

IV.—By C. D. BROAD.

I WAS asked to act as Chairman at the Joint Meeting of the Aristotelian Society and the Cambridge Moral Science Club on May 28th, 1942, when Dr. Waddington and Dr. Ewing held their Symposium on the Relations between Science and Ethics. I had written down a certain number of comments, mostly on Dr. Waddington's paper, which I read at the meeting when I opened the discussion. Afterwards Mr. Hannay asked me if he might print these remarks in the *Proceedings* with the other papers. As they were not originally written for publication, and as several points were further elucidated in the discussion, I consented only on the condition, which Mr. Hannay readily granted, that I might be allowed to re-write and somewhat expand my remarks.

(1) *The Nature of Goodness*.—It seemed to me when I read Dr. Waddington's paper that he held a "non-naturalistic" view of the nature of goodness, and that he combined this with a view of ethics in general which was strongly "naturalistic." This seemed to lead to paradoxes and difficulties, and I thought that it was important to get the matter cleared up at the meeting.

On p. 88, para. 3, Dr. Waddington states that goodness cannot be defined except tautologically, *i.e.*, except by bringing in some other ethical notion. But on p. 70, three lines from the bottom, he tells us that it is a causal-relational-property. If so, however, it *can* be defined as the property of causing or contributing or tending to cause so-and-so. This definition will *not* be tautological unless "so-and-so" involves some ethical term, *e.g.*, betterment.

It seemed to me that this apparent inconsistency in Dr. Waddington's paper might be removed by drawing the very necessary distinction between goodness itself and what I call "good-making characteristics." I suggested that what Waddington might mean is (a) that goodness itself is unanalysable, but (b) that the characteristics which confer goodness on anything that has it are always certain of its causal properties. This is a self-consistent view.

The same distinction clears up the controversy with Dr. Ewing on p. 90 about "good-in-itself." Ewing states that certain experiences, *e.g.*, are good-in-themselves or bad-in-themselves. He then adds that he does not mean by this that they would still be good or still be bad if everything else in the world were different. He means only that they *themselves* possess the quality of goodness (or badness), and not merely the property of producing something else which has it. To this Waddington objects that, unless the goodness of x is independent of the nature of the rest of the world, x cannot be said to be good-in-itself.

Now the distinction between goodness and good-making characteristics shows this controversy to be purely verbal. Ewing asserts (a) that there is a sense of "good" in which to call x "good" does not just mean that x is productive of results which are good; *i.e.*, that there is a non-instrumental sense of "good." This is, I think, quite obviously true. (b) On the other hand, he admits the possibility that the characteristics which make x good in the non-instrumental sense may always involve relations (non-causal or even causal) to other things, and therefore if there were no other things x might not be good even in the non-instrumental sense. There is no kind of inconsistency here. The worst that can be said is that it is somewhat misleading to use the positive phrase "good-in-itself" instead of the negative phrase "non-instrumentally good" in such a case.

Both symposiasts accepted the distinction, and agreed that it removes the appearance of inconsistency at this point.

(2) *Knowledge of the Presence of Goodness.*—I found very considerable epistemological difficulties in Dr. Waddington's paper. I stated them as follows.

It is said on p. 66, para. 1, that "the qualities of goodness and badness are recognized as such." Nevertheless, we are told later on that goodness is a relational property. And on p. 88, para. 2, Waddington seems to deny that "we can recognize goodness when we see it," though he says in the next paragraph that "some people sometimes have the feeling that they can recognize the good when they see it."

Now the question which I asked is this. Does Waddington hold that *sometimes*, in specially favourable cases, people can recognize the presence of goodness by inspection; or does he hold that they *never* can? Unless he admits the former it is difficult to see what evidence there could be for his general theory. For that theory seems to be that there is one and only one good-making characteristic, viz., tendency to maintain or to further the evolution of human social relations. The latter characteristic is not goodness, on Waddington's view; for, if it were, goodness would be definable non-tautologically. So the theory must be that this is the one and only good-making characteristic.

Now how could anyone have reason to believe this unless in some cases at least he can directly recognize the presence of goodness in things which have this other characteristic? The universal proposition must be a generalization from the observed conjunction of the two characteristics in some instances to their universal connexion in all instances. I do not know whether the generalization is supposed to be made by intuitive or by problematic induction. But on either alternative it will need for its basis observed instances of conjunction between goodness and the tendency to maintain or further human social evolution. And, unless the presence of goodness can be recognized by inspection in *some* cases, no such instances will be available.

This has some bearing on the part which natural science could play in the establishment of ethical propositions. All that natural science could establish in this department would be that certain types of belief or feeling or action do or do not tend to maintain or to further certain types of social change. This is not an ethical proposition at all. The proposition that beliefs, &c., which tend to maintain

or to further certain types of social change are *good*, and that nothing else is so, could be established by the ordinary procedure of natural science only if the two following conditions were fulfilled :—(a) That in those instances in which the presence of goodness can be directly observed, the process of observing it is of the nature of sense-perception or introspection. (b) That the generalization from these instances is made by ordinary problematic induction and not by what Johnson calls “intuitive induction,” *i.e.*, *not* by seeing a synthetic necessary connexion between two logically independent characteristics which have been observed to accompany each other. Now the first of these conditions seems to me ridiculous, and the second by no means plausible.

(3) *Waddington's Theory*.—This seems to consist of two parts, which I will call the “Evolutionary Part” and the “Psycho-analytic Part.” He considers that the two are very intimately connected, and it appeared in the discussion that he holds that the epistemological difficulties which I have raised in the previous section are entirely obviated if this connexion is understood and borne in mind. I am still very far from clear about the connexion between the two parts ; but I will go into this question at a later stage in the light of what was said in the discussion. At present I will state the Evolutionary Part.

So far as I can make out, this seems to involve the following propositions :—(1) If the social relations of men at different periods of their history are surveyed and compared it will be found (i) that they have changed, and (ii) that this process of change has persistently and predominantly followed a certain line, though there have been minor and temporary fluctuations, deviations, and regressions. (2) The social relations at any one period have one predominant cause, and their changes from one period to another are predominantly due to variations in this cause. (3) That predominant cause has been the ethical beliefs, emotions and practices of men. “Ethical beliefs” are defined in the first paragraph of the paper as those which refer to goodness and badness. (4) An ethical belief is

correct if it tends either (i) to carry changes in social relations further in the direction which they have predominantly followed in the past, or (ii) to prevent them from changing in divergent directions or from reverting to earlier phases in the course which they have already followed. It is incorrect if it tends to bring about changes in social relations which deviate from or reverse the trend which such changes have predominantly followed in the past.

Now the first three of these propositions are sociological or psychological and not ethical. They have no reference to goodness or badness. The fourth proposition is ethical ; for it refers to the question whether so-and-so, which is believed by someone to be *good* or *right* or *obligatory*, really is so ; and it offers a test by which this can be judged. It certainly does not follow from the other three propositions. It certainly cannot be supported or refuted by the methods of natural science, *i.e.*, by sense-perception and introspection, helped by experiment and generalized by problematic induction. And it does not seem to me to have the slightest trace of self-evidence. I still do not know what grounds Dr. Waddington has for believing this proposition. It appeared from his remarks in the discussion that he holds that it is proved or rendered probable by the facts which constitute the Psycho-analytic Part of the complete theory.

Before I leave the Evolutionary Part of the theory I will make the following remarks. (1) I have been very careful not to use the word "evolution" in stating the theory, but to talk instead of a "persistent and predominant direction of change." My reason is that the word "evolution" has a half-ethical flavour about it. It suggests *progress*, *i.e.*, change for the *better*. Evidently the whole discussion would be bedevilled from the start if we used an amphibious word, which is half non-ethical and half-ethical, in stating the theory. If Dr. Waddington himself has not been betrayed by the ethical overtones of the word "evolution," I am quite sure that many of the simple-minded scientists who read his article in *Nature* must have been.

(2) It seems to me that, even if the fourth proposition enunciated above were known to be true, it would be almost

useless as a criterion for deciding what is good or evil, right or wrong, in any concrete case. In the first place, I suspect that the criterion would be most difficult to formulate in detail. Is there anything to be said with certainty about the predominant direction of change in human social relations except highly vague and abstract generalities? Secondly, if the criterion could be formulated, it would be extremely difficult to judge whether acting in this way or in that in any particular situation would be likely to answer to it or not. Suppose, *e.g.*, that a person with a limited income is in doubt whether he ought to pension his old nurse or to give a rather better education to his gifted son. What conceivable help will he get from considering the predominant direction of change in social relations throughout human history? In the discussion Dr. Waddington said that this objection seemed to him unimportant, because all suggested criteria were difficult to apply in concrete cases. But surely this is a matter of degree. The criterion which a hedonistic Utilitarian, *e.g.*, would apply could easily be formulated and might give considerable guidance (whether correct or incorrect) in such a case.

I must now say what little I can about the Psycho-analytic Part of the theory and its connexion with the Evolutionary Part. Here I am very much hampered by the extremely abstract nature of Dr. Waddington's statements. He scarcely ever condescends to give an example of a particular ethical belief which babies acquire by reacting to their social environment and observing the consequences of doing so. Nor does he explain in detail in any concrete case the connexion between the way in which babies acquire their ethical beliefs and the proposition that ethical beliefs are correct in so far as they tend to carry the development of social relations further in the direction in which they have predominantly been changing in the past.

It should be noted that Waddington says in the last paragraph of p. 89 that the two most crucial points which he wishes to make in the psychological part of his argument are (i) that the development of the concept of the good

is by interaction with the environment, and (ii) that the function of the concept is to make possible the maintenance and progress of human societies. He does not insist that these two points stand or fall with the correctness or incorrectness of the psycho-analytic theories which he has quoted. It would therefore be unfair to lay much stress on doubts or difficulties about the psycho-analytic theories. But, on the other hand, the two principles here stated as crucial seem to be little more than platitudes. Who ever doubted that the concept of good develops through interaction with environment? And who ever doubted that a most important function of moral beliefs and emotions and practices was to "make possible the maintenance and progress of human societies"?

I propose to state in my own way what it seemed to me that Dr. Waddington really had in mind, as this gradually emerged in the course of the discussion. It is quite likely that I am to some extent misrepresenting him; but, if so, it is certainly not done with the intention of making an easy case against his views.

(i) There is a certain group of interconnected emotions which may be called "ethical." Examples of these are moral approval and disapproval, feeling of guilt, feeling of obligation, and so on. An ethical belief is a belief which is toned with one or more of these emotions. Such emotions act as motives for or against doing actions towards which they are felt, and so we have specifically *moral* motivation. (ii) The study of young children shows that in the main ethical emotions become attached to actions which hinder or promote the adjustment of the child's social relations with his family in general and his parents in particular. He acquires a moral motive against doing the former and for doing the latter. (iii) A certain kind of ethical emotion becomes attached to a certain kind of action through the child doing such actions impulsively or instinctively and then finding that the reactions of his parents are satisfactory or unsatisfactory to him. (iv) From this we infer that the "function" of ethical emotions is to enable individuals to live in social relations with each other; just as the "func-

tion " of the lungs is to aerate the blood, and that of the heart to distribute it throughout the body. (v) In particular cases a type of action which is detrimental to social harmony may have become associated with an approving ethical emotion, or one which would conduce to social harmony may have become associated with a disapproving ethical emotion. In such cases we say that ethical judgments about such actions are "false." This just *means* that these particular ethical judgments fail to perform that "function" which is characteristic of ethical judgments as a whole in human life. To call an ethical judgment "false" would be like calling a certain state or process in the heart or lungs "unhealthy" or "abnormal." (vi) A study of the genesis of ethical emotions and beliefs in the infant and of the part which they play in making family-life possible *suggests* to us the function of such beliefs and emotions in the life of the race. But in order to determine the latter more precisely it is necessary to consider the main trend of change in social relations throughout human history. We then recognize that the "function" of ethical beliefs and emotions is to keep human social relations changing in this direction and to prevent them from deviating from it or reverting within it. To call a particular ethical belief "false," then, means that it fails to perform this, which is the characteristic function of ethical belief as such.

I throw this out as a suggestion for critics of Dr. Waddington to consider. I do not propose to criticize it myself here and now. But I would conclude by asking them to look with a very attentive eye at the notion of "function," which plays so large a part in my statement of the theory. I wonder whether this has not teleological and perhaps even ethical overtones which carry us beyond the methods and presuppositions of ordinary natural science.
