced that the task implied by its definition can be accomplished. Who is bold enough to say that philosophy is a well-wrought-out science which has a definite history and is now in its most complete stage of development and is universally accepted? The fact is that there is no such thing, never was and never will be. Hence the surprise and in a measure the disappointment on the part of the beginner. How can there be a history of philosophy, for the absolute truth does not change in time? Or, if you have history, you have not philosophy. Philosophy is rather self-knowledge which includes a knowledge of the world and of God as dependent upon a knowledge of the self.* If so, how can we escape the conclusion that there are as many philosophies as there are selves and that philosophy is a certain aspect of individual experience, a certain attitude of reason towards life in all its complexity, both material, economic, social, religious, indeed, the entire compass of experience? As to any other kind of philosophy—a philosophy which can claim to be a science, verified and universally accepted, I doubt if there be such, either in the past or present. And yet some have been courageous enough to undertake a history of philosophy, seeking to find a logical order in the development of the world's thought, tracing the genesis and order of conceptions as they have appeared throughout the centuries. If philosophy be a personal affair and yet these personal views of succeeding generations fall into some discoverable order exhibiting a development towards a larger and more satisfying whole of truth, it is a fasci-

* Kuno Fischer, *Descartes and His School*, 1-14.

nating thought, causing us to raise the question whether the springs of our life are not deeper than we had believed, even in the eternal Spirit, else how account for this strange harmony amidst the individual diversities?

I would, then, define philosophy in this personal way, as "self-knowledge"—as an attitude of reason—an adjustment of the man to his living—an adjustment gained through reflection upon himself in relation to the world and to God, striving after, though not always gaining, a consistent view.

Why should this reflection be undertaken? Why not be satisfied with the piece-meal view of things? Because we must live, and the true life is the inner life, and the inner life seeks completeness and harmony of experience without which the mind cannot rest. Every contradiction impels forward. The mind ceaselessly puts forth new demands and refuses to take any answer as the whole truth because the mind itself is implicitly larger than the questions it can ask or the answers it can give. How must I think of myself and the not-self, call it world and God, if you please? What in my experience can I depend upon as having final significance? Does it make any difference how I conduct myself, and if it does, why should it? A few such questions arouse the mind from indifference—it may be only to fall back into despair, discovering no satisfying answers to its questions. Philosophy is a personal soul-struggle for the light of truth.

Another fact seems to complicate the difficulty, namely, consciousness and conscience admit no protesting appeal—what is true—what is right—must be at last my own decision. I may be taught by others past or present, but finally the belief in the truth and the right is my own response to the collective reasons that I have gained in my experience thus far.

It would seem as though those features of my experience which are of most significance in the conduct of my life should be given most importance in my final decisions concerning the truth, that they should convey

to me the deepest significance of my own reality and of all reality—in short, those principles which are pre-eminently practical and social—the moral and religious. Is it not true that the moral and religious experiences become most developed comparatively late in life, as though they could come into clear consciousness only as the confirmed result of long and complex experience?

Moreover, the plain man is forced to regard the universe from the moral and religious standpoint. He may be easily confused if asked whether the moral law is as real as the stone at his feet whose weight he lifts and whose form and hardness he experiences. The senses may have chronologically the first claim upon him for acceptance of what they reveal as final truth, but he at the same time conducts his life according to principles that transcend the senses, counting those principles as real and necessary in dealing with reality as what the eye and the hand reveal. And certainly in the later history of his mental life, a man would sooner doubt his own eyes than the final trustworthiness of a moral principle. How easy to regard the world as having a moral order—as grounded in a moral Personality who has intimate relations with real finite moral agents—how necessary to say this in the light of experience! Few would hesitate to accept such a statement as the truth. But only a little attention to the history of philosophy is needed to convince one that the above proposition is yet perhaps the boldest and most comprehensive of syntheses, full of difficulties, for can we after all say that the self is a real moral agent with moral responsibility? That the world-order is moral, consequently purposeful, even having the moral as at least one factor in the supreme purpose? That the World-Ground is a moral Personality --not only self-conscious thought and will, but also moral, therefore, realizing in His own perfectness the moral Ideal? It is, then, of much importance to determine the place of morality in a philosophical system.

First, consider some examples of the skeptical reply

that we do not and cannot know the nature of the Absolute. Restricting the discussion to narrow limits, I refer to the negative result of the Critique of Pure Reason, which has proved acceptable to so many, that this negative, skeptical position has in consequence been regarded by some as the essential teaching of Kant. This negative position concerning the ultimate consists in limiting knowledge to sense phenomena in space and time. Our sense perceptions are indeed determined by the subject according to certain pure concepts and principles. The result of this synthesis is the world of experience with its laws. Space, time, things and self are "empirically real but transcendently ideal." Concepts without sense intuitions are empty, and to become knowledge must be intuitionalized in space and time and causal relation. Hence the limits of knowledge. To be sure we have other conceptions like soul, world and God, but they are regulative, subjective principles necessary to the highest possible synthesis of knowledge, but to regard these conceptions as signifying ultimate realities would be to give objective validity to what are only *a priori* regulative principles. The influences of this negative results of the Critique of Pure Reason have been widely felt.

Mr. Shadworth Hodgson furnishes an illustration of the influence of this negative result of Kant's work. His "Metaphysics of Experience"* leaves us at last in the presence of Unknowable Power. Hodgson maintains that he continues the Kantian limitation of knowledge to experience, but also holds that he is more true to Kant's position than was Kant himself by insisting that the analysis of experience be undertaken without any assumptions. He will not, therefore, like Kant, assume forms of knowledge, a self that knows and a noumenal reality. All there is, is consciousness and its states which transform themselves into an external world, a human body and a self, distinguishing itself from yet knowing

* "The Metaphysics of Experience," Vols. I, II, III, IV., by Shadworth H. Hodgson. Longmans, Green & Co. 1898.

the world, possessing the body and being self-conscious. This process is not the unfolding of the life of a metaphysically real soul, for there is no such thing—there are only conscious states becoming of themselves in turn body, external world and the self in contrast to, yet in peculiar but different relations to world and body.

Moreover, conscious states are simply the accompaniment of brain states. The real agency is not consciousness but nervous changes; the order of conditioning is, brain state, then conscious state and this order is never reversed. Even in the highest forms of intellectual synthesis and ethical choice, the nervous elements interacting are the real agencies.*

While Mr. Hodgson says he is a materialist in psychology, he is not a materialist in metaphysics. Matter indeed marks the limit of our knowledge; matter embraces the nervous system which in the cerebral changes conditions our consciousness, but matter itself is in turn conditioned by a higher though unknown realm of real conditions—the unknown Power which can be conceived neither as matter nor as a universal consciousness, but which embraces in itself both the seen and the unseen. With these conceptions our positive knowledge ends.

Turning to the moral and religious sphere, we find that Mr. Hodgson follows Kant's example in the Critique of the Practical Reason, although he does not leave us with a like confidence in the postulates of Practical Reason. Kant leads us to believe that he himself really meant more than his clumsy words enabled him to say, namely, that the postulates of God, freedom and immortality are the highest form of knowledge and worthy of all confidence as the truth about reality. But Mr. Hodgson shows that the completion of the conception of the Unknown Power is accomplished through the "moral ideas and feelings which are the creatures of conscience."* Hence this addition to the conception of the

* *Ibid.*, Vol. III, 310-311, 335. Vol. IV, 53-54, 20. Vol. I, 416.

* *Ibid.*, IV, 203-6.

Unknown Power "that sustains the universe" is speculatively gratuitous. We know only that there is such a power to which neither blame nor praise, nor, least of all, moral goodness and self-conscious interest in human life can be attributed. Yet Mr. Hodgson would have conscience follow implicitly with "the confidence, that the power which we exert in so acting is identical in kind, and continuous *in fact*, with the inmost nature of the Infinite and eternal Power which sustains the universe."*

I think that Mr. Hodgson is here trying to keep with one hand what the other takes away, for if the World-Ground is not known as moral and as interested in moral agents, how can there be any confidence that in obeying the imperatives of conscience we are any more in harmony with the Unknown Power than in disobeying them? If the principles and conceptions which express the moral consciousness have not an objective as well as a subjective significance—if they are not the deepest meanings of all reality trustworthy to the core, what do I care about them? Why not make a lie my good? There is no answer. Mr. Hodgson's final position is disappointing and full of a stinging bitterness in the discovery that those things which I hold supremely valuable and significant are neither ultimately valuable nor significant. I do not intend to misrepresent this author's view of moral experience; but when he cuts it off from any final significance, condescending to recognize the moral as only a phase of the practical—all the practical being only the conditionate of an Unknown Power—I must indeed have great faith if I am to act upon a moral principle and regard it as identical and continuous with the Unknown Power.

What I have just said is supported by the treatment of theology in its relation to philosophy. Theology is regarded as simply the conceptual representation of the practical—the moral and the religious. It has no connection with philosophy and does not have the value of

* *Ibid.*, IV, 206-7.

knowledge. It does not in any sense throw light upon the nature of the Absolute. Theology, however, serves a useful purpose, in that it formulates the moral and religious experience of a given age. As a poem like Dante's *Divine Comedy* formulates the prevailing thought and spirit of an age in a pleasing manner and to a useful end, although the poet would not expect his statements to be received as a theoretical expression of the nature of reality, just so theology serves its day and generation without being able to claim acceptance as speculative truth about the Absolute. Theology is not knowledge, which amounts to saying that theology is not a possible science.

It is evident that "The Metaphysics of Experience" gives no prominent place to morality in its structure, although it is treated at much length. We feel that such a system can not be true. Why? Because the author undertook to base his metaphysics upon experience—which, of course, is the only correct thing to do—and yet has been untrue to the most significant factors in that experience—the moral and religious—regarding these factors out of their proper relations in the whole and consequently reaching a result which cannot prevail as a system satisfying to the subjects of these experiences.

Moreover, this theory attempts to explain morality on a naturalistic basis and according to a materialistic psychology, although we must give Mr. Hodgson the benefit of his assertion that he is not a materialist in metaphysics. T. H. Green in his "Prolegomena to Ethics" has shown that such an attempt cannot succeed. How can fear and compulsion generate the sense of moral obligation, and the energy of material forces have as its result the ideal of "the ought to be?" Prof. Huxley, although sympathizing with a line of thought like that of Hodgson, confessed that "all modern as well as ancient scientific effort has utterly failed" to bring the order of things into harmony with the moral sense of man, and "the cosmic process has no sort of relation to moral

ends." And to Spencer's question: "If the ethical man is not a product of the cosmic process, what is he a product of?" Prof. Ladd replies: "The naturalistic view of ethical phenomena has, of course, no sufficient answer."* I believe that moral experience can be satisfactorily understood only from the point of view of moral personality, both human and divine.

I now, however, call attention to a system which takes an intermediate view and maintains that morality has final significance but cannot as such be predicted of the Absolute. This is Bradley's "Appearance and Reality"—a work in which many difficult questions are acceptably treated. As I wish to show the value given to moral experience in this system, it is necessary briefly to outline it.

First of all, Bradley's starting point is acceptable, namely, "that the object of metaphysics is to find a general view which will satisfy the intellect—and—that whatever succeeds in doing this is real and true, and that whatever fails is neither" (553-4). It may be that to restrict this satisfaction to the intellect rather than the whole man is too narrow; but I think Bradley means all our experiences expressed in terms that will satisfy the intellect, and when so expressed we have to take the view as both the real and true. The world of "appearance" is the world of "experience"—using the term "experience" in the Kantian signification—and includes our thoughts, volitions and feelings—the world of things, events and selves. We must think of all these—not as illusions—but as appearances not in themselves real, manifestations of ultimate Reality. The world is not made up of real existences conceived as independent and persisting through successive changes, for "so understood the world contradicts itself; and is therefore appearance and not reality" for, whatever cannot be conceived without contradiction is less than reality and must be regarded as a fragment, as reaching beyond itself to a whole in which it is embraced as a constituent but trans-

* Quotations from Ladd's *Philosophy of Conduct*, p. 603.

mutated factor. Measured by this standard, space, time, change, causation, even the self are not ultimately real but are real only as "appearances," as experiences.

What, then, is reality? Reality is the only individual, embracing all finiteness, even selves and their acts, in a perfect harmony of "sentient experience" (p. 142). The Absolute Reality is never less than its appearances in thought, feeling and volition, but all this diversity of the finite actual is taken up into the Absolute Unity and so transmuted that, while all is retained, yet the differentiations disappear in an inexpressible highest unity of experience. Perhaps the undifferentiated state of feeling—the supposed condition of the self before the distinction of subject and object and relations arises—may furnish an analogy of what that highest unity of experience in the Absolute is. Somehow the things of the natural world, finite souls, the good, the true, the beautiful, "ugliness, error, and evil, all are owned by, and all essentially contribute to the wealth of the Absolute," but "all of these are worthless alike apart from transmutation" (489).

It is at this point that Bradley's theory of the Absolute becomes mystical. In one sense we may say that the Absolute is personal—for all finite personalities are in Him—indeed, it is better to call the Absolute personal than impersonal, but better still super-personal, super-rational, super-moral—an undifferentiated whole of immediate experience.

The "appearances" constituting the finite world differ in rank. Thus Bradley tries to avoid Pantheism which regards everything as equally divine (551). The relative rank and value of appearances is determined by the degree of freedom from contradiction and incompleteness, or, in other words, by the amount of transmutation and supplementing necessary to reach the Whole, the Absolute. For example, the evil and the good differ in degrees of realness and value, both being manifestations of the Absolute. To be evil is to suffer loss

and perish, because in the end the evil is overruled and transmuted into the inexpressible unity of the Absolute experience which is above the distinctions and relations of the finite yet possesses this finite in this perfect unity. But the good, though suffering transmutation, stands nearer the harmonious whole and is consequently of more value in the scale of appearances.

But why is the morally good not ultimate? Stated very simply, the moral life consists in the volitional effort to realize one's self-perfection with as great an extent and as perfect a harmony as possible. But it is soon found that this perfection of the self involves self-assertion and self-denial and that moral goodness requires now one and now the other. The more comprehensive the life, the more self-assertion and self-denial are required, and yet the assumption of morality is that the life may be a harmony. But how can these contradictions, self-assertion and self-denial, which are evidently two factors of moral goodness, be brought into unity? Their unity is inconceivable. So morality must issue in religion. Consequently, the next step after morality is religion which is the anticipation of the ultimate unity of all opposites in the Whole (438-440).

In a paradoxical sentence, Bradley says: "The moral duty not to be moral is the duty to be religious," for religion feels the unity even of good and evil in the Absolute experience. And yet religion itself is not final, but must be transcended and transmuted. Religion is incomplete and inconsistent because its faith is a "making believe," and yet because religion is practical, "it is at the same time a making as if one did *not* believe," i. e., the felt, the anticipated, final unity of good and evil found in religion contradicts the practical inability to escape the difference and the recognized necessity of living as though there never could be any transformation and unity of the good and the evil in something higher than themselves (440-3).

Another reason why religion is inconsistent and con-

sequently not ultimate lies in the relation between God and man which is supposed to be an essential factor in the nature of religion. But relation destroys the independence of both terms which can only stand in a unity embracing both. Consequently, man and God become finite forms of the Whole. In the realm of appearances, God and man may both stand as related personalities, but personality cannot be applied to the Absolute nor reality to the finite person. On the other hand, religion shows its inconsistency and consequently its incompleteness and unreality by its effort to attain the perfect unity of God and man. "And, if so, nothing would in the end fall outside God." But, "if you identify the Absolute with God, that is not the God of religion. If again you separate them, God becomes a finite factor in the whole. And the effort of religion is to put an end to, and break down this relation—a relation which it none the less presupposes. Hence, short of the Absolute, God cannot rest, and having reached that goal, he is lost and religion with him" (440-447).

I will now emphasize some of the features of this theory which are worthy of favorable consideration in any attempt to estimate the value of the facts of moral and religious experience in a philosophical system.

First, moral and religious experience is an expression of the Absolute Reality. The Absolute is its appearances and is not less real than are they. This is a far stronger position than that taken by Hodgson. In moral and religious experience we may be confident that we are grasping true Reality. It is my conviction that we must in the end ground moral and religious experience somehow in ultimate Reality. It is thus that I understand and accept Bradley's meaning.

Secondly—It does make a difference to the Absolute unity whether one is good or evil, for each contributes according to its nature to this Absolute whole of immediate experience (430).

Thirdly—It is a fair inference that the morally good

is relatively nearer the Absolute fulness—is more real than the evil—needs less correction—less transmutation to be brought into the Absolute Whole.

Fourthly—Judged by the principle involved in “degrees of reality and truth,” religion in which morality culminates is the highest in rank among the appearances of the Absolute Reality. “There is nothing more real than what comes in religion.” “The man who demands a reality more solid than that of the religious consciousness, seeks he does not know what” (449). I would draw especial attention to religion as the climax of the process in the world of finite experience, and the reason why it stands highest is that it is the most complete experience, the nearest approach to the unity of experience in the Absolute.

Fifthly—Moral and religious experience as certainly lays hold of the Absolute reality as philosophy, and in some respects is superior to philosophy. Neither religion nor philosophy can be said to be the completion of the other (454). As a mere intellectual expression of ultimate truth, philosophy may be said to stand higher than religion; but, on the other hand, so far as religion succeeds in its “attempt to express the complete reality of goodness through every aspect of our being—it is at once something more, and therefore something higher than philosophy” (453). To one man, philosophy, to another the intensity of religious experience may be the way to the Divine (6, 7).

But, on the other hand, there are some positions taken by Bradley which present great difficulty. For example, without attempting any definition of the moral good and evil, let us ask this question: Is God good, morally good? I cannot avoid the affirmative answer, and yet there are difficulties. Certainly, so far as we know, good is relative to evil, yet Christian faith holds that God is all in all, overrules the evil and causes the good to triumph. But how are error and moral evil to be in the All? Surely the temptation is strong to say with Bradley that the good,

the evil, the ugly, the erroneous are but "appearances," manifestations of the one Reality which holds all these, "transmuted," in a highest unity of experience wherein distinctions and relations do not exist. Of course, there is no telling how, but somehow this highest unity of experience is the highest, indeed, the only complete fact. Is this the way in which we must think of God over-ruling the evil and making the wrath of man to praise Him? Has Bradley offered the only solution?

Let it be remembered that Bradley has shut the door of escape by way of the free initiative of man as a moral agent rebelling in his evil independence against the divine Person, for man and God were shown to be only correlatives in conscious experience, both phenomenal, both adjectives of the Whole. To escape this conclusion seems to me almost impossible. How can anything be outside the Whole in order to be related to it as God (519)? How can there be created an independent-dependent being, namely, man as a moral agent? Are we driven to say that all including man's moral history is simply a process of the one Absolute Reality?

Another difficult point raised by Bradley is contained in his assertion that there can be no real moral progress except in the phenomenal order. In one sense of the term Absolute it would seem as though we were obliged to accept this denial of ultimate real progress and confine progress to the swiftly passing order of human life. But I am unwilling to admit that our triumphs are not real moral advances with ultimate significance—more than mere appearances. Are we shut up to Bradley's conclusion?

I frankly confess that I do not know how to get over the difficulty involved in the relation of man and the Absolute. To say that man is created by God and given moral independence is little short of a makeshift—and yet, that something has been granted to man which cannot be metaphysically expressed it seems unavoidable to maintain in behalf of the validity and trustworthiness of the principles of morality, but even then we may not have

escaped monism; we may have only made the difficulty involved in the relation of the finite and the Infinite a little less pronounced. To this end, I offer the following suggestions: Is knowledge of anything and the actual experience of it a necessity in the divine Life? Is it not possible that God may know a moral human act, yet that act not be, as such, the divine experience? Surely we know the act of another which is not made thereby our own. How can we hold that the human moral act which is an object of knowledge for the subject of it is at the same instant "transmuted" into something other than it is known to be by that human subject without destroying confidence in the trustworthiness and possibility of knowledge? Surely there cannot be two different kinds of truth about the same thing nor a finite experience which in its transmuted form is the same thing; and yet has not Bradley asked that this be granted?

Is it not conceivable that the very nature of God must realize itself in a society of moral selves in whom, indeed, there is struggle, passion, ignorance, and evil, initiated by their own volitions and in whom there is a separation between their conceived moral ideal and their moral attainments, while in God the ideal and the real form a true unity in virtue of which He is the perfect moral Person in fellowship with finite moral persons? Moreover, is it not possible that in such a society of moral selves the divine ends are progressively realized and so moral progress is real even from the absolute point of view?

NOTE—The second division of Prof. Ten Broeke's article will appear in the January Review and Expositor.—Editor.