

VII.—CRITICAL NOTICE

Moral Obligation : Essays and Lectures by H. A. PRICHARD. Oxford : at the Clarendon Press. Pp. iv + 201.

THIS book, edited by Sir David Ross, contains all the writings on ethical subjects which were found in a suitable state for publication among the papers left by Professor Prichard at his death. It also contains reprints of certain published articles, viz., *Does Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake?* (1912), *Duty and Ignorance of Fact* (1932), and *The Meaning of ἀγαθόν in the Ethics of Aristotle* (1935). The most extensive items in the new material are a set of lectures on *Green's Theory of Political Obligation*, which the Editor dates 1935-7, and part of a book on *Moral Obligation*, with which Prichard was long busied and to which he seems to have added little since 1937. The rest of the new material consists of seven short papers or notes on various ethical topics, viz., *The Object of a Desire* (1940), *The Obligation to keep a Promise* (c. 1940), *Exchanging* (1940), *The Time of an Obligation* (?), *The Psychology of Willing* (?), *Acting, Willing, and Desiring* (1945), and 'Ought' (1947).

In the present review I shall not discuss the works which have already been published, with the exception of *Does Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake?*. It will be useful to give a short summary of the main conclusions of this extremely influential paper, so that those who are interested may compare them with Prichard's later views. My impression is that his opinions remained fundamentally the same from 1912 to his death.

The essential doctrines of *Does Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake?* may be summarized as follows :—(1) The rightness or wrongness of an act depends on its being the origination of a certain state of affairs *A* in a certain situation *S*, which consists of a certain relationship *R* of the agent either to himself or to certain others.

(2) To judge whether an act would be right or would be wrong one may have to consider more fully the following two purely factual questions : (i) Would it or would it not originate *A* ? (ii) What is the relationship *R* involved in the situation *S* ? This kind of consideration involves only ordinary processes of *non-moral* thinking.

(3) When this is finished one recognizes that the act is obligatory or that it is wrong *immediately*, if one does so at all. If one recognizes this, one does so by an act of *specifically moral* cognition, which Prichard compares with mathematical insight. One does not come to see by *any* kind of argument that one is under an obligation to do so-and-so, and in particular one does not come to see it by an argument from the premiss that the act would itself be good or that it would lead to good consequences.

(4) Different features in a situation may give rise to obligations which conflict. Obligations have various degrees of urgency, and, when obligations conflict, the question is : ' Which is the *most urgent* ? ' and not : ' Which act would lead to the *best consequences* ? '

(5) A person may be said to have had *P* as his ' purpose ' in doing the action α , if he desired *P* and it was that desire which moved him to do α . Usually the agent's purpose is something other than the action, which he thinks that the action will contribute to bring about. But his purpose in doing α may be just the action α itself.

(6) An act may be done from a motive without being done for a purpose. In so far as an agent is moved to do an act (*e.g.*, to hand over a sum of money to another) simply by the belief that he is under a moral obligation to do so and by the desire to do his duty, he has *no purpose*. He does not desire to do the act of handing over the money *as such* (as, *e.g.*, he might desire to sing a song or dance a reel), nor does he do the act as a *means* to producing something else which he desires to exist for its own sake (*e.g.*, his own or the other man's feeling of satisfaction).

(7) A motive is anything that may move a person to do a deliberate act. Desire to realize a purpose and desire to do what is right as such are two co-ordinate kinds of motive. They may, of course, co-operate or conflict in any particular case.

(8) We must distinguish between specifically *moral* (or *conscientious*) action and *virtuous* action. An act is moral in so far as it is done from the belief that it is obligatory and the desire to do one's duty. It is virtuous in so far as it is done from some intrinsically good motive other than sense of duty, arising from some intrinsically good emotional disposition (*e.g.*, personal affection).

(9) No one can be under an obligation to do either a moral or a virtuous action ; for that would imply that he is under an obligation to be moved by a certain motive, and this is nonsensical. But he may be under an obligation to do in certain circumstances an act which is precisely similar to that which would proceed under those circumstances from a particular virtuous disposition ; *e.g.*, to do the same kind of act as a generous man would gladly do from generosity. He may also be under an obligation to try to cultivate virtuous dispositions.

(10) An act has intrinsic goodness if and only if it is either moral or virtuous. It is best if the conscientious motive is combined with some virtuous motive.

(11) Our apprehension of the goodness of what is intrinsically good is as immediate as our apprehension of the rightness of what is right in a given situation.

(12) The whole content of Moral Philosophy is the recognition of the fact that our apprehension, both of the goodness of good states of affairs and of the rightness of right acts, is immediate. In so far as it professes to give *reasons* for what can be apprehended only, if at all, by direct insight, it ' rests on a mistake '. Prichard

thought that most of the so-called 'Theory of Knowledge' rests on a parallel mistake.

From this summary I pass to the lectures on *Green's Theory of Political Obligation*. Seldom can the floor have been more thoroughly wiped with the remains of one who was at one time commonly regarded as a great thinker and who still enjoys a considerable reputation in some circles. A large part of the lectures is occupied with disentangling the strands of clotted masses of verbiage, in which inconsistency and nonsense are concealed by ambiguity.

The main points of general interest which emerge are the following :

(1) Green really rejects the specifically moral 'ought' altogether. For a person to be under an obligation to do an act comes to mean simply that his *purpose* will not be realized unless he does it.

(2) Prichard points out that we must distinguish between the *de facto* realization of a desired state of affairs and the necessary and sufficient immediate condition of the satisfaction of the desire for it. The mere *de facto* realization of *X* is neither necessary nor sufficient to cause the gratification or satisfaction of one's desire for *X*. The experience of satisfaction in respect of that desire will be enjoyed if and only if one comes to *know* or to *believe* (correctly or incorrectly) that *X* is or will be realized. It follows that the immediate condition for the satisfaction of *A's* desire for *X* cannot be the same as (or indeed have anything in common with) the immediate condition for the satisfaction of *B's* desire for *X*.

(3) Now Green holds that each man has one and only one ultimate purpose, *viz.*, *his own greatest good*. He also holds that a man's greatest good is that which is the immediate necessary and sufficient condition for the maximum satisfaction of all his desires. Nevertheless he also holds that in an organized society the good of *each* member is the aggregate of the goods of *all the other* members. These propositions could be combined consistently only on the assumption that each member of an organized community is identical with every other member. Green does in fact make this absurd assumption, according to Prichard.

(4) It is a part of Green's theory that there can be no obligations or rights except as between the various members of a community which includes some authority which issues and enforces regulations. This can be reconciled with certain obvious facts only by such palpable fictions as asserting that the human race as a whole is a 'community' in this sense.

(5) Members of an organized community think that they have a *prima facie* obligation to obey the constituted authority in it. Neither this obligation nor the belief that one is subject to it could possibly arise from the mere fact that the rulers had ordered obedience and had instituted sanctions for disobedience.

(6) Prichard remarks that it is commonly assumed that there is one and only one ground for the obligation of a subject to obey his rulers, and that this (whatever it may be) is the same in all

kinds of state. But it may well be that there are several different grounds, and that these vary according to the past history and present constitution of a state. One ground may be that the government was instituted by explicit or tacit agreement; another may be that, however it may have originated, it is now an efficient means of providing security and promoting welfare among its subjects.

(7) In any event the obligation to obey one's rulers is one which may be over-ridden in particular cases by more urgent obligations.

We can now turn to the long essay on *Moral Obligation* (pp. 87 to 163), which is the most important single item in the collection. Prichard distinguishes four main questions. (1) What is *meant* by being under a moral obligation to do so-and-so? (2.1) Will a man be *better off* for doing his duty? (2.2) *Ought* a man to do his duty? (Here 'ought' must be used in some non-moral sense, as in the question: 'Ought I to take the first turning to the left?'). (3) Is there any one characteristic which an act must have in order to be obligatory? If so, what is it?

We will now consider Prichard's attempts to answer these questions.

(1) WHAT IS MORAL OBLIGATION? (i) Prichard begins by distinguishing between non-moral and moral imperatives, e.g., 'You ought to give your wife a second dose of arsenic' and 'You ought to repay to B the money which he lent to you'. He holds that there is nothing common to the two. 'You ought (in the non-moral sense) to do X' means simply: 'Unless you do X your purpose will not be realized'. (This seems to me to be quite plainly untrue.)

(ii) As regards the moral 'ought' there are *prima facie* two alternatives, viz. that in saying 'You ought to do X' one is (a) making a *categorical* statement about a *person*, or (b) making a *hypothetical* statement about an actual or possible *act*. On the latter alternative one would be saying, e.g., 'If you did pay, or are paying, or are going to pay, or were to pay that debt, your act was, or is, or will be, or would be one which *ought to exist*'. Prichard rejects the second alternative. His fundamental reason is that, as we shall see later, he holds that the phrase 'ought to exist' is meaningless. So he concludes that a sentence of the form: 'You ought to do so-and-so' expresses a *categorical* proposition in which a *unique* kind of predication is ascribed to a *person*.

(2.1) DOES DOING ONE'S DUTY NECESSARILY MAKE ONE HAPPIER THAN OTHERWISE?

(i) Prichard begins by pointing out that the discussion will necessarily differ according to whether one has or has not explicitly distinguished between the moral and the non-moral senses of 'ought'. He considers that Plato and Butler are instances of great moralists who failed to draw this distinction. Butler's answer was that, unless an action will make for the agent's happiness, he *cannot* be under an obligation to do it. Plato's answer was that, although

this is not so, yet it can be shown that to do one's duty *will always* in the long run make for one's happiness.

(ii) In his very elaborate discussion of Plato's position Prichard draws an important distinction between what he calls the 'adjectival' and the 'substantival' senses of the word 'good'. (a) An example of the adjectival sense is provided by the sentence 'Courage is good'. As regards this sense Prichard makes the following statements. 'Good', in the adjectival sense, denotes a property which (α) belongs to a term independently of its relations to other terms; (β) is co-extensive, but not identical with the property of arousing approval when thought of; (γ) is indefinable; and (δ) is such that, *e.g.*, to be courageous and to be generous are *ways* of being good, so that to say of a man who is generous and courageous that he is good is not like saying of him, *e.g.*, that he is hot-tempered besides being generous and courageous. In this sense 'good' is most naturally applied to human dispositions or actualizations of them, or to persons in respect of having such dispositions.

(b) As an example of the substantival sense of 'good' we may take the sentence 'To have many friends is a great good'. On reflexion one sees that the phrase 'a good' is always an abbreviation for 'a good for so-and-so'. In the end '*X* is a good for *A*' means that *X* excites pleasure in *A*. (This is far from evident to me.) This pleasure may consist either in *satisfaction*, which arises from a person's knowledge or belief that one of his desires has been or will be realized, or in *enjoyment*, which arises in some other way. In order that *X* may be a good for *A* it need not be the *immediate* cause of pleasure in him, for we should say that to be healthy or wealthy was a good for a healthy or wealthy person.

(c) Prichard holds that there is nothing in common to the two senses of 'good'. The malicious *A*'s pleasantly toned belief that *B* is suffering is a *good* for *A*, but that satisfaction is evil. It is most important to distinguish between *A*'s *total good*, *i.e.*, either his satisfactions and his enjoyments or the totality of things which make him happy, and *A*'s *goodness*. Prichard thinks that Moore confused the two in his so-called 'refutation' of ethical egoism.

(iii) As regards the original question Prichard says that the only hope of getting an affirmative answer would be to show that conscientious action is its own reward and that this reward is so overwhelmingly great as to outweigh all possible unpleasant consequences. He rightly concludes that, without appropriate theological premisses, there is no hope of answering the question with a universal affirmative.

(2.2) OUGHT A MAN TO DO HIS DUTY? (i) Prichard thinks that this question has a meaning if and only if psychological hedonism be accepted. The 'ought' must of course be the non-moral one, and the question would mean: 'Is doing one's duty a necessary condition for attaining what (it is assumed) is the one ultimate purpose of anyone, *viz.*, his own greatest happiness?'

(ii) If we accept psychological hedonism, the only answer is that no general answer is possible. If we do not assume that all men have at all times *mutatis mutandis* the same ultimate purpose, the question collapses. The answer will depend on the nature of a person's ultimate purpose at any particular moment.

(iii) Prichard then embarks on a discussion of psychological hedonism, which begins promisingly and then suddenly peters out. He thinks that many philosophers have been led to accept an initially unpalatable theory of human motivation by the following three steps. (a) They assume that a person's purpose in doing an action is always something other than the action itself, *viz.*, something which he desires and which he thinks the action is likely to bring about. This leads to the two metaphors of calling a purpose an 'aim' and calling it an 'end'. Both are inappropriate when, as is sometimes the case, one's purpose is simply the action itself. (b) They see that, if one is to desire *anything*, one must desire something *for its own sake*. (c) They then assume that each person in *all* his deliberate actions is moved by a desire for *one and the same* end. Then, and only then, it becomes plausible to suppose that this is his own greatest pleasure.

(3) WHAT MAKES OBLIGATORY ACTS OBLIGATORY? Prichard divides answers to this question into what he calls 'teleological' and 'quasi-teleological' theories. We will consider these in turn.

(3.1) *Teleological Theories.* (i) A teleological theory of obligation is one that claims to reduce the moral 'ought' to the non-moral one, *without* introducing another kind of 'ought' which might be described as 'oughtness-to-exist'.

(ii) There are traces in Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* of a view which is really different from this, *viz.*, that, *if* a person desires *X* for its own sake, then (quite independently of whether we can say that *X* ought to exist or ought to be desired) he *ought* (in the moral sense) to do any act that he thinks will best contribute to the realization of *X*. This Prichard rejects without more ado.

(iii) The full-blown teleological theory is that each person has in fact one and only one ultimate purpose in all his deliberate actions, and that to say that he ought to do *X* in situation *S* is equivalent to saying that by so doing he will best further the realization of that purpose. After a certain amount of discussion Prichard concludes that the only purpose which it would be at all plausible to ascribe to an individual in all his voluntary actions is *his own maximum happiness*.

To this theory Prichard has two fundamental objections. (a) 'It attempts to resolve the moral 'ought' into the non-moral, instead of stating what properties an act must have in order to be *morally* obligatory. (b) A moment's reflection shows us that *no* act is rendered obligatory on a person merely by being the most efficient means that he can take in order to secure his own maximum happiness.

(iv) Many eminent philosophers have failed to be clear about the distinction between the moral and the non-moral 'ought'. This failure may happen in two different ways. (a) The philosopher may definitely ask himself the question: Do we mean the same by 'ought', in the sense of 'morally bound' and in the sense of 'necessary to realizing some purpose of the agent's?' And he may answer it in the affirmative. Prichard thinks that Bentham put this question and gave this wrong answer to it. Or the philosopher may never put the question to himself, and simply fail to notice that there is a difference. Prichard thinks that this was so with Mill and with Green. (It may be noted that pp. 120-128 consist of little more than a repetition of passages already printed earlier in the book in the lectures on *Green's Theory of Political Obligation*.)

(3.2) *Quasi-Teleological Theories*. These theories hold that there is a single end at which each of us *ought to aim*, and that an act is obligatory on a person if and in so far as it is most conducive to the realization of that end. Such theories therefore involve the notion of 'ought-to-aim', and Prichard's main criticism is that nothing answers to this phrase. His chief arguments may be stated as follows. To say that a person ought to aim at *X* must mean that he ought (in some specifically moral sense) to desire *X* and to be moved to action by that desire. But this is nonsensical. For (i) *moral* obligation is essentially an obligation to perform some *action*. (ii) A person cannot be under a moral obligation with respect to anything that is not within the power of his will. Now it is not within the power of a person's will to desire or not to desire *X*, nor, if he desires *X*, to do so strongly enough to overcome any conflicting desires which he may have. (iii) Inspection shows that one's obligation in a given situation is simply to perform a certain *kind of action*, and is never to perform an action *from a certain motive*.

(It seems to me that in answer to this it must be said that we quite certainly do use 'ought' in a *moral* sense in respect of desires and emotions. It is perfectly intelligible and quite usual to make such remarks as: 'You ought to feel ashamed of yourself', 'You ought not to wish for another's humiliation' and so on. The 'ought' here is certainly a form of moral ought, and the inference would seem to be that Prichard failed to recognize that there are at least two *moral* 'oughts'.)

This leads Prichard on to an elaborate discussion of Joseph's contention that an action, in the sense in which action is morally imputable, cannot be 'separated from' the motive which moves the agent to do it. Prichard says that Joseph's language suggests that his view is that one *can* consider an action in abstraction from its motive (as one can, *e.g.* consider a Rugby football in abstraction from its ovoid shape), but that, so considered, it is not properly called an 'action' and is not morally imputable. He thinks, however, that Joseph's language is here misleading and that something much more radical was meant. So far as I can understand

Prichard, the view which he ascribes to Joseph is the following. If one tried to think of something as being an action, without thinking of it as being done from a certain motive (e.g., malice), one would find that one was failing to think of anything at all (as one would, e.g., if one tried to think of something as red without thinking of it as coloured). On that view, says Prichard, there would be nothing for a motive to be the motive of, and therefore there would be no motive. In point of fact, however, the motive of an action is not even a part of it; it is something external to it which moves the agent to do it.

If it be admitted that it is meaningless to talk of an obligation to aim at a certain end, it follows at once that all forms of quasi-teleological theory of obligation can be rejected. But Prichard has another shot against them in his locker. Suppose that it were significant to say '*A* is under a moral obligation to aim at *X*'. Then it would not *follow logically* that *A* is under a moral obligation to do that action which is the most conducive of those within his power to the realization of *X*. Nor, says Prichard, would it be in the least *self-evident* that he ought to do such an action, regardless of whether he was *in fact* aiming at *X* or not.

Prichard devotes the rest of this division of his subject to an attempt to clarify and then to refute the highly confused arguments by which Sidgwick sought to put the readers of his *Methods of Ethics* into a position to see for themselves the intrinsic necessity of his two 'principles' of 'Prudence' and of 'Rational Benevolence'. He thinks that one fallacy which Sidgwick commits here is to identify the aggregate composed of *A*'s whole good, *B*'s whole good . . . etc., with the aggregate of all things which *are good*. He suggests that this identification, which involves a confusion between the substantival and the adjectival senses of 'good', is one of the commonest fallacies in the *Methods of Ethics*.

(4) GOODNESS AND OBLIGATION. The rest of this essay is devoted to an elaborate discussion of various possible forms of the very common view that an act cannot be obligatory unless *something good* will come into existence if and only if it is done. Prichard distinguishes three possible varieties of this view. According to them an act is obligatory (I) if and only if it has the *best effects*, or (II) if and only if it is the *best act*, or (III) if and only if it *either* has the best effects *or* is the best act, of all the acts open to the agent in the situation. Prichard counts Rashdall and Moore as supporting (I), Laird as a supporter of (II), and Joseph as a supporter of (III). But he notes that each, while beginning with some one of the three views, tends to slide into some other of them. Prichard first makes special objections to each of the three views in turn, and finally makes a general objection which he thinks is fatal to all of them.

Theory I. The essential defect of the Utilitarian theory is that it fails to stand up to the test of instances. According to it, if *A*

could do two alternative acts, each of which would produce equally good consequences, he would be under an equally urgent obligation to do either of them. But in fact no one believes this. Each of us has to consider *who* will be made better or made worse by his acts; and the urgency of the obligation to produce equally good effects varies greatly according to whether they will be produced in himself or in another, and, if in another, on the relationship in which that other stands to the agent.

Theory II. It is generally admitted that the goodness of an action depends on the nature of the motive which moved the agent to do it. So this theory involves the view that a person ought to be moved to action by certain desires because those desires are good. The theory can take two different forms. (a) It may hold that there is one and only one good motive, *viz.*, the desire to do what is right as such, and that it is obligatory to be moved by this. (b) It may hold that there are other good motives, *e.g.*, benevolence, personal affection, gratitude, etc., and that what is obligatory is to be moved by one or another of these.

If Prichard be right in holding that there can be no obligation to be moved by any particular motive, both forms of the theory collapse at once. But, he alleges, the theory leads to highly paradoxical consequences even if we waive this objection.

(i) If the theory be true, one is never, strictly speaking, under an obligation to *do a certain action*, *e.g.*, to give up an evening to reading to a blind friend. One is only under an obligation to *be moved by a certain motive*, *e.g.*, pity for his affliction, to do some act or other which expresses that motive.

(ii) If form (a) of the theory were true, the consequences would be still more paradoxical. For, according to it, one's only obligation is to be moved by a motive which involves the belief that one is under an obligation to *do certain acts*. But, according to both forms of the theory, this belief is in principle delusive; for one is *not* under an obligation to do any act, but is only under an obligation to be moved by certain motives.

(iii) If form (b) of the theory were true, it would be impossible for a person to do *from a sense of duty* any act which was *in fact* his duty. For, according to this form of the theory, in order for an act to be obligatory on *A* his motive for doing it must be some good motive, such as benevolence, *other than* the belief that it is right and the desire to do what is right as such.

Theory III. Since this is a disjunction of (I) and (II), a conjunction of the objections to (I) and the objections to (II) constitutes an objection to it.

General Objection to all three Theories. All three theories start by asking the question: 'What characteristic, other than that of being morally obligatory, is common and peculiar to morally obligatory acts and renders them obligatory?' Prichard says that this question presupposes that the phrase 'morally obligatory'

denotes a characteristic common and peculiar to certain *acts*. (This was, indeed, denied by Joseph, but Prichard argues that Joseph here combines assertions which are inconsistent with each other.) The question therefore arises: 'What is this common characteristic supposed to be?' Prichard says that he thinks that it would have to be described by some such phrase as 'oughtness-to-be', and he brings forward evidence to show that a number of philosophers have in fact taken for granted that 'oughtness-to-be' describes a property which is possessed by anything that is *good*.

Prichard then argues that there can be no such characteristic. For the categorical proposition *S* is *P* entails that *S* exists. Therefore, if there were a characteristic denoted by 'oughtness-to-exist', the statement '*X* ought to exist' would entail that *X* *does* exist. But it is obvious that this is not so. Therefore, Prichard concludes, the question which Theories I, II, and III set out to answer is an idle one, based on a false assumption.

I find it difficult to persuade myself that this argument is very formidable. I take it that, when one says 'So-and-so ought to exist' or (what is equivalent) 'There ought to be so-and-so', one is taking a description, explicit or implied, of 'so-and-so', and is asserting that it ought to have an instance. This assertion is logically independent of whether that description does or does not have instances. Thus, *e.g.*, the sentence 'There ought to be laws against cruelty to animals' is surely perfectly intelligible, and is equally so now in England where there are such laws and in England in the seventeenth century when there were no such laws. We can now say: 'There are laws against cruelty to animals, and that is as it should be'; and a humane ancestor in the seventeenth century could have said: 'There are no laws against cruelty to animals, but there should be such laws'. If that be so, I see no *logical difficulty* in an assertion of the form: 'If and only if an act would have the property *P* if it were to occur, then such an act ought to occur'.

With this the essay on *Moral Obligation* ends, but the general notion of the moral 'ought' is further discussed in two short notes entitled *The Time of an Obligation* and '*Ought*'. The former of these seems to me to be much ado about very little. The latter is too obscure to myself for me to venture to try to convey its meaning to others.

Two of the essays, *viz.*, *The Obligation to keep a Promise* and *Exchanging*, deal with particular kinds of obligation which Prichard found puzzling. The former is of great interest and I will therefore summarize it.

(1) When a person promises to do something he seems *prima facie* to be creating an obligation. But reflexion shows that an *obligation* is not the kind of thing that could possibly be created. What the promisor must be doing is bringing into existence something which imposes an obligation on him. The question is: 'What is this something, and how does it impose an obligation?'

(2) Prichard argues that it will not do to say that it is an *expectation* in the mind of the promisee. His main argument is as follows. When *A* promises *B* that he will do *X* he does, no doubt, generally arouse thereby in *B* an expectation that he will do *X*. But such expectations can be aroused in other ways; and, when such an expectation is aroused in *B* by a *promise*, it depends upon *B*'s believing (i) that *A* believes himself, *irrespective* of any expectations which he may have aroused, to have put himself under an *obligation* to do *X*, and (ii) that *A* is a more or less conscientious person, who, as such, is likely to fulfil what he takes to be his obligations. Now, suppose that the expectation-theory were the whole truth. Then the expectation which, according to the theory, is the *only* ground of *A*'s obligation to do *X*, could arise in *B* only in so far as *B* ascribes to *A* a belief about the ground of his obligation to do *X* which, according to the theory, is in principle false. Prichard in fact goes further than this. He says that *B* must ascribe to *A* a belief which, if the theory were true, he *could not* have. (I can see no justification for this. Surely the theory might be true, and yet every promisee might believe—and even correctly believe—that the promisor holds a belief about the grounds of his obligation to keep his promise which is inconsistent with the theory and therefore false. Nor is it clear to me why Prichard should hold that *B* must ascribe to *A* the belief that he has put himself under an obligation to do *X* *irrespective* of any expectations which he may have aroused.)

(3) Prichard's own very tentative answer is as follows. (i) When *A* makes a promise to *B* he utters certain characteristic words, e.g., 'I promise to' or 'I will', in connexion with a description of *X*. *B* hears and understands these characteristic expressions. (ii) It is his causing *B* to hear these sounds in this context which puts *A* under an obligation to do *X*. (iii) But this can give rise to an obligation only because *A* has already somehow made with *B* a *general* agreement not to use such expressions in connexion with the description of an act without going on to do that act.

(4) Prichard fully realizes that this theory is open to very strong *prima facie* objections. (i) None of us has any recollection of having made such a general agreement in the past. (ii) The problem of how one puts oneself under an obligation to do *X* by promising to do it is merely replaced by the problem of how one puts oneself under an obligation not to use certain verbal expressions in certain contexts without following them up with the appropriate action. To this Prichard's only answer is that it may well be necessary as a first step to substitute the latter for the former problem, and that the prior general promise must *somehow* have been given without using the peculiar verbal forms in which we subsequently make particular promises.

He evidently remained greatly puzzled by the question. For he ends the essay by saying that he is really suggesting, not a solution

but the following problem for consideration : ' What is that something, implied in the existence of agreements, which looks very much like an agreement, and yet, strictly speaking, cannot be an agreement ? ' This is a genuine enough problem.

The remaining three essays are on what might be called the ' philosophical analysis of volition and voluntary action '. They are entitled *The Object of a Desire*, *The Psychology of Willing*, and *Acting, Willing, and Desiring*. I do not propose to consider them in detail, for I have already devoted enough space to the purely ethical parts of the book, which are its most important contents.

This book is a most important and interesting contribution to moral philosophy. Too many of the papers which have appeared on this topic in recent years seem to be written by persons who are ' composing without their eye on the subject '. By this I mean that their authors seem to have little direct acquaintance with or interest in moral problems. They have accepted a general theory of judgment and of significance which was devised without reference to moral phenomena, and into which such phenomena fit very badly, and they now devote themselves with infinite ingenuity to stretching the facts to fit the theory. It is therefore most refreshing to read a book by a man like Prichard, who was really at home in the facts about which he was philosophizing, who was passionately interested in them, who had a certain healthy naivety and common-sense which made him immune to clever talk and ingenious fictions, and who had exceptional powers of patient analysis and subtle argumentation.

C. D. BROAD.