

PHILOSOPHY

THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY

VOL. XXVI. No. 97

APRIL 1951

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY AND CERTAIN ALLIED EXPERIENCES¹

Professor C. D. BROAD

THE Swedish philosopher Hägerström, who was professor in Uppsala during the first quarter of the present century, devoted much attention to the philosophical and psychological analysis of moral and legal phenomena. Hägerström is a difficult writer. He had steeped himself in the works of German philosophers and philosophical jurists, and his professional prose-style both in German and in Swedish had been infected by them so that it resembles glue thickened with sawdust. But he enjoys a very high reputation in his own and adjacent countries, and it seems to me that this is well deserved. I think, therefore, that it may be interesting and useful to try to provide English philosophers with an outline in my own words of Hägerström's doctrines, as I understand them, about the topic named in the title of this paper.

I shall use the name "deontic expression" to denote all sentences which contain as principal verb the word "ought" or some obviously equivalent word or phrase, Hägerström was concerned to describe and analyse the experiences which are expressed by the utterance of such sentences. I will use the name "deontic experience" to denote them. Now he thinks that much light is thrown on this problem by considering what is expressed by such sentences as "I shall do so-and-so," and by such sentences as "Do so-and-so!" We may call these respectively "expressions of intention" and "imperative sentences," and we may call the experiences which

¹ Lecture given to the Royal Institute of Philosophy on November 17, 1950.

PHILOSOPHY

they respectively express "experiences of intending" and "experiences of commanding and obeying." I shall therefore begin by considering in turn Hägerström's account of these two kinds of experience.

Experiences of Intending. Suppose I have been considering what to do in a certain situation and eventually make a decision which I express by saying "I will do so-and-so," e.g. "I will accept Mr. X's invitation." What am I expressing by uttering such a sentence?

(1) I am certainly *not* expressing merely a predictive judgment about myself, as if I were to say "I shall be dead within the next 50 years." The latter sentence clearly does not express an intention, and any sentence which does so evidently refers in part, at least, to something which already exists. (2) The sentence "I will do so-and-so" certainly does not express merely the introspective judgment which might be expressed by saying "I have just decided to do so-and-so." To be having a certain experience is one thing, and to judge that one is having such an experience is always another thing. The sentence "I will do so-and-so" is the direct expression of an experience of intending, whilst the sentence "I have just decided to do so-and-so" expresses my judgment that I am having or have just had such an experience. (3) Hägerström concludes that the words "I will" in such a sentence express a certain experience of *conative impulse*, and that this is an essential factor in the experience of intending.

He now raises the following question. The sentence "I will do so-and-so" seems *prima facie* to express a judgment, in which a certain predicate, viz. doing so-and-so, is ascribed to a certain subject, viz. myself. For grammatically it is a sentence in the indicative, and its grammatical subject is the word "I" and its grammatical predicate is the phrase "do so-and-so." Now, if the sentence had been "I shall be dead within the next 50 years," there would be no objection to accepting these suggestions of grammar. But we have come to the conclusion that, in uttering an expression of intention, I am expressing, *not* a judgment about myself, but a certain conative impulse which I am feeling. Why, then, do we all express our intentions by uttering sentences in the grammatical form which is appropriate for expressing *judgments*?

Hägerström's answer is as follows. When I utter the sentence "I will do so-and-so" I am expressing a complex experience, composed of two co-existent and intimately linked experiences, one conative and the other cognitive. The conative component is a feeling of impulse, the cognitive component is a thought of myself as doing so-and-so. He holds, apparently, that it is the presence of this cognitive experience, linked with the feeling of impulse, which diverts the expression from taking the form of a mere interjection into

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

taking the form of a sentence in the indicative. The grammatical form of the utterance then suggests that I am making and expressing a *judgment*, assigning a peculiar kind of predicate to myself as subject. But this suggestion is misleading. Hägerström thinks that sentences in the optative mood, e.g. "Would that Professor *X* would stop talking!" provide another instance of sentences which express a certain feeling intimately linked with a certain thought, viz. here the thought of Professor *X*'s speech coming to an end.

Hägerström suggests that, when one is merely seriously considering doing a certain action, as distinct from being resolved to do it, the idea is linked with a conative impulse similar in kind but of weaker intensity. He suggests that the difference in intensity is connected with the difference on the cognitive side between merely thinking seriously of the possibility of doing the action and fully believing that one will do it. The feature common to all such experiences is the presence of a feeling of conative impulse linked in a certain way with the cognitive experience of entertaining with *some* degree of conviction the proposition that one will do an act of a certain kind.

From this analysis Hägerström draws the conclusion that it is meaningless to apply the notions of logic, e.g. entailment, inconsistency, etc., to intentions. For these notions apply strictly only to judgments, and an expression of intention is not just an expression of a judgment. Suppose, e.g. that I have formed the intention of accepting Mr. *X*'s invitation. To accept his invitation logically entails communicating with him in some way or other, and I may know that the only available way is to write a letter to him. Yet no such feeling of conative impulse may be linked with the thought of sitting down and writing a letter to *X* as is linked with the thought of accepting his invitation. In that case there is no inconsistency in the *logical* sense. For *logic* does not require that, if *p* entails *q* and a certain feeling of conative impulse is linked with my thought of *p*, then the same feeling shall be linked with my thought of *q*. Nevertheless, Hägerström says, the feeling of conative impulse is in fact very often conveyed by association from one's thought of *p* to one's thought of *q* if one realizes that *p* logically entails *q*. Suppose a person has decided to seek a certain end *E*, and that he believes that the only or the best available means is to take the initial action *A*. Then a feeling of conative impulse, similar to that which is linked with his thought of seeking *E*, will, in general, be linked by association with his thought of doing *A*. But, if this should not be so, it is improper to talk of "inconsistency" in the logical sense.

Experiences of Commanding and Obeying. We can now turn to Hägerström's account of experiences of commanding and obeying.

PHILOSOPHY

He opens the discussion by raising the question: What state of mind does the issuer of a command seek to bring about in the recipient of it?

He begins by distinguishing a command, on the one hand, from a threat or a warning, on the other. If *A* threatens *B*, he seeks to induce *B* to act or to abstain from acting in a certain way by making *B* believe that he will otherwise bring about consequences which *B* would greatly dislike. If *A* warns *B*, the process is in principle the same, but the unpleasant consequences to *B* will not necessarily be due to *A*'s action. In either case *A* is imagining what it is like to be in *B*'s position and with *B*'s tastes and inclinations. He then tries to persuade *B* that omitting to do the action in question would lead to consequences which *B* would greatly dislike. And he expects that this will arouse in *B* a strong egoistic motive for doing the action.

Now a command, as such, is neither a threat nor a warning, though it may, of course, be combined with, and reinforced by, either or both. It is *not* intended primarily to arouse an egoistic motive for doing the action commanded.

Hägerström then proceeds to make certain other negative statements about the way in which a command acts on the recipient. (1) It does not act by arousing in *B* the belief that *A* wishes or intends him to do the action commanded. This belief, if it occurs, is merely an inference which *B* may or may not make. Even if he does make it, this belief will influence *B*'s action only if he has some motive, direct or indirect, for acting in accordance with *A*'s wishes or intentions. If this were the way in which a command worked, the person who issued it might just as well have uttered a promise or a threat or a recommendation or a warning. Then, again, from the point of view of the utterer of a command, what he is doing is certainly not just to express a wish or an intention. If it were, the appropriate expression would be, not a sentence in the imperative, but either one in the optative "Would that you would do so-and-so!" or an expression of intention "I will make you do so-and-so." Now a person often utters a command and is obeyed when he knows perfectly well that he has no means of *making* the other person do what he orders if the latter should prove disobedient.

Hägerström concludes that a command acts by producing in the recipient, *directly* and without appeal to motives based on his likes and dislikes, an intention to do the act commanded. In accordance with the analysis of intention given above, this means that receiving the command directly evokes in the hearer a feeling of conative impulse linked with the thought of acting in the way described.

We can, however, distinguish three different ways of reacting to a command, and Hägerström thinks that the characteristic experience

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

occurs only or most markedly with the third of them. At the lowest level reception of a command simply sets off the action required by a kind of conditioned reflex without the idea of it being present in the recipient's mind. The obedience of trained soldiers on parade to the ordinary words of command is of this nature. At a slightly higher level the effect of receiving the command is primarily to evoke the idea of the action commanded and to repress all ideas of alternative modes of behaving. This one idea then simply realizes itself *ideo-motively*. The characteristic experience of obeying a command does not emerge clearly in either of these cases. It does so only at the third level. Here thoughts of alternative modes of behaving are present, just because they do appeal to this, that or another of the recipient's desires or aversions. The effect of the command is then to produce directly the intention to do the alternative commanded, and to suppress the tendency of the other impulses to develop into intentions. Cf., e.g., the case of a boy forbidden by his mother to eat any more chocolates, and obeying, although he is very conscious of a desire to eat more.

We can now pass to Hägerström's account of the experiences of a person who issues a command. According to what has gone before, the words "I will" express the actual existence of a state of intention in the speaker, whilst the words "Thou shalt!" evoke directly a state of intention in a suitably situated hearer. But Hägerström proceeds to develop his theory as follows. He says that, if *A* addresses an imperative sentence to *B*, it will not be effective unless it appears to *B* to be expressive of a real intention in *A*, viz., an intention that *B* shall act in the way commanded. This must be carefully distinguished from an intention in *A* to make *B* act in that way. The latter intention may or may not exist. If it does, it would be expressed by saying "I will make you do so-and-so" and not by saying "Do so-and-so!" Now, in general, *B* will not be led to believe that *A* really means him to do *X*, when he utters the imperative sentence "Do *X*!" unless *A* does in fact have that intention in regard to *B*'s action.

I think that this part of the theory may be put as follows. If *A*'s command to *B* is to be effective, *B* must believe that it is meant seriously. And in general *A* will not manage to utter the imperative sentence in such a way as to convey that impression to *B* unless he does in fact mean it seriously. Now, so far, we have considered under the name "intention" only an intention in a person concerning *his own* action, i.e., the kind of experience which he would express by saying "I will do *X*." But now we have to consider an intention in *A* concerning an action by *B*, i.e., the kind of situation which a third party might describe by saying that *A* intends *B* to do *X*. Hägerström's view is that this consists in *A* having a

PHILOSOPHY

feeling of conative impulse linked with his thought of *B* doing this action, and that the feeling and the linkage are of the same nature as when he has an intention to do an action himself. The difference is simply that in the former case the feeling is linked with *A*'s thought of *B* doing *X* instead of with his thought of *himself* doing *X*. The natural expression of the former state is an imperative sentence "Do *X*!" addressed to *B*; the natural expression of the latter state is a sentence of the form "I will do *X*."

In order to deal with this development of Hägerström's doctrine it will be convenient to proceed as follows. We will say that an experience of intending, in the widest sense, always consists of a feeling of conative impulse linked in a certain way with the thought of a certain person performing a certain action. But it may be either *reflexive* or *transitive*. It is reflexive if the thought is of *oneself* as doing the act. The natural expression of a reflexive intention is a sentence of the kind "I will do so-and-so." It is transitive if the thought is of a certain *other person* as doing the act. The natural expression of a transitive intention is a sentence of the kind "Do so-and-so!" addressed to the person in question. The effect of this on a suitably conditioned recipient is to evoke directly in him a reflexive intention, which *he* would naturally express by saying "I will do so-and-so."

There are three remarks to be added before we leave this topic. (1) Hägerström thinks that a person often says to himself "I will do so-and-so" in order to strengthen in himself by auto-suggestion an already existing, but weak or wavering, reflexive intention. In such cases he is doing to himself something which is analogous to giving an order to another. (2) He thinks that the first person plural of the imperative mood, e.g., "Let us pray!" illustrates the close connexion between an intention and a command. The speaker is at once expressing his own intention to do a certain act and expecting this expression to evoke directly in his hearers an intention to co-operate with him. (3) The reception of a command may evoke in the recipient a conative impulse linked with the thought of doing the act commanded, but this impulse may be too weak to constitute a reflexive intention. In that case, as in the case where a command is effective, the recipient will feel himself to be to some extent *constrained* in his volitions. For impulses to do various alternative actions, based on their appeal to his various likes and dislikes, will be in conflict with the impulse to do the action commanded, which arises in a totally different way analogous to hypnotic suggestion.

Deontic Experiences. We are now in a position to consider Hägerström's account of deontic experiences. The fact that it has been common to interpret duty in terms of imperatives suggests that there is some analogy between deontic experiences and the

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

experience of receiving a command. Moreover, when a person's sense of duty is aroused, he does feel under a kind of compulsion in regard to a certain action, and expressions like "bound to" and "under an obligation to" seem to point to a conative impulse not dependent on the agent's likes and dislikes. On the other hand, it must be admitted that deontic expressions are often used where a person is merely expressing a valuation of an action by reference to his desires and aversions. One may say, e.g. "I ought to have taken the first turning to the left," when one means merely that this would have been the most convenient way to the place which one wanted to reach. The question therefore arises whether a feeling of duty is of the same nature as the feelings which are at the basis of our likes and dislikes or whether it is of the nature of a conative impulse such as Hägerström believes to be present in experiences of reflexive intention, of commanding, and of obeying.

In favour of the former alternative are the following facts. Suppose a person believes that the doing of act *X* is necessary either to avoid something which he would greatly dislike or to secure something which he highly values. Suppose further that the act *X* in itself is indifferent or repulsive to him. Then he does feel a kind of inner compulsion towards doing and in doing *X*. A typical example would be paying money to a blackmailer. When a person acts from a sense of duty may not the feeling of compulsion be due to the act being one which is in itself indifferent or repulsive to him, but is chosen by him as the only means available for avoiding what he would strongly dislike or securing what he would highly value?

Hägerström rejects this on the following grounds. (1) All these conditions may be fulfilled to the highest degree, e.g., in the case of being blackmailed, and yet the feeling of compulsion may *not* present itself as a feeling of duty to do the act. A person feels under a *moral* compulsion to take the unpleasant means only when he feels under a moral obligation to seek the end to which they are indispensable. E.g., a father of a family might feel himself under a *moral* compulsion to pay money to a blackmailer if he felt under a moral obligation to save his wife and children from distress and ruin. (2) It is plainly idle to suggest that the unpleasant consequence to be avoided is the pangs of guilty conscience. For, in the first place, unless I already have a feeling of obligation to do a certain act, I shall not expect to feel the pangs of guilt or remorse if I omit to do it. And, secondly, just in so far as I realized that my sole reason for doing *X* was the desire to avoid the unpleasant feelings which would attend my consciousness of having omitted to do it, I should *not* have the experience of doing *X* from a sense of *duty*. (3) It is equally unsatisfactory to suggest that the valued end which one seeks to secure by taking the unattractive means is self-approval

PHILOSOPHY

or approval by others. For, in the first place, self-approval must here be specifically *moral*, and the approval of others must be approval which I regard as *deserved*. Otherwise the act cannot possibly appear to the agent as done from a sense of duty. And, secondly, a person cannot expect to feel *moral* self-approval in respect of an action, nor to feel that the approval of others is *deserved*, unless he has acted from a sense of duty. All such attempted explanations of action from a sense of duty presuppose what they profess to explain.

Hägerström's conclusion is this. The only possible account of action from a sense of duty is that it involves an impulse towards a certain action which is felt to be compulsive, because it is determined, *not* by the agent's likes, dislikes, and valuations, but by something which is, so far as concerns them, *external* to him. If so, the analogy with acting on a command is obvious. Both experiences involve a conative impulse which arises independently of appeals to the subject's likes, dislikes, valuations, etc., and which is directly linked with the thought of a certain action.

Deontic Sentences in the Indicative. We can now pass to the next stage in Hägerström's argument. This is concerned with what I will call "deontic sentences in the indicative." We have seen that what is expressed by a sentence in the imperative, e.g., "Do so-and-so!" cannot be expressed naturally by any sentence in the indicative. We have also seen that the expression of a reflexive intention "I will do so-and-so," though grammatically similar to "I shall be dead within 50 years," cannot be treated as an ordinary sentence in the indicative expressing the judgment that a certain subject has a certain predicate. But in the case of deontic experiences the situation is expressed quite naturally by what looks like an ordinary sentence in the indicative, e.g., "So-and-so is my duty" or "I am under an obligation to do so-and-so." Now the *prima facie* interpretation of this linguistic fact is to suppose that the feeling of duty makes a person aware of a peculiar kind of predicate which qualifies either himself in relation to a certain act or a certain act in relation to himself. The deontic sentence in the indicative is then naturally regarded as expressing a judgment that the action or the agent has this peculiar predicate. Hägerström proceeds to investigate this *prima facie* interpretation of the linguistic facts.

If we consider any action which is held to be a duty in given circumstances, we shall generally be able to mention certain *non-deontic* characteristics of it, e.g. its being the fulfilment of a promise, which *make* it a duty in the circumstances. Let us call these "deontifying characteristics." None of these deontifying characteristics can be *identified with* the supposed property of being a duty. Nevertheless, many people would say that the fact that we naturally

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

use sentences like "This act is obligatory upon me" shows that we *are* aware of a certain peculiar predicate and that we *do* judge that it belongs to a certain action. Hägerström holds that this is a mistake.

His preliminary answer is that the example of expressions of intention, like "I will do so-and-so," suffices to show that a sentence in the indicative is not always an expression for a judgment. He then turns to the special case under discussion, viz., the sentence "This action is a duty." He takes this to be equivalent to "This action ought to be." He then uses an abstract argument, which seems to me to come to the following. In ascribing *any* predicate to a subject we presuppose that that subject exists. But when I say "So-and-so ought to be" I certainly do not presuppose that so-and-so exists. I admit that that which I declare ought to exist may never exist, and I hold that the question whether it does or does not is irrelevant. Hägerström therefore concludes that the indicative sentence "So-and-so ought to be" cannot express a judgment in which a predicate denoted by the phrase "ought-to-be" is assigned to a subject denoted by the phrase "so-and-so."

If this is Hägerström's argument, it resembles one used by Prichard. I must confess that I find it inconclusive for the following two reasons. (1) It is not at all obvious that the natural expression "I ought to do so-and-so" can or should be replaced by the expression "So-and-so ought to be." Now the former sentence seems *prima facie* to express a judgment in which a predicate denoted by the phrase "being under an obligation to do so-and-so" is ascribed to a subject denoted by the word "I." Now *I* exist, even if I should never do the action in question. (2) Even if we allow the translation into "So-and-so ought to be," the argument seems to me to be a mare's nest. It might be compared with the following bogus difficulty which might be raised about such a negative existential sentence as "Dragons do not exist." It might be said that this is self-contradictory; for, unless there were dragons, one could not ascribe *any* predicate to them and therefore not non-existence. The answer is, not that the sentence "Dragons do not exist" does not express a judgment at all, but that it expresses a judgment of a radically different kind from that which is expressed by the grammatically similar sentence "Pigs do not fly." Its subject, in fact, is not anything *denoted* by the word "dragons," but is whatever set of attributes we take to be *connoted* by that word, e.g. the property of being a serpent which has wings and breathes flame. And what it asserts is that this complex attribute has no instances. Now I should have thought that the sentence "So-and-so ought to be" could *prima facie* be treated on similar lines. The subject would be a set of attributes describing a certain possible action or state of

PHILOSOPHY

affairs. What is asserted of it is that it ought to have an instance; and this neither entails nor excludes that it does have instances.

However this may be, Hägerström concludes that deontic sentences in the indicative do not and cannot express judgments in which a peculiar predicate, denoted by some such phrase as "ought-to-be," is ascribed to a subject. What lies behind them is simply a conative impulse directly linked with the idea of a certain action in the way already described in discussing expressions of intention and imperative sentences.

The question at once arises: Why should we express this particular kind of mixed conative and cognitive experience by a sentence in the indicative, which inevitably suggests by its grammatical form that we are making a judgment in which we are ascribing a unique kind of predicate to an act? Hägerström's answer, if I am not mistaken, is as follows.

What causes the expression to take this grammatical form is that the *cognitive* element is predominant at the time. One is thinking of the special *factual* character of the action in relation to the circumstances, e.g. of its being the fulfilment of a promise. This forces the expression of the mixed conative and cognitive experience into a form of words which is appropriate to the expression of a judgment assigning a peculiar predicate to the action contemplated.

Now we must notice the following two facts about such utterances. (1) They are not sentences which we deliberately construct, as one does when using an unfamiliar language or trying to convey in one's own language something to a foreigner who is imperfectly acquainted with it. They arise automatically to our lips on the occasion of a deontic experience. (2) A person does not utter such sentences as an isolated individual. Their form is determined by his membership of a community in which other members automatically express their deontic experiences in a similar way. In consequence of their automatic and extra-individual character such utterances have much the same properties as those which really do express judgments. Now this leads one, by a very natural association, to take for granted that deontic sentences in the indicative do express judgments. So there arises in the mind of the speaker a kind of image of the experience which he has when he really is making a judgment and expressing it by a sentence in the indicative. Let us call this an "experience of *quasi*-judging."

When a person has such an experience he naturally takes for granted that there is a peculiar kind of objective *fact* corresponding to it, in the way in which, e.g. the historical fact that Charles I was executed corresponds to the genuine judgment which I should express by saying "Charles I was executed." The *subject* of this assumed deontic fact is naturally taken to be the action in connexion

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

with the thought of which the feeling of moral compulsion is experienced. But what is supposed to be the *predicate*, which the phrase "ought to be done" is assumed to denote? Any *non-deontic* predicate which might be suggested obviously will not do, for then the alleged judgment would naturally be expressed by an indicative sentence with a non-deontic word or phrase as its grammatical predicate. Actually there is one and only one way in which a person who is having an experience of deontic *quasi*-judging can present the alleged predicate to himself. He can think of it only as that which answers to the description "that predicate, whatever it may be, which the phrase 'ought to be done' denotes in the sentence 'This action ought to be done.' " Of course, if Hägerström be right, there is nothing answering to this description, just as there is nothing answering to the description "the national fraction whose square is equal to 2." But in either case we can understand the description, and in that sense and in that only one can be said to think of that which it ostensibly describes.

Ascription of Duties to other Persons. The account of deontic experiences which we have so far considered applies to those which are expressed by a deontic indicative in the first person singular, viz. "I ought to do so-and-so." But there are, of course, deontic indicatives in the second and in the third person. *A* may say to *B* "You ought to do so-and-so," or he may say of *B* "He ought to do so-and-so." What sort of experiences are expressed by such sentences? Can a similar account be given of them?

In answering this question Hägerström refers to the experience which he alleges to be present in a person who issues an order to another, i.e., what I have called a "transitive intention." He holds that when *A* says to *B* "You ought to do so-and-so" there is in *A* a feeling of conative impulse of the same kind as that which is present when he says "I ought to do so-and-so." But in this case it is linked with *A*'s thought of *B* doing the action instead of being linked with his thought of himself as doing the action. The feeling is of the same kind and the linkage is of the same kind; the difference is in the content of the thought with which the feeling is linked.

Hägerström explains the experience of moral indignation by reference to this transitive deontic feeling of conative impulse. Suppose, e.g., that *A* has this feeling linked with his thought of *B* keeping his promise to *C*. Suppose he becomes aware that *B* has broken his promise to *C*. Then this conative impulse of *A*'s is thwarted, and he reacts by a feeling of indignation towards *B*. Such indignation is specifically moral.

Rightness and Sense of Duty. Our ordinary language suggests that there is a peculiar property called "rightness," with a contrary opposite called "wrongness," which belongs to certain actions, and

PHILOSOPHY

that this property is intimately connected with sense of duty. It would commonly be said that a person feels a duty to do a certain act if and only if he believes that it is *right* in the circumstances. It might, indeed, be said that he feels it a duty to keep his promises, to return true answers to questions, and so on. But he does so only in so far as he believes that promise-keeping, truth-telling, etc., are the *right* actions in the relevant circumstances. The question therefore arises: Is there any such property? If so, what is it? If not, how can we account for the appearances just mentioned?

Hägerström first considers in detail and rejects, on what seem to me to be adequate grounds, various attempts to identify "rightness." To be right cannot be identified with being commanded by a certain will, e.g. the will of one's community. Again, to say that *X* is right cannot mean that omission to do *X* will be reacted against by some authority. It is always intelligible and relevant to ask whether it is *right* to obey the command, or whether the reaction against omission to do *X* is *right*. Now to ask whether it is right to obey a certain command obviously is not to ask whether obedience to that command is commanded. And to ask whether a social reaction against omission to do *X* is right is evidently not to ask whether omission to react against omission to do *X* is socially reacted against. Then, again, to say that *X* is right does not mean that *X* is the act which will in fact bring about the best consequences of all the acts open to the agent in the situation. There may be a sense of "right" which can be defined in this way. And this may well be one of the criteria which a person uses in trying to decide what he ought to do. But this is certainly not the sense of "right" in which one can say that it is one's duty to do that and only that act which one believes to be right. Lastly, to act rightly cannot be defined as acting in accordance with one's true self and thus maintaining one's autonomy. For suppose we ask how the various voluntary actions done by a person can be distinguished into those done by his *true* self and those done by some inferior or spurious self. The only answer that we can give is that the former are those which he does from a sense of duty because he believes them to be right and in spite of opposing motives, whilst the latter are those which he does without considering whether they are right or in spite of believing that they are wrong.

We can turn finally to Hägerström's own attempt to answer these questions. I must confess that I find it complicated and obscure. I am very doubtful whether I fully understand it, and all that I can do is to state in my own way what seem to me to be the main points.

We start from the following two premisses. (1) That which calls forth a feeling of obligation in a person to do a certain action is an experience which is described (correctly or incorrectly) as "his

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

believing the action to be right in the circumstances." This is the experience which we have to analyse. (2) The experience of feeling under an obligation to do an action is closely analogous to the experience which a person has when he receives from one who is in a position to command him an order to do a certain action. It is, therefore, plausible to suppose that what is described as "believing a certain action to be right in a certain situation" must be analogous to the experience of receiving an order from one whose authority one recognizes. Now Hägerström thinks that there are two factors which invest the rules of morality current in a society with an evocative power similar to that possessed by an actual word of command. These are *authority* and *custom*. We will now consider each in greater detail.

Any member of a society is from his earliest childhood constantly subject to commands from at least the following authorities, real or imaginary, viz. his parents and educators, the authorities which maintain law and order, the accepted divine powers, and the force of public opinion. These various authorities, on the whole, co-operate rather than conflict, and in the main they enforce on each member of the society actions of the same type in similar frequently recurring situations, such as being asked a question, being called upon to fulfil a promise, and so on. Long before a member of a society is grown up there is for him a whole system of types of action, e.g. violent assault, theft, lying, promise-breaking, etc., which he and all his fellows have been forbidden by various authorities to adopt in the situations in which they would be relevant. And there is for him a whole system of types of action, e.g. truth-telling, promise-keeping, respect for the property of others, etc., which he and all his fellows have been commanded to adopt in the situations in which they are relevant.

In this way the thought of any rule in this system of rules of conduct becomes invested with the same evocative power as if it were accompanied by the words "Act thus!" spoken by a recognized authority. Since many different authorities have co-operated in the past, no one in particular is now thought of as issuing the command. And, since the same type of action in similar situations is known by each of us to have been commanded not only for himself but also for all his fellows, no one in particular is now thought of as the recipient of the command. The evocative power associated with a word of command remains and is attached to the thought of acting in accordance with the rules of the system, but it is dissociated from any idea of a determinate commander or a determinate recipient.

Under such circumstances the following illusion arises, gets embodied in language, and then propagates itself through the

PHILOSOPHY

language in which it is embodied. We take for granted that there is a peculiar objective property, common and peculiar to acts of truth-telling, promise-keeping, and the rest of the types of conduct which the authorities have enjoined upon us. To this alleged objective property we give the name "rightness," and the word "right" functions thereafter as an ordinary adjective like "square." We assume that a person is capable of intuiting the presence of this alleged property in certain types of action. And we assume that men are so constituted that, when a person sees or thinks he sees that an action which he contemplates as possible would have this property, he inevitably has a feeling of obligation to do that action. Really there is no such objective property. What evokes the feeling of obligation to do a certain action is the knowledge that this is the kind of action which the accepted system of morality lays down for such situations, and the fact that the rules of that system have acquired through association the power of working upon us in a way analogous to that in which an order from a superior does. The so-called objective property of rightness is merely the ghostly, but none the less effective, echo of the voices of Father and Nurse, of the Policeman round the corner and "old Nobodaddy up aloft," haunting and pervading the system of moral rules in which we were brought up.

Hägerström holds that similar results follow when a custom of acting in a certain way in situations of a certain kind exists in all or most members of a society. The customary ways of acting in the relevant situations are felt as something commanded, and other ways of acting in those situations are felt as something forbidden. But no one in particular is thought of as issuing the command, and it is thought of as addressed to all and sundry and not to anyone in particular. So it is easy to delude oneself into thinking, or into talking as if one thought, that there is a peculiar objective property common and peculiar to these ways of acting in such situations; that we can recognize the presence of this property by inspection and reflexion; and that the knowledge or belief that it is present in a contemplated action calls forth a feeling of obligation to do that action. Generally authority and custom co-operate and give rise to a single system of moral rules with a commanding power derived from both sources. But they may happen to lead to different and conflicting systems of rules, each with its own commanding power. In that case the individual is subject to an insoluble internal conflict of duties.

It is time for me to bring my paper to an end. I have tried to explain Hägerström's theory, as I understand it, with the minimum of comment and criticism. But in conclusion I will say this. Hägerström's theory is a form of what is called "ethical subjectivism"

HÄGERSTRÖM'S ACCOUNT OF SENSE OF DUTY

or "ethical positivism." That theory to-day has many powerful supporters in England and America. So far as I am aware, none of its Anglo-Saxon adherents has made so thorough and so ingenious an attempt as Hägerström to show how the various aspects of the admitted facts can be fitted into the theory.

University of Cambridge.