

may be as prophetic and anticipatory of truth as anything else we have, and some of them more so than others, cannot possibly be denied. But what hope is there of squaring and settling opinions unless Absolutism will hold parley on this common ground; and will admit that all philosophies are hypotheses, to which all our faculties, emotional as well as logical, help us, and the truest of which will at the final integration of things be found in possession of the men whose faculties on the whole had the best divining power?

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### CAN A MAN SIN AGAINST KNOWLEDGE?

By F. H. BRADLEY.

There is an old paradox which at some time we must all have encountered. That no one sins willingly, and that vice is ignorance, must at some time have been offered to us all as gospel. And most of us, I presume, have long ago concluded that a truth has here been pressed into a falsehood. We naturally reflect that, as for the artist beauty rules the universe and is the dominant reality, so for the reasoning philosopher reason is the king and master both of the world and of the soul. And we have persuaded ourselves that such prepossessions lead to conflict with fact. For not only may the ruler at times be absent, but even if he is present, yet appetite defies him, and, with no cloak of ignorance, sins wilfully and knowingly in the master's sight.

I cannot think that our persuasion is false. For me, too, the old gospel has joined the museum of one-sided growths, and, with "the practical reason," has been placed on the shelf of interesting illusions. I would not seek to revive them; but, on the contrary, my object is to remove a hindrance to their well-earned repose. There is a psychological doubt which remains unsatisfied, and serves as the foundation for a serious mistake. Our experiences seem discrepant. For myself, and in my own mind, I am able to verify the presence of wrong-doing in the face of and despite the voice of conscience. I feel sure of this fact, but others are not certain, while others again within their experience are certain of the opposite. They assure me that never until conscience has slumbered, never until for the moment they have forgotten the quality of their act, are they able to give way to an immoral impulse.

It is not likely that any of us are quite mistaken about the fact. When an observer tells us that with him bad action never co-exists with present knowledge, that an actual consciousness of its immorality is incompatible with the victory of any desire, we may be sure that he is not wholly in error. He has observed a fact, but observed it wrongly; and our task is to show that his

mistake has come from a view that is partial, and an interpretation that is erroneous.

Perhaps the most convenient way of pointing out the root of the error will be for me to invent a defence, which will show what I think is the source of delusion. And if I dwell upon truths which we all understand, I may excuse myself by observing that, if all of us understand them, nearly all of us make mistakes because we disregard them.

What defence can we find for the doctrine that knowledge excludes wrong action? We are not forced to invoke the obsolete primacy of the "practical reason": we may move to the ground of a saner psychology and may rest upon fact. For we may urge, 'No one knows an act to be wrong unless he has an idea of the wrongness. But if this be admitted, observe what follows: the *idea* of wrong implies the *feeling* of wrong. And this consequence is certain; for our ideas, we know, are representative signs, and to perceive the signification without the presence of the whole sign is quite impossible. Thus when you have in your mind the idea of a horse or a cow or a bad action, you possess a present image, part of which you neglect, and part of which you take as your meaning, and use as the idea of something not present but represented. But now what is it that could represent a horse but something present in the form of a horse-image? And what is it again that could be the idea of a moral or of an immoral act, unless it were something present to the mind in one of these qualities? But to be present to the mind as moral or immoral implies a feeling of right or wrong. What represents, and is used as the idea of the act, must therefore imply a corresponding emotional element. If so, however, the conclusion seems proved; for since what represents right or wrong is emotional, it therefore, because it is emotional, will work. It will not indeed work as the idea of something else, but it will work as the actual present state. It will be the badness that is *felt*, and not the badness that is *thought*, which will have power to move us. In other words, it is the whole sign that is active, and not the mere signification. But this will make no difference. Since you cannot represent the wrong that is signified without the present image which is felt as wrong, the knowledge of vice must thus be *per accidens* a dislike to viciousness, and this felt aversion, psychologically implied in all ideas of immorality, will fetter the will, until, with the knowledge, the feeling disappears.

'And we may support this defence by an appeal to the general theory of motives. A motive, if that means the *object* of our desire or aversion, must be the idea of something pleasant or painful. And thus (I have argued in my *Ethical Studies*), if the motive is the end and is so an idea, then what moves is never the motive as such. But on the other hand the motive will move *per accidens*. For an idea implies a representative state of mind, and that state of mind must have present existence as a psychical phenomenon.

The state which represents something pleasant or painful must furthermore itself *be* pleasant or painful. The idea will thus indirectly imply a feeling, and in this indirect way a motive will move.

'And by this we may not only support our paradox, but may prop up, besides, another doctrine. To suppose that what promises to be most pleasant must always move us, we know is a mistake, because the promised is an idea, while the mover is feeling. But, since the future prospect of the most pleasant could not be represented to us in idea, unless there were a feeling which served as the sign, hence, through this feeling and *per accidens*, the promise will move, and, *per accidens* again, the promise of the most pleasant will move us the most.'

Such is the defence which we may place in the mouth of our failing paradox, and this defence, though erroneous, still is based on a solid foundation. The reader may refuse to follow us through these psychological subtleties, but I am sure that any one who is not at home in them is threatened by errors from every side.

The defence we have put forward amounts to this : an idea not only represents something else beside itself, but is in itself an existing phenomenon, and in this capacity does psychological work. And hence the idea of immorality will be felt as an actual painful fact, and so will repel ; while, again, the idea of the greatest pleasure will be felt as most pleasant, and so must attract.

The mistake that is made here is tolerably simple. It is true that the idea of a pleasure or a wrong act must imply a feeling, and that this feeling will do *some* work. But it is not true that the feeling need determine the will to avoid or pursue the object of the idea. This is perfectly obvious, and our experience of the contest of discrepant impulses puts it beyond doubt. What is felt pleasant or painful will determine us or not, according as it stands to our whole state of desire. We need ask no hard questions about the nature of desire, but may state the matter thus. Admitting that pleasure and pain are what move us, it is still not mere pleasure nor again mere pain that determines the movement. It is the greatest felt pleasure, or the balance of pleasure or pain, that will succeed. And hence obviously, when we ask if a feeling will *work*, the question is a question of that feeling's intensity, and a question of its *comparative* intensity.

We shall agree, I hope, that the above is obvious ; but it gives us a key to the puzzle before us. When an observer maintains that he cannot act against a wakeful conscience, what happens in his mind, I think, is this. He has fixed his attention upon the wrongful quality of the act, and that fixing of the attention has important results. In the first place it is exclusive ; that is, it keeps out *other* ideas, and so removes the conflicting influence of *their* feelings. In the second place (I do not ask how these two functions are connected) the attention strengthens ; that is,

through attention the idea becomes clearer, and the images and feelings involved in that idea become also stronger; so that to resist such an isolated and heightened prompting is now impossible. Hence, if our observer were to say, 'When I realise with vividness the immorality of my act, I cannot, while I do so, go on to commit it,' I think that his statement would be quite correct. It would be in accordance both with sound psychology and with the evidence of fact.

But such a modified statement would fail to carry the required conclusion. It would not show that, when my conscience is aroused, I am unable then to oppose it and defeat it. For, in the first place, when we have before us the idea of a bad act, our attention need not be concentrated upon this one element of our whole state of mind. On the contrary, we may try to observe indifferently all the discordant factors of our complex condition; and, if we do this, our idea of the immorality of the act will not gain any *relative* increase of strength. And again, and in the second place, there is a very great difference between ideas. Some are highly *symbolic*, and in this case their effect on the imagination and feelings is comparatively weak.

I will try to explain this second point. Suppose, for example, I have thought of something pleasant, and then am asked to think of something *twice* as pleasant. I am able to perform this in more ways than one. I may retain the pleasant image which I already have, and which has furnished me with my idea of the represented pleasure; I may increase the pleasantness of that pleasant image, and may use this increase as a sign of something that is twice as pleasant. In this case we might roughly and inaccurately say that what *represents* twice the pleasure is itself actually felt to be doubly pleasant. But I may take another course: I need not try to double my pleasant image, but may qualify it from outside by another and a foreign image of quantity. That is, I may call up an image of something *not* pleasant, which is increased twofold, and I may use this as a sign to stand for *twice*; and adding this from the outside to my idea of something pleasant, I may so indirectly acquire the idea of what is doubly pleasant. In this case I do not say that the effect on the feelings and on the imagination will vanish wholly, but I am sure we shall agree that it will be much diminished.

The point is so important that I perhaps may be allowed another illustration. I have the image of a horse before my mind, and I want to think of a hundred horses. Now, to do this, I need not try to have before me a hundred horse-images, but may apply the idea of a hundred from elsewhere. No doubt, this idea of a hundred times must rest upon *some* present image, but there is no sort of reason why it should rest on the obscure image of a hundred horses. In the same way, if I desire to think of a horse one hundred times as large as the first, I need not struggle to magnify my present horse-image. I may employ some *other*

obscure image, take from that the idea of hundredfoldness, and employ this to modify my idea of a horse.

And we may strengthen our position by a familiar experience. We all know that as a rule it is impossible to recall either vivid pleasures or vivid pains. But it would be wrong to say that I have not the knowledge that my pleasure or my pain was very great. I do know this ; but I know it discursively and by the intellectual addition of the idea of intensity to my idea of the feeling. And hence the effect on the imagination and emotions may be very weak ; it may serve in temptation but to sour the pleasure without preventing the sin. In a corrupted state, where the passions are enfeebled and where cruel experience has opened the eyes without changing the heart, we may find the condition described by Lamb, " the sin and the suffering co-instantaneous, or the latter forerunning the former, remorse preceding action ".

The result of this is that the idea of a greater pleasure need not in itself be felt as more pleasant, nor the idea of a greater pain as more painful. The increase of feeling, if it takes place at all, need take place in no proportion to the increase thought of. This again must be true of the idea of wrong-doing. I may qualify my idea of a certain act by the addition of immorality, but I may transfer that addition from another and wholly separate image. In this case my knowledge that an act is bad does not rest on an image of the act as bad. It consists primarily in the intellectual use of a symbol, and the secondary effect on the imagination and the feelings may be almost inappreciable.

Our ethical paradox, if true at all, will be true only of a mind which is confined to intuition ; and such a mind is not known to exist, except at an *early* stage of evolution. But any mind which can abstract and reflect and reason discursively will be able to think of an act as being wrong, and yet the feeling of that act's wrongness may not pass beyond an ineffective minimum. It is only where the attention is concentrated upon the quality of the act, and even then it is only where the act in its wrongful quality is present as a vivid imagination, that the conscience will be irresistible. It is not knowledge, it is a relative degree of feeling excited by a certain kind of knowledge, that coerces the appetite.

This, I think, will furnish us with a partial justification of our paradox, and it also may serve as its final refutation.