ANALYSIS OF SOME ETHICAL CONCEPTS

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IN this paper I propose to take certain notions which we constantly use in our judgments of right and wrong, good and bad, and to analyse them so far as I can and bring out their connexions with each other. The subject is, of course, rather a hackneyed one; but I cannot help thinking that there still remains a good deal which may profitably be said about it. I do not suppose for a moment that my analysis is adequate, and it may well be in part positively mistaken. But I am inclined to think that it may be useful as a beginning of a more adequate and more correct analysis.

The concepts that I propose to consider are Intention, Action, Motive, Conscientious Action, and Rightness. In the course of the discussion I shall try to explain what is meant by " mixed " and " pure " motives, and I shall also try to bring out the relations of rightness to motive and intention and consequences.

The various subjects which I shall treat are very closely bound up with each other, so that it is more or less arbitrary which we begin with. But, on the whole, I find it most convenient to start with the notion of " intention."

INTENTION.—Whenever a man is called upon either to act or to abstain from action he is in presence of a highly complex total situation, composed of pre-existing persons, institutions, and things, in various relations to each other and to himself. Action is always taken or abstained from by the agent in view of the given situation, as he then believes it to be. Now, in considering what he should do, the agent will always have to consider, not merely the situation as it is at present, but how it is likely to develop (*a*) if he abstains from interfering with it, or (*b*) if he interferes with it in various alternative possible ways. If he does anything at all, he *must* modify the present situation in one way, and he may (and generally will) also modify it in another way. He will inevitably modify it to the extent that his action is *added* to it as a new factor which immediately enters into various relations with the pre-existing factors. And he may, and generally will, also modify it further in so far as his action constitutes a cause-factor which makes the future development of the situation different from what it would otherwise have been. I will distinguish these two cases as " non-causal " and " causal " modification, respectively.

At this stage a little simple symbolism will be helpful. Let us

denote the situation at the moment of acting or abstaining from action, as it appears to the agent, by s_0. And let us denote the successive phases which the agent believes that the initial situation would pass through if he abstained from action by s_1, s_2 . . . We will denote the whole series $s_0 s_1 s_2$ . . . by σ, and we will call it " the apparent unmodified series." Suppose now that, instead of leaving the situation s_0 to develop by itself, the agent were to make a certain change x in his body or mind or both. Then he would envisage a modified series, which might be denoted by $(x\mathrm{R}s_0)s_1^x s_2^x$ . . . Here $(x\mathrm{R}s_0)$ symbolizes the non-causally modified initial situation, consisting of s_0 and x, which the agent believes to be related by the relation R to each other. And s_1^x, etc., symbolize the phases corresponding to s_1, etc., causally modified as the agent believes they would be by the presence of the cause-factor x in the initial phase. Such a series may be denoted by σ_x, and we will call it " the apparent series as modified by x."

At the moment of decision, then, the agent contemplates a set of apparent series, which appear to him to be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive of the possibilities open to him. This set consists of σ, the apparent unmodified series, and of one or more apparent modified series, σ_x, σ_y, etc. Suppose, now, that, on the whole, he likes one of these more or dislikes it less than any of the others. We will call such a series " the preferred apparent series." Then the agent's " total intention " may be defined as the preferred apparent series.

ACTION.—Now it is a true, but analytical, proposition that the agent will try to actualize that apparent series which, on the whole, he prefers to all the rest that he believes to be open to him. If this should happen to be the unmodified series σ, we say that he " intentionally abstains from action." If it should happen to be the modified apparent series σ_x, we say that he " performs the action x in order to realize the intention σ_x." So an action is a change which the agent makes in his body or mind or both, because on the whole he prefers the apparent series whose initial phase contains this change to any of the alternative apparent series which seem to him to be possible.

MOTIVE.—We have seen that, if the agent decides to act at all, he will choose that action x which initiates that apparent modified series σ_x which, on the whole, he prefers. We have now to consider why σ_x should be preferred on the whole to σ and to σ_y. It is evident that there are in general three relevant factors, viz., (1) the intrinsic qualities which the agent believes x to have, (2) the relation R in which the agent believes x to stand to the apparent initial situation s_0, and (3) the causal modifications which the agent expects x to produce in the subsequent developments of the initial

situation. It will be well to say something about each of these factors.

(1) There is not much to be said about the intrinsic qualities of the action. An important quality is its immediate pleasantness or painfulness. If it be believed that x is intrinsically pleasant, this will be *pro tanto* a cause for preferring it to inaction; and if x be thought to be intrinsically pleasanter than y, this will be *pro tanto* a cause for preferring x to y.

(2) The relation in which an action is believed to stand to the initial situation is extremely important. It will be noticed that actions are classified and named, from a legal or an ethical point of view, very largely from their relations to the situation in which they occur, and very little from their intrinsic qualities or their consequences. Consider, *e.g.*, an act of sexual intercourse of a man with a woman. The intrinsic qualities of such an act are presumably the same whether the woman be his wife, his daughter, an unmarried woman who is not a blood-relation, or another man's wife. But, according to which of these relational properties it has, it is classed as legal cohabitation, incest, simple fornication, or adultery, respectively. And it is obvious that such non-causal relational properties would often have a most important influence in determining whether a man would decide to do such an act or not.

(3) It would be admitted by everyone that the nature of the consequences which an act is expected to have is a very important factor in determining whether the agent will prefer it to another act. Utilitarians hold that nothing else is *ethically* relevant. But at present we are discussing psychology and not ethics. And it is perfectly certain that the agent is in many cases *in fact* determined by what he believes about the intrinsic qualities of an act or its relations to the initial situation, and not merely by what he believes about its consequences. It is, *e.g.*, quite certain that many men would choose the act x and reject the act y simply because they believed y to be an act of ingratitude to a benefactor, although they believed that y would be intrinsically pleasanter than x, and that the consequences of y would be no worse than those of x.

Now it is evident that the three factors may not all point in the same direction. It is rarely, indeed, that I prefer x to all other alternatives for its intrinsic qualities, for its relation to the initial situation, and for its consequences. It may well happen that I prefer x in one respect, y in another, and z in the third. What I prefer on the whole is then nearly always a compromise reached by weighing the attractive and repulsive aspects of these three factors against each other and against the corresponding three factors in the other alternatives. Nor is this the end of the complications. Each factor may itself have several aspects, and some of these may

be attractive and others repulsive. I might think that a certain action is at once intrinsically pleasant and intrinsically ignoble. Again, an act may be attractive in virtue of some of its relational properties and repulsive in virtue of others. *E.g.*, suppose a person who had done me kindnesses in the past were applying for a post for which I was an elector. To vote for him might attract me as an act of gratitude, and repel me as an act of injustice to another candidate, and as an act of bad faith to the institution which was trusting me as an elector. It is still more obvious that I may like some of the consequences that I expect to follow from an act and dislike others of them. Thus the final preference is doubly a compromise. It is a compromise as between the three factors as wholes, and, with regard to each factor, it is a compromise between its attractive and its repulsive aspects.

We can now begin to attempt a definition of " motive." We shall find that it is not at all a simple matter to do this. We may say at once that, even if all actions have causes, it is certain that some actions do not have motives. This is obvious in the case of impulsive actions. But it is true also of intentional actions. Suppose the agent contemplates certain alternatives, σ, σ_x, σ_y, as wholes, without explicitly analysing out certain aspects of each and comparing them in respect of these aspects. And suppose that he then directly prefers σ_x as a whole to the others as wholes. Then I should say that the act x was done intentionally, but without a motive. We say that an action has a motive only when the agent explicitly considers the various alternative series as having certain aspects, compares them with respect to these aspects, and finally prefers the series which contains this action to all the rest *because of* the aspects which he believes it to have as compared with the others.

Let us begin with the simplest possible case. Suppose the agent likes the alternative σ_x as a whole, and dislikes or is indifferent to all the other alternatives. Suppose there are certain aspects in σ_x which he finds attractive, and certain others which he finds repulsive. I will call each such aspect " an intrinsic motive-factor in σ_x." Those which attract him I will call " positive," and those which repell him I will call " negative." The resultant of all these factors, positive and negative, in σ_x I will call " the intrinsic resultant motive of σ_x." In the case supposed, the intrinsic resultant motive of σ_x is positive, and the intrinsic resultant motives of all the other alternatives are either negative or zero. In this case, and in this only, we can identify the intrinsic resultant motive of σ_x with what I will call " the total motive for choosing σ_x."

But this extremely simple case seldom arises. The agent may dislike all the alternatives, and simply choose the one that he dislikes least. Or he may like several of the alternatives, and choose the

one that he likes best. To deal with these more complicated cases a more elaborate analysis is needed. It is evident that here the total motive of choice is essentially connected with the *relative* attractiveness and repulsiveness of the chosen and the rejected alternatives.

Now to choose the alternative σ_x is evidently precisely equivalent to preferring σ_x to σ, preferring σ_x to σ_y, and so on for all the other alternatives. Consequently the total motive for chosing σ_x must be composed of the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ, the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y, and so on. Thus the fundamental conception to be analysed and defined is " the resultant motive for preferring a certain alternative to a certain other alternative."

It is clear that any two alternative apparent series, σ_x and σ_y, will have a good deal in common. For they all start with the same apparent initial phase s_0, and they continue as alternative apparent developments of it. The differences between σ_x and σ_y can be brought under three heads: (1) Factors present in σ_x and absent in σ_y. (2) Factors absent in σ_x and present in σ_y. (3) Generic factors common to σ_x and σ_y, but present in different specific forms in each. Now the positive motive-factors for preferring σ_x to σ_y can be brought under three corresponding headings: (1) Positive motive-factors present in σ_x and absent in σ_y. (2) Negative motive-factors absent in σ_x and present in σ_y. (3) Generic characteristics common to σ_x and σ_y, but present in σ_x in a specific form which the agent prefers to the specific form in which they are present in σ_y. The negative motive-factors for preferring σ_x to σ_y can obviously be brought under the same three headings by simply interchanging σ_x and σ_y everywhere in each of the above three statements. I will call the resultant of all the positive and all the negative motive-factors for preferring σ_x to σ_y " the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y." And I will call the whole composed of all the resultant motives for preferring σ_x to the other alternatives " the total motive for choosing σ_y."

The total motive for choosing the alternative that actually is chosen is thus in general doubly complex. In the first place, it is composed of as many resultant motives of preference as there are other alternatives. Secondly, though each of these as a whole is positive, each is in general the resultant of several motive-factors, some positive and some negative.

We can now deal with a notion which is of considerable importance in ethics, viz., that of " purity " and " mixture " of motive. We do not call a man's motive " mixed " merely because of the first kind of complexity, which is inevitable whenever there are more than two apparent alternatives open to him. Purity and mixture are primarily bound up with the second kind of complexity, viz., the internal complexity of each resultant motive of preference.

The best way to approach the subject seems to be the following: Suppose that the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y consists of the two positive factors a and b, and of the negative factors u, v, and w. Then, keeping the negative factors fixed, we can consider the following alternatives : (1) a in the absence of b, and b in the absence of a, might each be sufficient to make the agent prefer σ_x to σ_y. (2) a in the absence of b might be sufficient, but b in the absence of a might be insufficient, to produce the result. (Of course the converse of this might hold, but this would only be another instance of the same possibility.) (3) Neither a in the absence of b nor b in the absence of a might be sufficient. To take a concrete example. A man might prefer σ_x to σ_y, both because he believed that the action x would be intrinsically pleasanter to himself than the action y, and because he believed that the total consequences of x would be pleasanter for other men than those of y. In such a case, if the negative factors remained constant, there would be the following three types of possible alternative: (1) That he would have still preferred σ_x on account of the superior pleasantness of x to y, even though he had not believed that the consequences of x for others would be pleasanter than those of y; and, conversely, that he would still have preferred σ_x on account of the superior pleasantness of its consequences for others, even though he had not believed that x would be intrinsically pleasanter for himself than y. (2) The first clause of (1) might be true, and the second clause false; or conversely. (3) Both clauses of (1) might be false. It may be that both factors are necessary and neither is sufficient to determine his preference.

Suppose now that condition (2) is fulfilled. Suppose, *i.e.*, that among the positive factors in the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y there is one and only one which would suffice to determine the agent to prefer σ_x to σ_y even in the absence of all the other positive factors and in the presence of all the negative factors. Then I will call this factor " the sufficient motive-factor for preferring σ_x to σ_y." And I shall say that the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y is " unmixed." When this condition is not fulfilled, I say that the resultant motive for preferring σ_x to σ_y is " mixed." Now this mixture may take two forms, according to the two different ways in which the above condition may fail to be fulfilled. (i) There may be *more than one* sufficient motive-factor in the resultant motive. I say then that the resultant motive is " alternatively mixed." (ii) There may be *no* factor in the resultant motive which would suffice, in absence of the other positive factors and in presence of the negative factors, to determine the preference. I say then that the resultant motive is " conjunctively mixed."

So much for resultant motives of preference; we can now deal with the total motive of choice. If the total motive for choosing

σ_x is to be unmixed, it is a necessary condition that each of the resultant motives for preferring σ_x shall be unmixed. But this is not sufficient. Suppose that the fact that I believed x to be intrinsically pleasanter than y was the sufficient motive-factor for making me prefer σ_x to σ_y. And suppose that the fact that I believed that the consequences of x would be better than those of z for others was the sufficient motive-factor for making me prefer σ_x to σ_z. Then it would hardly be said that my total motive for choosing σ_x was unmixed. So the second necessary condition is that the sufficient motive-factor for preferring σ_x should be the same in all the resultant motives of preference which together make up the total motive for choosing σ_x. Thus the statement that the motive for choosing σ_x is unmixed would seem to mean that each of the resultant motives for preferring σ_x is unmixed, and that the sufficient motive-factor is the same in each of them. When this condition is fulfilled the common sufficient motive-factor may be called "the sufficient motive-factor for choosing σ_x."

CONSCIENTIOUS ACTIONS.—We are now in a position to analyse the notion of "conscientious action." I call x a "conscientious action" if and only if the sufficient motive-factor for choosing the alternative σ_x is the belief that σ_x is on the whole *better* than any of the other alternatives. It is evident that many actions are not conscientious in this sense. Some, as we have seen, have no motive. Some have mixed motives. And, even when there is one motive-factor which is the sufficient motive-factor for choosing σ_x, this may not be the belief that σ_x is *better* on the whole than the other alternatives.

I call a conscientious action "imperfect" if it is based on either inadequate knowledge or mistaken belief. Of course, the inadequacy of the knowledge is relevant only if it leads to mistaken belief. We must begin by distinguishing between (1) factual imperfection and (2) ethical imperfection. The most important respects in which a conscientious action may be factually imperfect would seem to be the following: (1, 1) The agent's knowledge of the initial situation s_0 will always be incomplete, and his beliefs about it may be in part positively mistaken. And incomplete knowledge of the situation may lead to mistaken beliefs about it. (1, 2) The agent's knowledge of the nature of the action may be incomplete, and his beliefs about it may be in part mistaken. (1, 3) The agent's beliefs about the relation of the action to the initial situation may be mistaken. It is at this point that *incomplete* knowledge of the situation or of the intrinsic nature of the action is first specially likely to lead to positive error. It was incomplete knowledge of the situation which led Œdipus to marry a woman who was in fact his mother. And incomplete knowledge of the intrinsic

nature of his action might lead an extremely strong man to do in play an action which seriously injured a friend. (1, 4) The agent's beliefs about the future developments of the initial situation, if left to itself or modified by various alternative actions, will always be based on incomplete knowledge and will generally be partly mistaken. Any mistake or inadequacy at the earlier stages will be very likely to entail error here. One's predictions are always at the mercy of unforeseen accidents, and some of these accidents might have been foreseen if one's knowledge of the initial situation had been wider or deeper.

There would seem to be at least two distinct ways in which a conscientious action could be ethically imperfect. (2, 1) The agent may, either wittingly or unwittingly, judge in accordance with some general ethical principle which is in fact false. Suppose, *e.g.*, that the agent were, wittingly or unwittingly, an ethical hedonist. Then he will judge one alternative to be better or worse than another simply and solely according to whether it contains a greater or less balance of pleasure for sentient beings as a whole. Now suppose, for the sake of illustration, that hedonism is a mistaken ethical theory. Then it may be that the intrinsic nature of the action, or its relation to the initial situation, or other characteristics in the consequences beside pleasantness and painfulness, are ethically relevant. If so, the agent may be mistaken in thinking that σ_x is the best alternative open to him, even though he makes no factual mistake. (2, 2) Even if the agent estimates the relative values of the various alternatives in accordance with correct general principles, and has true beliefs about all relevant matters of fact, he may still be mistaken on points of ethical detail. A man might believe that deception is bad, and that pain is bad. And he might hold that these two evils are commensurable, so that there is a degree of pain which it is right to spare a man by lying to him, if it can be spared him in no less objectionable way. Suppose now, for the sake of illustration, that this general principle is true. It might still be the case that the agent honestly judged that a certain lie was justified to spare a certain amount of pain, when it would really have been justified only in order to spare a much greater amount of pain. Under this head we must include what might be called "moral insensitiveness." This would consist in failure to see that a certain characteristic was either positively good or positively bad when it was in fact one or the other; or, again, in failing to see that there was any difference in value between two characteristics which do in fact differ in value.

Now it is plain that we attach *some* value to conscientiousness in all circumstances. Even when we disapprove an action on the whole, we do regard the fact that it was conscientious as a plea in mitigation

of our judgment on the agent. Nor is it difficult to see why we attach this high value to conscientiousness. As rational and moral beings we want the best alternative possible to be chosen as often as possible when men have to make decisions. And it seems reasonable to believe that, on the whole, the tendency to choose the alternative which seems to be best, because it seems to be best, will more often issue in the choice what actually is best than will any other motive. This is quite compatible with the recognition of three facts which certainly must be recognized: (1) That some of the worst actions that have ever been committed have been conscientious actions. (2) That, in some cases, we think better of a man for acting impulsively, or for acting with intention but no motive, than we should have thought of him if he had acted conscientiously. (3) That, in some cases, we think better of a man for acting from some other motive than the belief that the alternative which he is choosing is on the whole the best of those open to him. The first case is illustrated by the conscientious persecutor, such as Torquemada. The second is illustrated by comparing the case of a man who helps a parent or benefactor deliberately and from a sense of duty but with reluctance, and that of another man who does the same act with pleasure from an impulse of personal affection. Each is felt to be deserving of praise. But the praise is for different qualities, and, on the whole, we tend to prefer the latter to the former. The third case may be illustrated as follows. In considering which is the best on the whole of the alternatives open to one, it is certainly necessary to take into account and give due weight to the effect of the action on one's own future happiness as well as its effect on the happiness of others. Yet, in some cases, we prefer the man who considers only the happiness of others, though we acknowledge that he " ought to " have given due weight to his own.

Two comments must be made on the above. Whilst we do admire spontaneous generosity to relatives, friends, and benefactors, we recognize that actions determined by it tend to be unduly restricted and capricious in range and are often harmful to the person whom the agent intends to benefit. I think it would be fair to say that we admire the agent more for acting in this way than for acting conscientiously only when we think that his action is in fact the same as that which a conscientious person would have done in the same situation. When this condition is not fulfilled, our admiration for the agent is very much qualified. Secondly, we have to remember that the tendency to underestimate the value of one's own happiness is much less common than the tendency to underestimate the value of the happiness of others. When so many men are too prudent to be benevolent enough, it is not unreasonable to give special admiration to the few who are too benevolent to be prudent enough. We

acknowledge, on reflection, that they are faulty; but we say that their fault is "on the right side," and that it would be desirable to have more people with this fault when there are so many with the opposite fault.

We must now consider the various kinds and degrees of blame which attach to an agent in respect of a conscientious action which is imperfect. (1) No blame attaches for unavoidable limitations of knowledge about matters of fact, or for positively mistaken beliefs on such matters which arise wholly from these limitations. At most we say that the action "turned out luckily or unluckily." (2) We do blame the agent for positively mistaken beliefs about matters of fact not based on unavoidable limitation of knowledge. We say that he showed himself "unintelligent," and that his action was "unwise" or "ill-judged."

We come now to conscientious actions which are ethically imperfect. Here the first point to notice is that the common distinction between "intellectual" and "moral" defects is unsatisfactory. Ignorance or false belief about the relative values of things is at once a moral and an intellectual defect. The proper distinction is between moral and non-moral defects. Each of these in turn is subdivided into cognitive, conative, and emotional defects. It is a cognitive moral defect to be unable to see the good points in the character of a personal enemy, to overestimate the value of one's own happiness as compared with that of others, and so on. The typical conative moral defect is expressed in Horace's lines: *Video meliora, proboque; deteriora sequor.* It is an emotional moral defect to feel the wrong kind of emotion, or too strong an emotion, or too weak an emotion, in a given situation. Of course, the three kinds of moral defect are very closely connected. Emotional moral defects are often important factors in determining intellectual or conative moral defects. What the heart does not trouble about the eye often fails to see.

Cognitive moral defects, as we have noticed, may consist of holding mistaken ethical principles or of making mistakes on points of ethical detail. The former notion needs a little further elucidation. We must distinguish carefully between the principles in accordance with which a man really acts and those which he explicitly formulates. Most people never explicitly formulate general ethical principles at all. And those who do may be quite mistaken in thinking that these are the principles in accordance with which they act. A man may think that he is an egoistic ethical hedonist; but an intelligent observer may see that egoistic hedonism is not the principle in accordance with which he acts as a rule. Merely to formulate one's principles wrongly is a non-moral cognitive defect. When we have reason to believe that a man's ethical principles are

not only inadequate but positively false, we regard him as " corrupt " or " bad at heart " or " having the lie in the soul"; even though he never formulates these principles, or formulates principles which we believe to be true and adequate. And this is the most damning judgment that can be passed on any agent; it is far more serious than the judgment that he often makes mistakes on points of ethical detail. A man who honestly " can't see " that anything is of value but his own pleasure, and who acts on this principle, has an intellectual defect which is, perhaps, quite independent of his will. But anyone with this intellectual defect is *ipso facto* a thoroughly bad man morally. He is plainly far worse than a man who honestly rejects this principle, but habitually overestimates the value of his own pleasure as compared with that of others.

RIGHTNESS.—I very much doubt whether " rightness " can be defined. I am almost certain that it cannot be defined in non-ethical terms. And I see no reason to think that it can be defined in terms of other ethical concepts, such as " good." At any rate, I do not know, and cannot think of, any satisfactory definition. Still, there are some very important facts which can be stated about rightness.

(1) The fundamental fact seems to me to be that rightness is a relational characteristic, and not a pure quality. When I say that x is right I am saying something about its relations to certain other terms. Rightness is a species of fittingness or appropriateness, and a term which is " fitting " must be fitting *to* something. The above is, I believe, a true statement about rightness, but it is not a definition of it. For, so far as I can see, rightness is a quite unique kind of appropriateness, just as red is a quite unique kind of colour.

" But," it might be objected. " are not some actions *intrinsically* right, and others *intrinsically* wrong ? " To this I answer that " intrinsically right " must mean " fitting to all situations," and " intrinsically wrong " must mean " unfitting to all situations." When this is recognized it becomes very hard to believe that any type of action is intrinsically right, though it may still be plausibly maintained that some types of action are intrinsically wrong. And I am inclined to think that it is the latter proposition only which most people who profess to believe in intrinsically right actions are really concerned to maintain.

(2) It is important to notice that rightness and wrongness are not confined to actions. They apply also to emotions; and the doctrine that they are relational properties is strongly supported by considering their application to emotions. An emotion is felt when and only when a certain situation, real or imaginary, is contemplated, and when this contemplation is characterized by a

certain emotional quality. Now the very same emotional quality which is appropriate to a certain kind of contemplated situation is inappropriate to one of a different kind. It is right to contemplate sorrowfully the undeserved misfortunes of a good man, and it is wrong to contemplate them joyfully. But it is right to contemplate with satisfaction the just punishment of a criminal, though it may also be right to contemplate with regret the existence of criminals. I know of no emotional quality which is appropriate to every kind of contemplated situation, and I doubt if I could mention any emotional quality which is inappropriate to every kind of contemplated situation.

(3) Suppose that W is a whole, composed of two interrelated parts A and B. Then (i) what is appropriate to A without B may be inappropriate to B without A, and conversely. (ii) What is appropriate to A without B or to B without A might be inappropriate to the whole W which is composed of A and B. And the converse may hold. Suppose, *e.g.*, that A were a pleasurable emotion in x, that B were a painful sensation in y, and that the whole W were x's pleasurable contemplation of y's painful sensation. Then the emotion appropriate to A alone would be that of sympathetic pleasure, the emotion appropriate to B alone would be that of sympathetic sorrow, and the emotion appropriate to W would be that of moral indignation.

Similar remarks apply even in cases where we can hardly talk of a whole composed of several interrelated parts. A situation S may have many different characteristics. The emotion appropriate to it when it is regarded as having one selection of these characteristics might be quite inappropriate to it when it is regarded as having another selection of these characteristics, or when it is regarded as having all of them. Lastly, one emotion may be appropriate to S when S is regarded only as having a certain generic characteristic G in some form or other, and a quite different emotion may be appropriate when S is regarded as having this generic characteristic in a certain specific form g. It may be right to feel disgust towards a man if I know merely that he is a homicide. But if I know that his homicidal acts have taken the specific form of killing murderers in the course of his official duties as hangman, I ought not to feel disgust towards him.

(4) It is necessary to draw a distinction between what I will call "formal" and "material" rightness. I use these terms because of the close analogy between the present distinction and the familiar distinction of formal and material correctness in logic. A conclusion is said to be formally correct if it really does follow from the premises, whether the premises be themselves true or false. It is said to be materially correct if, in addition to this,

the premises be themselves true. It is not even formally correct if it involves any *logical* mistake; but it is not rendered formally incorrect by any purely *factual* mistake. Now an action or emotion is formally right if it is appropriate to the situation as it appears to the agent, no matter what *factual* mistakes he may have made, provided only that he has made no *ethical* mistake. It is materially right if, in addition to this, no relevant factual mistake or omission has been made. A factual mistake or omission is irrelevant provided that the emotion or action which would have been appropriate if this mistake or omission had not been made is the same as that which is appropriate to the situation as it appears to the agent.

It is very important to be clear as to just how much and how little subjectivity is involved in the notion of formal rightness. (*a*) In a most vital sense formal rightness is not subjective at all. If the action or emotion x is formally right for Smith in a given apparent situation, the same action or emotion is formally right for *anyone* to whom the factual characteristics of the situation appear as they do to Smith. (*b*) The only subjectivity is that the factual characteristics of the same situation may appear differently to different observers, and that what would be appropriate if the situation were as it appears to A may be different from what would be appropriate if the situation were as it appears to B.

RIGHTNESS AND MOTIVE.—I am inclined to agree with Mill that the motive of an action is irrelevant to its rightness or wrongness, though highly relevant to the goodness or badness of the agent. This view is, I think, strongly supported by considering the rightness and wrongness of emotions. It is admitted that the emotion that we feel in a given situation is independent of our volition at the time. Volition may control the expression of the emotion, and it may prevent us from acting impulsively on the emotion ; but that is all that it can do in the matter. Hence there can be no question of motive in connexion with emotions. Yet we unhesitatingly say that one emotion is right and another wrong in a given situation. And it seems to me that I mean exactly the same by " right " and " wrong " when I apply these terms to emotions as when I apply them to actions. I mean in both cases a certain kind of appropriateness between that which is called " right " and the situation. And the causal antecedents of the event which is called " right " seem to be equally irrelevant in both cases. Nor does it seem to be in opposition to common sense to say that so-and-so " acted rightly," but from a bad motive " on a certain occasion.

The doctrine just stated is quite compatible with the view, which appears to me true, that the motive of an action may make a great difference to its *goodness*. To be done from a certain motive is a relational property of an action, and, like any other property, it

may affect the goodness of the action. Of two otherwise similar actions, done in similar situations with different motives, one will be no *more right* than the other, but one may be much *better* than the other. I should say that the *goodness* of an action is in fact a function of its own rightness or wrongness and of its motive. We must notice that, owing to the Principle of Organic Unities, a motive which had no intrinsic value might add very greatly to the value of an action or detract very greatly from it. Consequently, even if it be denied that any motive has any intrinsic value, it will not follow that the motive of an action can make no difference to its goodness. Again, an action of the type A might be better when done with a motive of the type *a* than when done with a motive of the type *b*, whilst the converse may be true of an action of the type B. It seems to me, *e.g.*, that some types of action are better when done on conscientious motives than when done from personal affection, whilst others are better when done from personal affection than when done from conscientious motives.

It is plainly possible that an action might be formally and even materially *right*, and yet be on the whole *bad* in consequence of its motive. Whether any action which is not at least *formally right* can be rendered *good* on the whole by its motive seems to me much more doubtful. It is logically possible that this might happen, but I feel very doubtful whether one can produce any plausible instance of such an action.

We might define " the ideal action " in a given situation as that action which is (*a*) materially right, and (*b*) is done from that kind of motive which adds most to the value of that kind of action. We may define " the formally ideal action " by substituting " formally " for " materially " in the first part of the above definition.

RIGHTNESS AND INTENTION.—It is plain that the rightness of an action in a given situation depends on two factors which may vary independently, viz., (*a*) its non-causal relations to the initial situation, and (*b*) its effects on the later developments of this situation. The former factor may be called " immediate fittingness." The latter may be called " utility," provided we clearly understand that this is to include effects on *all* characteristics that give value to the future developments, and not merely effects on *happiness*.

Some moralists seem to have maintained that the rightness of an action depends only on its immediate fittingness. Others have certainly maintained that the rightness of an action depends only on its utility. The first alternative, if it has ever been really held, is plainly false. The second, even when " utility " is interpreted in the wide way in which I am interpreting it, seems also to be inadequate. It is, I think, impossible to avoid flagrant conflicts with common sense unless we make the rightness of an action depend

on both these factors. Now, of course, the two factors may point in different directions. The action which is most immediately fitting to a given initial situation may have less utility than an action which is less immediately fitting. And the action which has most utility may be less immediately fitting to the initial situation than one which has less utility. Now the right action is that which fits the *total* situation, *i.e.*, the initial situation and its future developments, best on the whole. Hence, in many cases the right action is necessarily a compromise between what is most fitting immediately and what has most utility.

Naturally a distinction must be drawn between formal and material immediate fittingness and between formal and material utility. The action which is formally most fitting to a given initial situation is that which is most fitting to the situation as the agent at the time believes it to be, assuming that he makes no mistake on any relevant matter of pure *value*. His beliefs may, however, be inadequate or mistaken on relevant matters of *fact* about the situation, the action, and their factual relations. A similar definition can be given for the formally most useful action. What is formally right is the best possible compromise between that would be formally most fitting immediately and what would be formally most useful.

It seems to me very doubtful whether rules can be given for striking the right balance between immediate fittingness and utility, when the two conflict. I suggest that here probably we come, as in the end we always come, to direct judgments which cannot be brought under rules. Doubtless individual skill and delicacy differ here innately, as they do in artistic and athletic activities; and doubtless innate skill can be improved by training and practice, or spoiled by misuse.