

BUTLER AS A MORALIST.

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IN a recent article in the HIBBERT JOURNAL I gave some account of Butler's contributions to theology ; in the present paper I propose to expound and criticise his ethical work. This is contained in the *Sermons on Human Nature* which he preached at the Rolls Chapel in London, and in the *Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue* which forms one of the appendices to the *Analogy*. I may say at once that Butler seems to me to be easily the greatest English writer on ethics, and to be one of the greatest moralists that the world has produced.

It is necessary to say something at the outset about the ethical and religious tone of the time, because this largely determined the form in which Butler put his arguments. The Christian religion was then going through one of its recurrent periods of dormancy, and has seldom been at a lower ebb in England. Although it has received much more serious attacks since Butler's time, I should say that it is far more alive now than then. A typical story of the time is that of a college tutor who had occasion to rebuke a certain noble undergraduate for a serious moral lapse. He opened the subject in the following terms : " The respect which I feel for my Lord, your father ; the obligations which I am under to my Lord, the Bishop, your uncle ; and the peculiar situation in which I stand with respect to my Lord God ; encourage me to address you, my Lord ! " In fact religion was in a resting stage, worn out with the theological excitements of the seventeenth century and awaiting the revival which was to take place in the latter part of the eighteenth. Butler says in his preface to the *Analogy* : " It is . . . come to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much a subject of enquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it

as if in the present age this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world." This would certainly not be an accurate description of the attitude of "people of discernment" at the present time towards religion in general or Christianity in particular.

It was also fashionable at the time to deny the possibility of disinterested action. This doctrine, which was a speculative principle with Hobbes, has always had a certain vogue. It is not without superficial plausibility, and one of Butler's great merits is to have pointed out clearly and conclusively the ambiguities of language which make it plausible. As a philosophic theory it was killed by Butler; but it still flourishes, I believe, among bookmakers and smart young business men whose claim to know the world is based on an intimate acquaintance with the shadier side of it. In Butler's time the theory moved in higher social and intellectual circles, and it had to be treated more seriously than any philosopher would trouble to treat it now. This change is very largely the result of Butler's work; he killed the theory so thoroughly that he sometimes seems to the modern reader to be flogging dead horses. However, all good fallacies go to America when they die, and rise again as the latest discoveries of the local professors. So that it will always be useful to have Butler's refutation in store.

After these preliminaries we can consider Butler's ethical theory as a whole. His greatest merit is as a moral psychologist. He states with extraordinary clearness the principles according to which decent people do feel and act and judge, but which they could not state for themselves. And, in the course of this, he refutes certain plausible fallacies which would not have occurred to common sense, but which unaided common sense cannot answer when philosophers suggest them to it. His fundamental principle is that the human mind is an organised system in which different propensities and principles can be distinguished. But it is not enough to enumerate these without saying how they are related to each other. It would not be an adequate description of a watch to say that it consists of a spring, wheels, hands, etc.; nor would it be an adequate description of the British Constitution to say that it consists of the King, Lords, Commons, and Lord Rothermere's newspapers. We do not understand the nature of a watch till we know that the

spring causes the wheels to turn, that the balance-wheel controls them, and that the object of the whole arrangement is to record the time. Similarly, we do not understand the British Constitution till we know the precise functions and the mutual relations of the King, Lords, Commons, and Lord Rothermere.

Now Butler explicitly compares the nature of man both to a watch and to a constitution. He says that we do not fully understand it till we know what it is for and what are the proper functions and relations of the various principles and propensities. According to him none of these is intrinsically evil. Wrong-doing is always the excessive or inappropriate functioning of some principle of action which is right when acting in its due degree and its proper place. It is like a watch with a spring too strong for its balance-wheel, or like a constitution in which the newspaper proprietors, instead of confining themselves to purveying news and organising limerick competitions, usurp the functions of the King and Parliament. So the essential thing about man as a moral being is that he is a complex of various propensities arranged in a hierarchy. These propensities have a certain right proportion and certain right relations of subordination to each other. But men can go wrong, just like watches and constitutions, and so we must distinguish between the actual relative strengths of our various propensities and those which they ought to have. The latter may be called their moral authority. It may well happen that at times a principle of higher moral authority has less psychological strength than one of lower moral authority. If so, the man will be likely to act wrongly. You can only judge the rightness or wrongness of an action, or even of an intention, by viewing it in relation to the whole system of which it forms a part. Thus we judge very differently the same action or intention in a child or a lunatic and in a sane grown man. In the same way we do not blame a motor-cycle for irregularities which would make us regard a watch as worthless. This is because watches and motor-cycles are different systems with different functions. An actual motor-cycle must be judged by comparing its behaviour with that of an ideal motor-cycle, and an actual watch by comparing its behaviour with that of an ideal watch.

It is pretty clear that Butler has hold of a sound and intelligible idea. He chooses to express his theory in the form that virtue consists in acting in accordance with one's nature, and that vice is acting against one's nature. I am

not fond of the words "natural" and "unnatural," because they are extremely ambiguous. Butler fully recognises this; he sees that in one sense no one can act against his nature. I think that it would be best to say that virtue consists in acting in accordance with the *ideal* nature of man, and that vice consists in acting against it. No man's actual nature is the ideal nature of man. But this raises no special difficulty. We can form the conception of a perfect watch, although no real watches are perfect. And science makes great use of such idealised concepts as perfect straight lines, perfect circles, perfect gases, etc., though it admits that there are no such objects in nature.

We must now consider how such concepts are reached, so as to see how far the concept of an ideal human nature is likely to be valid and useful. I think that we reach them in two different ways. In forming the concept of a perfect watch we start with a knowledge of what watches are for. A watch is for telling the time, and a perfect watch would be one that told the time with complete accuracy. Butler often talks as if we could apply this kind of criterion to men, but this does not seem to me to be true. There is no sense in asking what man is for unless we assume that he has been made by God for some purpose. And, even if this were certain, it would not help us; for we do not know what this purpose may be. But there is another way in which we form ideal concepts, and this is illustrated by the concept of the perfect circle or straight line. We see such things as cakes, and biscuits, and pennies. On reflection we find that they fall into a series—cake, biscuit, penny—in which a certain attribute is more and more fully realised. Finally, we form a conception of a perfect circle as the ideal limit to such a series. Thus we can form the concepts of such ideal limits as circles and straight lines by reflecting on imperfect instances arranged in series; and here there is no need to know what the objects are for. There are three things to notice about these ideal limits. (1) There is generally no lower limit to such series. There is a concept of a perfectly straight line, there is no concept of a perfectly crooked line. (2) When we have formed the concept of an ideal limit we sometimes find that it is definable and sometimes that it is not. We can define a circle, we cannot define a straight line. But we understand just as well what is meant by one as by the other. (3) We could not reach the concepts of these ideal limits unless we had a power of reflecting on series and recognising the quality which is

more and more adequately though still imperfectly realised by the higher members of the series.

Now I think that there is an exact analogy to these three points in forming the concept of an ideal human nature. (1) There is no concept of a perfectly bad man any more than there is of a perfectly crooked line. Such phrases are meaningless noises. (2) If we arrange actual men, including ourselves, in a series and reflect on it, we can detect a closer and closer approximation to an ideal which is not perfectly realised by any of them. But it does not follow that we can analyse and define this ideal completely. I think that Butler would say that you can point out its general outlines but not its precise details. It certainly involves, as we shall see, the subordination of particular impulses to the more general principles of prudence and benevolence. And it certainly involves the subordination of both these general principles to the supreme principle of conscience. But just how far each impulse would be indulged in the ideal man, and just what compromise he would make between prudence and benevolence, Butler does not tell us; and probably it is impossible to say. This does not, however, make the concept of an ideal human nature either unintelligible or useless. (3) Butler would say that we could not form this concept at all unless we had a faculty for reflecting upon actions and characters, and comparing their moral worth. This faculty we evidently do have and do constantly use. It is what Butler calls *conscience*. With these explanations it seems to me that Butler's conception of an ideal human nature is sound, and that it is true to say that virtue is acting in accord with this nature, and that vice is acting against it.

We can now consider in more detail how Butler supposes human nature to be constituted. In all men he distinguishes four kinds of propensities or springs of action. (1) There are what he calls "particular passions or affections." These are what we should call impulses to or from particular kinds of objects. Hunger, sexual instinct, anger, envy, sympathy, etc., would be examples of these. It is obvious that some of these mainly benefit the agent and that some mainly benefit other people. But you cannot reduce the former to self-love or the latter to benevolence. We shall go fully into this very important doctrine of Butler's later. (2) There is the general principle of cool self-love. By this Butler means the tendency to seek the maximum happiness for ourselves over the whole course of our lives. It is

essentially a rational calculating principle which leads us to check particular impulses and co-ordinate them with each other in such a way as to maximise our total happiness in the long run. (3) There is the general principle of benevolence. This, again, is a rational calculating principle, which must be distinguished from a mere impulsive sympathy with people whom we see in distress. It is the tendency which makes us try to maximise the general happiness according to a rational scheme and without regard to persons. I think it would be fair to say that the ideal of the Charity Organisation Society is benevolence in Butler's sense. (4) There is the principle of Conscience, which is supreme over all the rest in authority. In ideal human nature conscience is supreme over self-love and benevolence; *i.e.*, it determines how far each of these principles shall be carried. And self-love and benevolence are in turn superior to the particular impulses, *i.e.*, they determine when and to what extent each shall be gratified. But in any actual man self-love may overpower conscience and so spread itself at the expense of benevolence. We then get the coolly selfish man. Or benevolence may overpower conscience and exercise itself at the expense of reasonable prudence. This happens when a man neglects self-culture and all reasonable care for his health and happiness in order to work for the general welfare. Butler holds that both are wrong. We do not, indeed, blame the latter as much as the former as a rule. But we do blame him to some extent on calm reflection. We blame him less than the coolly selfish man, partly because his fault is an uncommon one, and partly because it may be beneficial to society to have some people who are too benevolent when there are so many people who are not benevolent enough. Butler does not mention this last reason; but I have no doubt that he would have accepted it, since he holds that the faulty behaviour of individuals is often overruled by Providence for the general good.

Again, particular impulses may be too strong for self-love or for benevolence, or for both. *E.g.*, revenge often leads people to actions which are inconsistent with both benevolence and self-love, and ill-regulated sympathy may have the same effect. We then get the man who gives excessively to undeserving cases that happen to move his emotions, and who equally violates prudence by the extent of his gifts and benevolence by his neglect of more deserving and less spectacular cases. Butler makes the profoundly

true remark that there is far too little self-love in the world ; what we want is not *less self-love* but *more benevolence*. Self-love is continually overcome by particular impulses like pride, envy, anger, etc., and this is disastrous both to the happiness of the individual and to the welfare of society at large. Self-love is not indeed an adequate principle of action. But it is at least rational and coherent as far as it goes ; and, if people really acted on it consistently, taking fairly into account the pleasures of sympathy and gratitude, and weighing them against those of pride, anger, and lust, their external actions would not differ greatly from those which benevolence would dictate. This seems to me to be perfectly true. Those actions which are most disastrous to others are nearly always such as no person who was rationally aiming at securing for himself the maximum amount of happiness in the long run would dream of performing. We have an almost perfect example of Butler's contention in the action of France towards Germany since the war. It has been admirably calculated to produce the maximum inconvenience to both parties, and, if the French had acted simply from enlightened self-interest instead of malice and blind fear, they and all other nations would now be far better off.

The ideal human nature, then, consists of particular impulses duly subordinated to self-love and benevolence, and of these general principles subordinated in turn to the supreme principle of conscience. This seems to me to be perfectly correct so far as it goes ; and I shall now consider a little more in detail each of these constituents of human nature.

(1) *Particular Impulses*.—Butler's first task is to show that these cannot be reduced to self-love, as many people have thought before and since his time. It is easy to see that he is right. The object of self-love is our own maximum happiness over the whole course of our lives. The object of hunger is food ; the object of revenge is to give pain to some person who we think has injured us ; the object of sympathy is to give another man pleasure. Each of these particular impulses has its particular object, whilst self-love has a general object, viz. our own maximum happiness. Again, these particular impulses often conflict with self-love, and this is equally true of those which we are inclined to praise and those which we are inclined to condemn. Nor is this simply a question of intellectual error as to what will make us happy. A man under the influence of a strong

particular impulse, such as rage or parental affection, will often do things which he knows at the time to be imprudent.

In a footnote Butler takes as an example Hobbes's definition of pity as "fear felt for ourselves at the sight of another's distress." His refutation is so short and so annihilating that I shall give the substance of it as a model of philosophic reasoning. He points out (a) that on this definition a sympathetic man is *ipso facto* a man who is nervous about his own safety, and the more sympathetic he is the more cowardly he must be. This is obviously contrary to fact. (b) We admire people for being sympathetic to distress; we do not have the least tendency to admire people for being nervously anxious about their own future. If Hobbes were right, admiration for sympathy would be admiration for timidity. (c) Hobbes mentions the obvious fact that we specially tend to sympathise with the troubles of our friends, and he tries to account for this. But on Hobbes's definition this would mean that we feel particularly nervous for ourselves when we see a friend in distress. Now, in the first place, it may be doubted whether we do feel any more nervous for ourselves when we see a friend in distress than when we see a stranger in the same state. On the other hand, it is quite certain that we do feel more sympathy for the distress of a friend than for that of a stranger. Hence it is impossible that sympathy can be what Hobbes says it is. Butler himself holds that when we see a man in distress our state of mind may be a mixture of three states. One is genuine sympathy, *i.e.*, a direct impulse to relieve his pain. Another is thankfulness at the contrast between our good fortune and his ill-luck. A third is the feeling of anxiety about our own future described by Hobbes. These three may be present in various proportions, and some of them may be wholly absent in particular cases. But it is only the first that any plain man means by "sympathy" or "pity." Butler makes a very true observation about this theory of Hobbes's. He says that it is the sort of mistake which no one but a philosopher would make. Hobbes has a general philosophic theory that all action is necessarily selfish, and so he has to force sympathy, which is an apparent exception, into accord with his theory. He thus comes into open conflict with common sense. But, although common sense here happens to be right and the philosopher to be wrong, I should say that this is no reason to prefer common sense to philosophy. Common sense would *feel* that Hobbes was wrong; but it would be quite unable to

say *why* he was wrong. It would have to content itself with calling him names. The only cure for bad philosophy is better philosophy; a mere return to common sense is no remedy.

We can now leave Hobbes and return to the general question of the relation of our particular impulses to self-love. Why does it seem plausible to reduce particular impulses, like hunger, and revenge, and sympathy, to self-love? The plausibility arises, as Butler points out, from two confusions—(i.) We confuse the ownership of an impulse with its object. All our impulses, no matter what their objects may be, are *ours*. They all belong to the self. This is as true of sympathy, which is directed to others, as it is of hunger, which is directed to modifying a state of ourselves. (ii.) Again, the satisfaction of any impulse is *my* satisfaction. I get the pleasure of satisfied impulse equally whether the impulse which I indulge is covetousness, or malice, or pity. So it is true that all impulses *belong to* the self, and that the carrying out of any impulse as such *gives pleasure to* the self. But it is not true that all impulses have states of the self as their objects, and it is not true that any of them aims at the general happiness of the self. Neither sympathy nor malice is directed to producing the happiness of the self who owns the impulse. One is directed to producing happiness in another person, and the other is directed to producing misery in another person. Thus there is no natural contrariety between any impulse and self-love. The satisfaction of any impulse as such gives me pleasure, and this is a factor in the total happiness of myself at which self-love aims. And self-love can only gain its ends by allowing the various special impulses to pass into action. On the other hand, no impulse can be identified with self-love. The relation of particular impulses to self-love is that of means to end.

All this is true and very important. But to make it perfectly satisfactory I think it is necessary to draw some distinctions which Butler does not. (i.) We must distinguish between those pleasures which consist in the fulfilment of impulses and those which do not. Certain sensations are intrinsically pleasant, *e.g.*, the smell of violets or the taste of sugar. Others are intrinsically unpleasant, *e.g.*, a burn. We must therefore distinguish intrinsic pleasures and pains, and the pleasures and pains of satisfied or frustrated impulse. All fulfilment of impulse is pleasant for the moment at least, and all prolonged frustration of impulse is unpleasant. This kind of pleasure and pain is quite independent of the object of the impulse. Now these two kinds of pleasure or pain

can be combined in various ways. Suppose I am hungry and eat some specially nice food. I have then both the intrinsically pleasant taste and also the pleasure of satisfying my hunger. A shipwrecked sailor who found some putrid meat or who dined off the cabin-boy would enjoy the pleasure of satisfying his hunger accompanied by intrinsically unpleasant sensations of taste. A *bon-vivant* towards the end of a long dinner might get an intrinsically pleasant sensation of taste from his savoury although he was no longer hungry, and so did not get the pleasures of satisfying his hunger.

(ii.) I think we must distinguish between the aim of an impulse, its exciting cause, its fulfilment or frustration, and the collateral effects of satisfying it. Butler lumps together hunger and sympathy, and says that the object of one is food, and of the other the distresses of our fellow-men. Now, in the first place, the word "hunger" is ambiguous. It may mean certain organic sensations due to lack of food. Or it may mean an impulse to eat which arises from these. Butler evidently uses the word in the latter sense. Again, it does not seem to me to be accurate to say that the object of hunger is food. The object of a butcher, going to market, is also food; but he may not be hungry. The object, or, as I should prefer to say, the *aim*, of hunger is *to eat food*. The aim of the butcher is to buy it cheap and sell it dear. In fact the aim of an impulse is never, strictly speaking, a *thing* or *person*; it is always to change or preserve some state of a thing or person. So much for the aim of an impulse. Now, as we eat, the impulse of hunger is gradually satisfied, and this is pleasant. If we are continually prevented from eating when we are hungry, this continued frustration is unpleasant. Lastly, the process of satisfying our hunger has the collateral effect of producing sensations of taste which may be intrinsically pleasant or unpleasant according to the nature of the food and the tastes of the eater. I would say then that the exciting cause of the impulse of hunger is certain organic sensations; that its aim is the eating of food; that its collateral effects are sensations of taste; and that it is accompanied by satisfaction or dissatisfaction according to whether we get enough food or are unable to get it. Now let us consider pity from the same points of view. The exciting cause is the sight of another person, particularly a friend, in distress. The aim of it is to relieve the distress. The collateral effects of its exercise are the gradual relief of the distress, feelings of gratitude in the sufferer's mind, and so on. Lastly, in so far as we are able to exercise the impulse

there is a pleasant feeling of satisfaction in our minds, and in so far as we are prevented from doing so there is an unpleasant feeling of frustration.

Now, in considering the relations between the various particular impulses and the general principles of self-love and benevolence, it is very important to keep all these points in mind. Butler says that some particular impulses are more closely connected with self-love and others with benevolence. He gives examples, but he does not carry the analysis further. We can now state the whole case much more fully and clearly. (a) Some impulses have their exciting causes in the agent, some in inanimate objects, and some in other persons. Hunger is excited by one's own organic sensations; covetousness may be excited by a jewel or a picture; pity is excited by another man's distress. (b) Some impulses aim at producing results within the agent himself; some aim at producing results in other men; and some aim at producing changes in inanimate objects. For instance, hunger aims at one's own eating; pity aims at the relief of another's distress; blind rage may aim at smashing plates and furniture. (c) The collateral effects of satisfying an impulse may be in the agent, or in others, or in both. Probably there are always collateral effects in the agent, and nearly always in other men. But sometimes the collateral effects in the agent are much the more important, and sometimes those produced in other men predominate. The collateral effects of satisfying hunger are, under ordinary circumstances, almost wholly confined to the agent. The collateral effects of the exercise of pity are mostly in the sufferer and the spectators, though there are always some in the agent. The collateral effects of ambition may be divided pretty equally between self and others. Lastly, (d) the pleasure of satisfaction and the pains of frustration are naturally always confined to the agent.

We can now see that those particular impulses which aim at producing or maintaining states of the agent himself, and those whose collateral effects are mainly confined to the agent, will be of most interest to self-love. Hunger is a typical example. Those impulses which aim at producing or altering or maintaining states in other men, and whose collateral effects are mainly confined to others, will be of most interest to benevolence. Sympathy and resentment are typical examples. There will be some impulses which almost equally concern self-love and benevolence. For it may be that they aim at producing a state in others, but that their

collateral effects are mainly in the agent, or conversely. Anger against those whom we cannot hurt is aimed at them, but mainly affects ourselves. The question where the exciting cause of the impulse is situated is not of much importance for our present purpose, though it is probably true that most impulses whose exciting causes are within the agent also aim at producing changes in his own state. The pleasures of satisfaction and the pains of frustration concern self-love alone since they can only be felt by the agent.

It is important to notice that actions which were originally done from particular impulses may come to be done from self-love or from benevolence. As babies we eat and drink simply because we are hungry or thirsty. But in course of time we find that the satisfaction of hunger and thirst is pleasant, and also that the collateral sensations of eating certain foods and drinking certain wines are intrinsically pleasant. Self-love may then induce us to take a great deal of exercise so as to make ourselves thoroughly hungry and thirsty, and may then make us go to a restaurant and choose just those dishes and wines which we know will excite intrinsically pleasant sensations as well as giving us the agreeable experience of satisfying our hunger and thirst. Again, a boy may play cricket simply because he likes it; but when he grows older he may from benevolence devote his half-holidays to playing cricket with boy scouts, although he is no longer specially keen on the game, and although he could enjoy himself more in other ways.

It sounds to us odd when Butler says that ambition and hunger are just as disinterested as pity and malice. He is perfectly right, in his own sense of the word "disinterested," and it is a very important sense. It is true that neither ambition nor hunger aims at one's own happiness. One aims at power over others, the other aims at eating food. True, the satisfaction of either is *my* satisfaction; but so, too, is the satisfaction of the impulse of pity or of malice. If by "disinterested" you mean "not done with the motive of maximising one's own happiness in the long run," it is quite clear that hunger and ambition can only lead to disinterested actions. The appearance of paradox in Butler's statement is explained by the distinctions which we have drawn. It *is* true that ambition and hunger are more closely connected with self-love than are pity and malice. For they do aim at the production of states in ourselves, although they do not aim at our own general happiness, whereas pity

and malice aim at producing states in other men ; and the collateral effects of their satisfaction are also largely confined to others. Thus both Butler and common sense are here right, and the apparent conflict between them is removed by clearly stating certain distinctions which are liable to be overlooked.

(2) *Self-love and Benevolence.*—We can now deal in detail with the two general principles of self-love and benevolence. Butler seems to me to be clearer about the former than about the latter. I have assumed throughout that he regards benevolence as a general principle which leads us to maximise the happiness of humanity without regard to persons, just as he certainly regards self-love as a general principle leading us to maximise our own total happiness. I think that this is what he does mean. But he sometimes tends to drop benevolence as a general principle co-ordinate with self-love rather out of sight, and to talk of it as if it were just one of the particular impulses. Thus he says in the First Sermon that benevolence undoubtedly exists and is compatible with self-love, but the examples which he actually gives are particular impulses which aim at the benefit of some particular person, *e.g.*, paternal and filial affection. He says that, if you grant that paternal and filial affection exist, you must grant that benevolence exists. This is a mistake. He might as well say that, if you grant that hunger exists, you must grant that self-love exists. Really paternal affection is as much a particular impulse as hunger, and it can no more be identified with benevolence than hunger can be with self-love. I think that he makes such apparent mistakes partly because he is anxious to show that benevolence is no more contrary, as such, to self-love than is any of the particular impulses. He shows, *e.g.*, that to gratify the benevolent principle gives pleasure to the agent just as much as to gratify any particular impulse, such as hatred or hunger. It is true that excessive indulgence in benevolence may conflict with self-love, but so, as he points out, may excessive indulgence in any particular impulse such as thirst or anger. In fact benevolence is related to self-love in exactly the same way as any particular impulse is related to self-love. So far he is perfectly right. But this identity of relation seems sometimes to blind Butler to the intrinsic difference between benevolence, which is a general principle, and the particular impulses which aim at producing happiness in this or that man, *e.g.*, pity or paternal affection. I think that there is no doubt that there is a

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general principle of benevolence; and I think that Butler held it too, though he certainly does not always make this clear. The main business of benevolence is to control and organise those particular impulses which aim at producing changes in others or whose collateral effects are mainly in others. Thus it has to do with pity, resentment, paternal affection, etc. The main business of self-love is to control and organise those impulses which aim at producing states in oneself, or whose collateral effects are largely in oneself. From the point of view of self-love benevolence is simply one impulse among others, like hunger, resentment, etc. But it is equally true that, from the point of view of benevolence, self-love is simply one special impulse among others. The prudent person may need to check his benevolence toward mankind in general, just as he has to check blind anger or a tendency towards overeating. The benevolent person may need to check his excessive prudence, just as he has to check the special impulse to lose his temper.

There are, however, two respects in which self-love and benevolence seem to me to be not perfectly on a level. Conscience approves both of self-love and of benevolence in their proper degrees. But I think it is clear that conscience rates benevolence higher than self-love. It would hold that it is possible, but not easy, to have too much benevolence; but that you could quite easily have too much self-love, although in fact most people have too little. Again, from the purely psychological point of view, self-love and benevolence are not perfectly co-ordinate. The putting into action of any tendency, including benevolence, is as such pleasant to the agent and so ministers in its degree to self-love. But the putting into action of our active tendencies is not as such a source of happiness to others. Other people can only be affected by the collateral results of my gratification of my impulses. But I get a certain amount of pleasure from the mere fact that I am doing what I want to do, quite apart from any collateral pleasure and pain that may accrue to me as the result of my action. Thus no action of mine can be altogether hostile to self-love, although the collateral results of the action may be so unpleasant that self-love would not sanction the action. But the gratification of many impulses may be wholly hostile to benevolence. *E.g.*, if I lose my temper and blindly strike a man, self-love gets something out of the transaction, viz., the momentary feeling of satisfaction at fulfilling an impulse, even though the ultimate consequences may be so unpleasant to me that

cool self-love would have prevented the action. But benevolence gets nothing out of the transaction at all; it is wholly hostile to it.

As we have said, Butler holds that pure self-love and pure benevolence would lead to very much the same external actions, because the collateral results of most actions really make about as much for our own happiness as for that of others. In this connection he makes two profoundly true and important observations. (i.) He says that if you want to make yourself as happy as possible it is fatal to keep this motive constantly before you. The happiest people are those who are pretty fully occupied with some activity which interests them, which they feel to be honourable and useful, and which they perform with success. Such people have no time to worry about happiness or unhappiness, and so happiness is added to them unsought. The most wretched lives are led by men who have nothing to do but think about their own happiness and scheme for it. Happiness which is consciously sought always turns out to be disappointing, and the self-conscious egoist divides his time between wanting what he has not and not wanting what he has. (ii.) The second point which Butler makes is that the common opinion that there is an inevitable conflict between self-love and benevolence is a fallacy which rests on the common confusion between enjoyment and the means of enjoyment. If I have a certain sum of money, it is obvious that the more I spend on myself the less I shall have to spend on others, and conversely. It therefore looks at first sight as if self-love and benevolence must necessarily conflict. But, as Butler says, money and other kinds of property are not themselves enjoyment; they are only material objects which produce enjoyment by being used in certain ways. Now it is certain that both spending money on myself and spending it on others may give me happiness. If I already spend a good deal on myself it is quite likely that I shall gain more happiness by spending some of it on others than I shall lose by spending that much less on myself. This is certainly true, and the confusion between happiness and the means to happiness, which Butler here explains, is constantly made. The miser is the typical and exaggerated example of this mistake; but nearly everyone makes it to some extent.

I think there is only one point in Butler's theory of the substantial similarity of the conduct dictated by self-love and that dictated by benevolence which needs criticism. It assumes an isolated purely selfish man in a society of people

who are ruled by benevolence as well as self-love and who have organised their social life accordingly. In this case it certainly would pay this individual to act very much as the principle of benevolence would dictate. It is not so clear that it would pay to act in this way in a community of men who were all themselves quite devoid of benevolence. All that we can say is, that everyone in such a society, if it could exist at all, would be extremely miserable; but whether one of them would be rendered less miserable by performing externally benevolent actions it is difficult to say. But if we suppose Butler to mean that, taking men as they are, and taking the institutions which such men have made for themselves, enlightened self-interest would dictate a course of conduct not very different from that which benevolence would dictate, he seems to be right.

This fact, of course, makes it always difficult to say how far any particular action has been due to benevolence and how far to self-love. What is certain is that both principles exist, and that very few actions are due to one without admixture of the other. Sometimes we can see pretty clearly which principle has predominated, but this is as far as it is safe to go. Exactly the same difficulty arises, as Butler points out, over self-love and the particular impulses. It is often impossible to say whether a certain course of action was due to enlightened self-love or to a particular impulse for power or money. All that we know for certain is that both principles exist and that they mix in all proportions. Often the onlookers can tell more accurately than the agent what principle of action was predominant, because they are less likely to be biassed.

(3) *Conscience*.—We now come to Butler's supreme principle of conscience. According to him this has two sides to it, a purely intellectual and an authoritative. In addition, I think we must say that it is an active principle, *i.e.*, that it really does cause, check, and modify actions. Intellectually it is a principle of reflexion. Its subject-matter is the actions, characters, and intentions of men. But it reflects on these from a particular point of view. We reflect on our actions when we merely recall them in memory and note that some turned out fortunately and others unfortunately. But we should not call such reflection an act of conscience, but merely an act of retrospection. The peculiarity of conscience is that it reflects on actions from the point of view of their rightness or wrongness. The very fact that we use words like "right," "wrong," "duty,"

etc., shows that there is an intellectual faculty within us which recognises these characteristics. Otherwise the words would be as meaningless to us as the words "black" and "white" to a blind man. We clearly distinguish between a right action and one which happened to turn out fortunately. And we clearly distinguish between a wrong action and one which happened to turn out badly. Again, we distinguish between mere unintentional hurt and deliberate injury. Conscience is indifferent to the former and condemns the latter. Finally, conscience recognises a certain appropriateness between wrongdoing and pain and between rightdoing and happiness. *I.e.*, it recognises the notion of merit or desert. If we see a man being hurt we judge the situation quite differently according to whether we think that he is innocent or that he is being punished for some wrong act. So we may say that conscience on its intellectual side is a faculty which reflects on actions, intentions, and characters, with a special view to their goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness. And it further judges that pain is appropriate to wrongdoing, and happiness to rightdoing. Lastly, we must add that it does not judge of actions or intentions in isolation, but judges them in comparison with the ideal nature of the agent. The ideal nature of a child or a lunatic is different from that of a full-grown sane man, and so conscience takes a different view of their actions. Butler apparently assumes that, although the ideal nature of a child or a lunatic is different from that of a normal man, the ideal nature of all sane mature men is identical. No doubt we have to assume this in practice, but it seems hardly likely to be true in theory. After all it is hard to draw a perfectly sharp line between maturity and immaturity, or between sanity and insanity.

By saying that conscience has supreme authority, Butler means that we regard the pronouncements of conscience not simply as interesting statements of fact and not simply as reasons to be balanced against others, but as *conclusive* reasons for or against the actions about which it pronounces. The fact that conscience judges an action to be wrong is a motive for not doing it. So, too, is the fact that self-love pronounces it to be imprudent, or that benevolence pronounces it to be likely to diminish the general happiness. Thus far conscience, self-love, and benevolence are all on a level. They are all capable of inducing us to act or to refrain from acting. The difference lies in their respective authority, *i.e.*, in the relative strength which they *ought* to

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have and which they *would* have in an ideal human being. If self-love and benevolence conflict over some proposed course of action there is nothing in the nature of either which gives it authority over the other. Sometimes it will be right for self-love to give way to benevolence, and sometimes it will be right for benevolence to give way to self-love. But conscience is not in this position. In an ideal man conscience would not simply take turns with self-love and benevolence. If self-love or benevolence conflict with conscience it is always they, and never it, which should give way; and if they conflict with each other it is conscience, and it alone, which has the right to decide between them. In any actual man conscience is often overpowered by self-love or benevolence, just as they are often overpowered by particular impulses. But we recognise the *moral right* of conscience to be supreme even when we find that it lacks the necessary *psychological power*.

I do not think that Butler means to say that every trivial detail of our lives must be solemnly debated before the tribunal of conscience. Just as the man whose aim is to maximise his own happiness best secures that end by not constantly thinking about it, so I should say that the man who wants always to act conscientiously will often do best by not making this his explicit motive. So long as our actions are those which conscience would approve, if we carefully considered the question, the supremacy of conscience is preserved, even though we have acted from an immediate impulse or from self-love or from benevolence. For instance, conscience approves of a due measure of parental affection; but it is much better for this affection to be felt spontaneously than for it to be imposed on us as a duty by conscience. In fact the main function of conscience is regulative. The materials both of good and evil are supplied by particular impulses. These are organised in the first place by self-love and benevolence, and these in turn are regulated and co-ordinated by conscience. In a well-bred and well-trained man a great deal of this organisation has become habitual, and he does the right things without having to think whether or why they are right in ninety-nine cases out of an hundred. It is only in the hundredth specially perplexing or specially alluring situation that an explicit appeal to conscience needs to be made.

It remains to say something about two rather curious and difficult points in Butler's theory. (1) Although he

constantly asserts the supremacy of conscience, yet there are one or two passages in which he seems to make self-love co-ordinate with it. In one place he actually says that no action is consistent with human nature if it violates *either* reasonable self-love *or* conscience. In another famous passage he seems to admit that if we reflect coolly we can justify no course of action which will be contrary to our happiness. The former passage I cannot explain away; it seems to me to be simply an inconsistency. But the latter passage occurs in the course of an argument in which he is trying to prove to an objector that there is no real conflict between conscience and enlightened self-love. I think it is clear from the context that he is not here asserting his own view, but is simply making a hypothetical concession to an imaginary opponent. He goes on to argue thus. Even if you grant that it can never be right to go against your own greatest happiness, yet you ought to obey conscience in cases of apparent conflict between it and self-love. For it is very difficult to tell what really will make for your own greatest happiness in the long run even in this life, and there is always the possibility that there is another life after this. On the other hand, the dictates of conscience are often quite clear. Thus we can be far more certain about what is right than about what is to our own ultimate interest; and therefore, in an apparent conflict between the two, self-love should give way, even though no action were right which in fact conflicts with our ultimate interests.

Thus Butler would probably reply that the question as to whether conscience is superior to self-love or co-ordinate with it is merely academic. I do not think this can be accepted. We may grant all that Butler says about the extreme uncertainty as to what is to our own ultimate interests. But, on the other hand, the deliveries of conscience are by no means so certain and ambiguous in most cases as he makes out. Thus there might often be a very real practical problem if it be granted that self-love is a principle of co-ordinate authority with conscience.

(2) The other doubtful point is Butler's view about the value of happiness. In one place he says that it is manifest that nothing can be of consequence to mankind or to any creature but happiness. And he goes on to assert that all common virtues and vices can be traced up to benevolence and the lack of it. Finally, in the same sermon, he says that benevolence seems in the strictest sense to include all that is good and worthy. Now, if these statements be accepted at

their face value, Butler was a Utilitarian, *i.e.*, he thought that happiness is the only good and that virtue consists in promoting happiness. But it is to be noticed that these remarks all appear in the sermon on the *Love of our Neighbour*, where he is specially concerned to recommend benevolence to people who were badly lacking in it. And even here he adds a footnote, in which he distinctly and positively says that there are certain actions and dispositions which are approved, altogether apart from their probable effect on general happiness. He asserts this still more strongly in the *Dissertation on Virtue*, which is a later and more formal work. So I think it is clear that his considered opinion is against Utilitarianism. But in both works he seems to take the very curious view that God may be a Utilitarian, though this is no excuse for our being so. It may be that God's sole motive is to maximise the total amount of happiness in the universe. But, even if this be the only obligation that he is under, he has made us in such a way that we approve of other tendencies beside benevolence, *e.g.*, justice and truth-telling. And he has provided us with the faculty of conscience, which tells that it is our duty to act in accordance with these principles, no matter whether this seems to us likely to increase the general happiness or not. God may have given us this direct approval of truth-telling and justice because he saw that it would in fact make for the greatest happiness on the whole if we acted justly and told the truth regardless of consequences to ourselves and others. But that is his business, not ours. Our business is to act in accordance with our consciences, and only to promote the general happiness by such means as conscience approves, even though we may think that we could promote it still more in certain cases by lying or partiality. If God does overrule our conscientious actions in such a way that they do make for the greatest possible happiness even when they seem to us unlikely to have that effect, so much the better. It makes no difference to our duty either way.

I think we may conclude by saying that, although there are certain minor inconsistencies, partly verbal and partly real, in Butler's writings, and although there remains much work to be done in ethics which he did not attempt, yet his researches form the necessary basis of any system of moral philosophy which can claim to do justice to the facts of experience.

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