

THE ETHICS OF SOME MODERN WORLD-THEORIES

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IN the History of Philosophy, world-theories may, on a broad view, be resolved into two main types, namely, Idealism and Materialism. Idealism takes a twofold direction, Theism and Pantheism. Theism is properly a form of religious philosophy, not of theology. The original opposition between theism and pantheism, however, was on religious rather than on philosophical grounds. Materialism has assumed a threefold form: that in which the psychic is something physical — the spiritual is a stuff; that in which the psychic is a product or effect of moved matter; and that in which the psychic is an accompaniment of physical processes, and here the materialistic trend is not so pronounced. It is, however, no part of my present purpose to pursue the classification of world-theories, but merely to select some of these, which have proved of great interest to the thought of our time, for consideration on their ethical sides or aspects.

There is the best-possible world-theory of Leibniz. Leibniz admitted his system to be a "mingle-mangle" of Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, and the Scholastics. But this does not mean a mechanical laying down of the ideas of his precursors, since they are organically bound in his thought with one another. He was the renewer of the vitalistic-teleological mode of thought. Men's perfections he derived (in his "Monadology") from God; their imperfections he ascribes to their own imperfect nature. To the imperfection inherent in finite things, not to Divine Will, he attributes (in his "Theodicy") the evil in the world. But he would commit philosophical theism to a strange position, when he is prepared to deny that the world would have been a better one without sin and without suffering. There has been, to his preëstablished har-

mony, divine foresight and regulation of all things beforehand; everything is necessary, nothing can be changed; if the least evil in the world were wanting, it would not be this world; besides, an evil often causes a good. An optimism absurdly frigid and fatalistic, it must be said, for if the world is already the best possible, ethical incentives to hope are not in that case much in evidence. The ethical task, in his view, was the perfection of human spirits, which must be freed always more of their finite relations. For the source of error, and with that of moral evil, lies in their limitation and finitude. The more comprehensive and free their development away from limited knowledge, the greater their approach to an harmonious world-view. The unethical is, with him, too much the result of mere error and confused ideas; and the ethical is too much in need of harmonization with the metaphysically necessary in his system. After much meaningless talk of 'possible' worlds, however, he leaves us with just the actual world, with whose moral evil he should have more closely concerned himself. But, because of his absorption in the metaphysical ground of evil — which he failed correctly to apprehend — he almost wholly missed the philosophy of moral evil. To him it was mere defect of good; he never faced it as enemy and opposite of the good. In his ethics, it was therefore not real; it was indeed but the unreal — a mere appearance which made the rosiest optimism possible. God had merely allowed evil as necessary. Rosmini (in his great "Theodicy") has been largely influenced by Leibniz, in his emphasis on the privative or negative aspects of evil.

Notwithstanding his individualist position, Leibniz passes in his ethics to a sharply altruistic position, in which love to one's fellow men becomes the chief moment in morality. This stress on harmonious social life is an echo of his metaphysic, with its emphasis on world-harmony. But the independence postulated for the individual in his metaphysical system had a restraining influence on him here, the more so as he made all virtue

rest on individual knowledge. Extreme altruism would have been untenable, morally, and his theory of self-perfection saved him from it. His emphasis on ethical ideal and moral perfection was indeed one of the finest and most fruitful things in the thought of Leibniz, albeit it concerned the moral subject, not world-development, as in Hegel.

Then there is the World-Will theory of Schopenhauer. He combats pantheism, but all the marks of pantheism are yet characteristic of his own world-theory. For him the world-essence is that unity known as Blind Will, ever pressing on to self-manifestation as its single aim. But, as such self-manifestation can never, for an Infinite, be complete, there must be sense of defeat, and pain of perpetual craving. The world is for him an appearance-world—a veil of Maya. Individuality is banned, since the World-Will is in essence one. Individual existence is illusory—mere appearance. Our own bodies, and the bodies of animals, are to him will-appearances. The world itself is Will. Such, in a word, was the result of the metaphysics derived by Schopenhauer from Brahmanism. And the ethical result which he enjoined was the mortification of personal will, the obliteration of individuality, the crushing of egoism in its very source. To remove the unhappiness that rules in the world, one must needs deny the will to live. For the individual deludes himself that he is furthering his own happiness, while, as matter of fact, he is but serving the race, as the only thing that endures. An atmosphere of acrid illusionment is all that Schopenhauer supplies. Such, but not without a curious contradictoriness, was the issue of the ethics which Schopenhauer drew from Buddhism. Schopenhauer's World-Will is a clear indication of the universalistic tendency of his ethics; but it is non-rational in its inmost core, and never out of it can you bring Science, Law, and Order. For it has not reason as its base and bottom, as obtains in a sound philosophical theism; its reason is but a by-product or an afterthought. But the conception of World-

Will, wherein everything is jumbled together as equally and alike will, defeats itself and becomes unmeaning, since there is no means of differentiating will from anything else. His is will that has no object which it reaches after, and can represent as other than itself. His World-Will is not deliberative will, only blind inclination to life. Hence the immense difference of his meaning from that of a theistic thinker like Martineau when the latter said, "All cosmic power is Will." This irrationality of the world, as a metaphysical theory, becomes, when carried over into the ethical sphere, the ground-principle of Schopenhauer's pessimism. And indeed it is not remarkable that the world, as the appearance of blind will, should be to him the worst thinkable. It is the irrationality of the world's root, or the disjunction of will from intelligence, that is the fundamental source of Schopenhauer's error. And the prime rectification is the substitution of a World-Will that is, before all things, rational. His grave ethical blunder is to identify being and evil, for it is physical evil or suffering—not moral evil—that he inveighs against. But even in the transcendental ethics of Brahmanism and of Buddhism, to both of which he owed much, suffering held a place of unique importance. And it has been said that "all noblest things are born in agony."

No ethical world can arise as fruit of unreason, chaos, caprice, and non-intelligent instinct, which are the prime conditions of his world-theory. Though Schopenhauer imagined that he ran the meaning of the world up into the ethical, yet he resolved it into will as inclusive of every form of cosmic and psychic energy: it was in contempt of reason or intellect, and in glorification of mere blind activity, that he made man will, and will inexplicable—*velle non discitur*. Yet, as Hartmann remarks, this "maimed and blind Will nevertheless altogether comports itself as if it had a notional or ideal content." True, he denounces it as one of the most pernicious of errors to say that the world has only a physical, not a moral significance. But the ethical significance of the world, for him, is of unsatisfactory character, when the world-principle

of it, will, is seen to be so little worthy of the ethical halo with which it has often been invested. Reason and idea are no necessary and essential conditions of the activity of the will, with him; nothing could be more unsatisfactory than his lack of care that will be directed by reason. We may, of course, abstract will from reason in our thinking, but in reality will is inseparable from reason, is, in fact, energizing reason. Will is, as Kant said, nothing but the practical reason, reason being required for action under law. The holder of such a theory of will had small title to speak of Kant's "apotheosis of lovelessness"; there is in it, in my view, nothing ethically admirable. Every philosophy of will reckons ill that leaves out reason, and makes will the sole substance or energy of the universe. For reason is that omnipresent and unescapable thing which antedates and bases everything that truly goes by the name of will. Schopenhauer was himself not devoid of a glimmering of the truth that man's life is often at its highest when reason or intellect is most in evidence, and will most in abeyance. Hence for the will to live and its insatiable desires, he offers the æsthetic view of the world — as the highest form of existence — to raise us above the vanity of the world. So, in his inconsequence, he offers us, in pure will-less æsthetic contemplation, a positive good in the world after all. But he has no strong, clear, correct, and consistent view of the relation of reason or intellect to will. Obsessed by the priority of automatism and instinct, he absurdly subsumes such process under the term "will," and fails to realize that rationality is of its essence. Nothing could be more mischievous than so to treat will as mere power. Again, the altruism of Schopenhauer is absolute and consequently absurd. He was himself a living contradiction of the theory, which is as false as the theory of pure egoism would be. But if life carries so little value for our pessimistic philosopher, a more neutral attitude to both theories would obviously have been more consistent. The

egoistic and the altruistic impulses are both necessary, on a true view, and must be harmonized.

I turn now to Hartmann's world-theory of the Unconscious. His world-theory is a manifold eclecticism. He himself says it is a synthesis of Schopenhauer and Hegel, with a decided preponderance of the former; executed under the guidance of the principles of the teachings of Schelling's positive philosophy, and of the concept of the unconscious in Schelling's first system; the abstract result is then closely united to Leibnizian individualism and modern natural-science realism so as to form concrete monism. But, as we saw in the case of Leibniz, so in that of Hartmann, there is organic connection, not mere juxtaposition, of the derivative ideas or elements. In respect of method, Hartmann made the curious error of supposing that we can solve metaphysical problems out of immediate experience, that induction assumes tasks which it can by no means solve.

Beginning with the absolute substance and its two attributes, the logical and the alogical, Hartmann gives us the world from this absolute substance through the alogical, the unconscious, changing from the original condition of rest. The effect of this is, that the manifoldness of the ideas which the logical eternally contains but does not of its own initiative unfold, becomes thereby realized. The logical, that is to say, seeks to repair or make good what, in this compulsion, the unreasonable had done, so that rest or not-willing may be restored. The logical brings the unconscious to consciousness in this way, teaching it to know the misery and illusion of its activity. Will is startled or supervenes on this procedure, and this surprise is consciousness, according to Hartmann. And always knowledge brings it more about that willing leads to unblessedness and renunciation to painlessness.

In Hartmann's "concrete monism" the plurality of phenomenal being is supposed to be reduced to the unity of the unconscious, but the freeing from dualism is not really explained. Matter also is reduced to the combined will

and intellect of the unconscious. More exactly, there is a combination of will-atoms, with logical ideas, which accompany the combinations of the will-atoms. Hartmann's treatment is more unified and methodical than Schopenhauer's. Hartmann represents a dynamic rather than a mechanical view of nature, and finds room for teleological conception. But he treats ethics only as a condition to the satisfaction of real needs or human well-being — as mere means to religion, æsthetics, and knowledge — in short, as phenomenal means to supra-ethical ends in the three spheres just named. That is to say, he does not allow the ethical to have value in itself. Not a very exalted rôle for the ethical, it must be said. And he is not quite free of the Schopenhauerian tendency towards the complete negation of the will. Yet the moral consciousness begins with the egoistic pseudo-morality, and the highest unified connection of the Nature-processes is found in the "I" consciousness. But ethical culture is to pass into the ethics of the moral world-order, which includes both the subjective and the objective moral principles. There, subjective motives are to advance objective ends. He seeks to base the ethical on the consciousness of the identity of the ground of all appearances; he thinks the moral must be based upon the Absolute; but he does not give morality itself an absolute character, treating it as merely relative. Ethics must yet be grounded, he holds, in the absolute Being or Essence, if the full unity of the moral life is to be attained, but this, he thinks, is mainly of an abstract character. Whereas the highest ethics is first found in concrete monism, the Kingdom of God consists not of an aggregate of substantially separate creatures, but of an organism constituted of essentially identical God-men; God is the absolute subject of the moral world-order, its immanent essence, not merely a transcendental lawgiver; and the developmental stages of the moral consciousness lead, with Hartmann, up to religion.

Religion, for him, goes beyond ethics, and has redemption from evil as its last purpose. But this means a

quiescence of the will, or a freeing from positive will, in his pessimistic tendency. For him, the world is self-redeeming, not through any species of self-mortification, but by universal insight into the vanity of human endeavor, consequent upon the highest development of intelligence. In all which there seems to be a strange slipping away of spiritual content and ethical value. What boots it to talk of concrete monism and the moral world-order, if the negation of life and the worthlessness of action are the only results? When the soul, though he calls it reasonable will, is only an individual function of the Absolute Will — an unconscious Deity — what is there left of concrete monism, when it has given itself to fulfill this function? Hartmann's ethical position cannot even give real ethical value-judgments, for these are valid only as they have reality behind them, only as the spirit really exists, and posits ethical ends with reason-necessity. His ethic lacks proper metaphysical grounding and support; the ethical reason is hampered, and comes not to its fullest for lack of adequate guarantee in the metaphysics of spirit. The stages of the moral development are, in his view, threefold: the nature stage, or infra-moral; the moral stage; and the super-moral. The moral is, to him, not only end in itself for man, but also highest end for the universe. His pessimism is no more consequent than we saw Schopenhauer's to be, for to his eudæmonistic pessimism he unites evolutionistic optimism, the world having for him a relatively reasonable and purposive development. Still, the non-existence of the world were better, in his view, than its existence. But if one found more pleasure than pain in the world, there would be no need to condemn it. For him there is no absolute purpose in the world, but only the negative absolute purpose, to bring this world to a finish — the extinction of consciousness. The end of all is illusion, which it is the task, not only of the individual, but of all humanity, to recognize as such. Curious is the joining of this ethics of annihilation to teleology.

Hartmann conditions morality on insight into the fruit-

lessness of all striving after pleasure, and into the oneness of individuals with one another and with the universal spirit. His pessimism has a social cast while Schopenhauer's bore an individual character. Eudæmonistic ethic oscillates between the individual and the social in one-sided fashion, and remains only relative in character; eudæmonism is incomplete as a theory, and is not a true and sufficient *rationale* of life. The culture process is required so long as humanity has not seen through the misery and vanity of the world, and the need for quiescence of the will. The preparation for this must be found in æsthetic culture, wherein man frees himself from the world, while standing above it. But in this the pessimistic world-view has already broken down. The world has received a certain rehabilitation; in it the many are to experience the pleasure of participating in this culture process. Hartmann's world-view provides in its way for the determination of humanity as a whole as well as for the individual—in fact, posits a redemptive, supratemporal end. Only, in Hartmann's world-process, things are inverted; God is the subject to be redeemed, and man is the means of His redemption—His coming to Himself for Himself! An unconscious Deity could not be free, since He could not know Himself to be active in the world. It may be safely added that no ethical difficulties of theism can compare with the unethical conceptions involved in Hartmann's working out his ideas of Deity—his Eternal and Absolute. The pessimistic ethic has only a negative albeit an absolute character, namely, the complete negation of will. But it lacks positive end, and will not be adopted save by him who is convinced by suffering; the question as to its universal validity cannot receive an affirmative answer. To invest life with activity and value, under a teleological conception of the world, and yet to insist on nothingness as end or ideal, is clearly absurd and unsatisfactory. Hartmann is found, however, in his later work, less favorable to eudæmonism and quiescence of the will, and more inclined to striving and combat with

evil. To which may be added the general reflection, to which M. Sorel has given expression, that "pessimism is the unfailing source of ceaseless religious renovation."

I turn next to the world-theory of modern Naturalism. This takes many forms, which I do not now propose separately to follow. I prefer to deal in broad outline with naturalistic theory in its ethical standpoints and bearings. It concerns itself with the rise of ethical phenomena, but too often absorbs itself in the merely negative contention that these are natural, as opposed to supernatural. Whether they are the one or the other, is not the real question of ethics of scientific character, which is concerned with accounting, in a disinterested manner, for the place and persistence of moral consciousness in the economy of man's rational life. Naturalistic ethics is content to derive moral principles from the adjustments or balancings of nature-impulses or affections. It regards ethical reason as the synoptic view or connection of determinate rules derived in this way. Ethics becomes a sort of technique for securing as great a good of the whole as possible. It becomes eudæmonistic, but may take the form of individual weal, or the good of the whole, or both. Its eudæmonistic character may lead naturalistic ethics to lay emphasis on individualism, or to put stress on the social principle; it leaves an unstable equilibrium between egoism and altruism, and does not treat the ethical as an independent spiritual magnitude. Ethics thus does not assume an unconditional character, or yield absolute norms; it is only a means. It is fluctuating and relative in character, the practical reason being a mere sum of rules, due to the abstracting power of the understanding. Naturalism may profess to emancipate us from illusion and superstition, but it is not adequate to explain life, still less to ennoble it. For the thought and experience of man transcend nature, and cannot be bound by her limits. That is why, as Schopenhauer remarked, no being, man alone excepted, *wonders* at its own existence and surroundings. Man does not regard himself as merely a

natural object among other natural objects, as naturalism is prone to do. In naturalistic ethics there is no fine putting of the self to proof, for it is made dependent on surroundings or environment, as set in the universal order of nature.

The eudæmonistic impulse is set by naturalistic ethic in constant dependence on outer environment. The self-activity of the individual is significantly limited by the ethical life being set in relation to nature impulses, in the manner of this theory. Moral mistakes are the consequences of miserable conditions. Morality is raised with the raising of happiness. There is no other worthy end in the theory than the impulse to happiness, for which the subject is dependent on the outer world. Of course, social sentiment may be stimulated towards the happiness or welfare of the whole, and the individual merged in the task of shaping outer circumstances to this end. For on this whole he depends; he is supposed to be product of his *milieu*. Or his eudæmonism, dissatisfied with such vague and doubtful collectivism as sole end, may take more individualistic form. Naturalism took—an extreme example—such an individualistic coloring in Stirner, egoism being for him genuine liberty. But he had not Nietzsche's lust of power. His philosophy consisted of sheer, vertiginous heights of individualism, consequently it was of the most unethical character, with no proper recognition of other human beings. His measureless egoism was the only measure, his naturalism, of course, rejecting all supernaturalism. He held in enmity every form of community. But revolt against unethical repression of individuality and against socialist dead-level monotony has no need of, and no justification for, such extreme forms.

Ethical individuality and ethical self-culture must always go beyond a naturalistic individualism, and cannot rest in themselves as end; they are what they are, that they may freely and voluntarily serve the whole. Their enrichment comes of this reciprocity. Against the levelling

of society stood Nietzsche also, who sought "the restoration of the egoism of humanity," in glaring opposition to Schopenhauer's absolute altruism. What Nietzsche called his ethical naturalism was but a stripping of the moral values, till we should be brought back to immoralism, to "nature itself and to naturalness." But he forgot that the transvaluation of values is always going on. He is but critic of existing moral values, violent and extreme at that. His standard of valuation is merely his own. He turns to the happiness principle in the form of "human prosperity" at least. But his "moralistic naturalism" is really averted from value, treating everything as physiologically necessary. As if you could ever in that way reach or explain what is most distinctive of man as a person! Even truth has significance for him only as it is serviceable to the will for power, not as having an objective value. Again, we have in him the rule of the irrational. Vital fitness, under the biological standard, is the thing of supreme moment. But no ethical valuation can accept this as standard of unconditional worth. Naturalism cannot, in fact, be considered a comprehensive world-theory, and grows always more cramped and limited as a world-view, the more it is scrutinized. Its inability to explain the facts of moral obligation—of the Ought—remains stark and unrelieved. Where there is consciousness of an ideal—and a naturalism without ideals would be beneath discussion—there is obligation. From this obligation there is no escape, for the ideal out of which it springs is our own—rooted in our self-hood. The consciousness of the ideal carries with it a sense of the "ought" which bids us realize it—an "ought" of end, not of means. The moral ideal, which is of the essence of the individual, when pursued in bitter earnest to the end, yields its source, not in the social world alone, nor in the physical world alone, but in the underlying principle alike of the social and the cosmic universe, and it is in the failure severely to track it to this lair that lies the root-defect of naturalism. It fails in thoroughness,

and does not get beyond the visible system, is purely geocentric. It is morality without wings — nothing heliocentric about it.

I do not care to class Hartmann with such naturalism, though this has sometimes been done. Hartmann seems to have reached, in some sort, the independence of spirit, which, he says, is not a product of nature. Nature is, he maintains, on the contrary, only a product of spirit, which is its immanent ground. Spirit is not eternal, but has posited nature, and man knows himself to be of the Creator-Spirit, and as standing far nearer to it than is nature. Hartmann, indeed, is not without a clear kinship to idealistic thought. I am not now concerned to consider how far this logical flight of the thought has been justified in his system. Naturalism derives spirit from nature rather than nature from spirit, and thereby does hopeless injustice to man as a thinking and ethical being. It is not surprising that Lotze should have said that, of all errors of the human mind, it was to him the strangest that it "could come to doubt its own existence, of which alone it has direct experience, or to take it at second-hand as the product of an external nature, which we know only indirectly, or by means of the knowledge of the very mind to which we would fain deny existence." What I am concerned with is, that wherever, on the broadest possible historic survey, man comes to consciousness of the difference of his own spiritual force from mere nature-force, he feels himself raised above all, and views the world as a cosmos or well-ordered Whole, in which the consciousness of ethical law and of relative freedom is developed. And the naturalistic issue is whether spirit is to lose itself in the world, or is to develop its powers in and by the world, conceived as a realm of moral ends. On this latter alternative, he comes to view nature — for it is a matter of insight — as substratum and instrument for the realization of moral ideas and purposes. For the world-concept has already for him ethical content; the world is for him the means for the realization of the good will. This is not to say that the world, in the actual mechanism

of its nature-connection, does not present difficulties to the realization of moral demands and ideals, but, for all that, the moral—and especially the human world as an integrating constituent—is, in the last analysis, that which holds the world together. As the true, the ethical, self is developed, it cannot be holden of pure naturalism, conscious as it increasingly becomes of its membership in what must needs be a spiritual universe. It grows always more sensitive to the lack of standards and discipline in naturalism. It spurns its alternatives of Stoic despair or refined Epicureanism. Its outreaching desires aspire after truth and goodness, justice and love—things above, not things on earth. Its increasing conviction is of the hopelessness and helplessness of naturalism to deal with ultimate problems. “It is,” as Hegel said, “only by means of being elevated above nature that man arrives at a consciousness of what is higher, and at a knowledge of the universal.”¹

The only other world-theory which I shall now notice is the theistic world-view in its modern ethical aspects. Theism is not a mere ontology; its Deity is the aboriginally perfect ethical Being, albeit many philosophers have not grasped or admitted this fact. There can, for theistic world-theory, no more be immoralism or unethicism at the heart of things than there can be irrationality. That is to say, its Deity is active and perfect Moral Reason, no less than it is Supreme Mind or Intellect. It is this which gives to theistic world-view its tremendous moral strength. But theistic world-view does not simply say that moral law is ultimate fact for human mind, and that it represents ultimate fact for Divine Mind, for that would leave too many questions as to moral law unsettled. Its Deity is Himself moral law, and the Seat of ethical truth, and law is not to be conceived as a power above Him, or as superior to Him. Such a view need have no particular concern with theological ethics, nor base itself exclusively on revelational authority. Its sole concern is with the

¹History of Philosophy, vol. iii. p. 421.

background of ethical law and unity in the cosmos, with its call for corresponding ethical force and character in man. This gives theistic world-view a sense of community with the universe, in which God, or the absolute cosmic Self, is not only manifested in, but truly related to, our individual ethical self. Thus, on theistic world-view, our power of real self-determination is ethically conserved and promoted or developed. On this view, then, the world-order is in the last result a moral order. All this must be of great consequence for our ethical ideals and our moral conduct. It is calculated to invest life—and all history—with the most varied, lofty, and permanent values, so that, in fact, the world itself is indefinitely heightened and intensified in value. The ethical world-principle involved in a thoroughgoing theistic world-view thus carries in it, in my judgment, an immense and impressive superiority over any other form of world-view.