
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Christian Theology and Moral Principles.

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I think I need not dwell at length on the confusion into which the theory and practice of ethics have been plunged by the bewildering rapidity of change in our modern world. The other day, before the British Association, Sir Josiah Stamp was calling attention, in the now usual manner, to the need for a complete revision of our ethical principles and systems. But he showed a deeper insight into the true problem when he declared that, if we are to continue to live with change, we must learn to master it. It is obvious that we cannot master change merely by making changes. We must learn both to understand its causes and to control its direction by fixed principles. And the moment we make any such attempt in the sphere of ethics, we find ourselves confronted by the question: Are there any fixed principles in ethics which can be our guide in understanding and controlling change? Or is the notion of moral obligation, the 'ought' which we apply to human conduct, merely a convenient way of getting most people to do what some people consider for the present to be advantageous? It is my purpose in this article to state what I take to be the fundamental postulates of morality, to indicate some of the problems to which they give rise, and to suggest that in the Christian religion lies the principle of their solution.

I will begin by affirming dogmatically what I hold to be the main fixed postulates of morality; and I will then discuss each of them in turn.

(1) Man has a capacity for genuinely choosing between right and wrong. This proposition raises the problem of free-will.

(2) Man has some genuine knowledge of right and wrong. This proposition raises the problem of the nature and validity of conscience as a cognitive faculty.

(3) Right action is essentially both the expression of a good will and the means to a good end. This proposition leads us to consider the controversy between the doctrine of right for right's sake, and the various forms of utilitarianism.

(1) *Free-will.*

It would not be relevant to our purpose to embark on any general discussion. All I desire to do is to make one or two remarks on free-will as a moral postulate, which are specially relevant in view of the revival of the Pelagian controversy among theologians. Granted that the freedom of the will is in some sense a postulate of morality, does it follow that a man can always choose to fulfil his moral obligations? Kant answered this question in the affirmative. 'I ought,' he declared, 'therefore I can.' But this inference, though it evidently contains a truth, does not seem to be justified as it stands. It is best criticised by the consideration of a concrete case. If A. owes B. £100 and the debt is due, A. ought to pay; but it does not follow that he can. Moreover, the obligation remains unaffected whether or not it is A.'s fault that he cannot pay. If we suppose A. to be unaware of the debt, or that he honestly but erroneously refuses to acknowledge it, we may still say that he is under some obligation to pay, though not, I think, strictly that he *ought* to pay. On the other hand, the obligation vanishes altogether if we suppose A. to be a person *incapable* of appreciating its nature and of acting accordingly. We should conclude then that, although the existence of a moral obligation does not imply the subject's *power* to fulfil it, it does imply his general *capacity* to recognize such obligation and to act in accordance therewith. To say that a man *is capable* of a certain action means that under certain possible conditions he *would be able* to do it.

This distinction between power and capacity (ἐξουσία and δύναμις) is of the utmost importance for the understanding of free-will as a moral postulate and of its relation to Christian theology. The whole doctrine of God's grace in Christ depends on the recognition of the fact that from a certain point of view the whole of mankind is under a moral obligation which it lacks power to fulfil. To deny this is Pelagianism. Yet to assert that by the Fall man has lost the capacity to recognize and choose to do his duty is a still graver error. It is to imply that the mass of mankind is past redemption. It is to invalidate the appeal of the gospel to the natural conscience. It is to declare that man has forfeited all that really raises his proper nature above the brute's. The manner and degree in which the special grace of God in Christ is necessary actually to *enable* man to see and choose the right is a legitimate matter of debate among Christian theologians. But the answer to this question does not affect the essential postulate of morality in regard to free-will, so long as the theologian does not deny man's inherent and natural *capacity* to do both.

2. *Conscience as a Cognitive Faculty.*

The best definition of conscience is still that given by St. Thomas Aquinas: 'the mind of man passing moral judgments.' The important point to notice is that the definition emphasizes the cognitive or intellectual aspect of conscience. If I judge that I certainly ought to do something, it is implied that I know that this thing, which I ought to do, is really right. This assertion may sound like a platitude. But false views of conscience have gained currency, which obscure its truth.

(*a*) It is sometimes supposed that, because morality is concerned with conduct, conscience gives a merely practical knowledge which has nothing to do with theoretic or intellectual truth. Such a statement may possibly be justified by arbitrary definition of the terms used; but none the less it is thoroughly misleading. There *is* such a thing as genuinely practical knowledge. It concerns the adaptation of means to ends; and it consists in knowing *how* to do things. A man, we say, knows how to ride a bicycle or lay bricks or talk German. Some kinds of practical knowledge are of a more instinctive sort, while others demand more learning and methodical direction of effort. But the sole and sufficient proof of practical knowledge is the ability to do a particular thing. It need not express itself in any judgments which are true or false. Now evidently, in order to be able to do right, I must have some practical knowledge. It is no use my knowing that I ought to act unselfishly, if I have no notion how to do so. We have all of us suffered from pulpit-exhortations, which are about as helpful as telling a poor man to be rich. But our natural irritation in such cases only indicates the more clearly that the knowledge that we ought to be unselfish is quite distinct from the knowledge how to act unselfishly. The latter is practical knowledge. The former is strictly cognitive, or, if you will, theoretic and intellectual. It expresses itself in a judgment of conscience which is either true or false. True, all judgments of conscience, in so far as they refer to conduct, are judgments about practice; but knowledge about practice is not necessarily practical knowledge. To know that it is right to speak the truth is as strictly a cognition as to know that the sun is shining in the sky.

(*b*) Another view of conscience which is erroneous because it ignores its cognitive aspect is that which supposes it to consist simply in a specific form of feeling. The specific feeling of moral approval or disapproval, as Hutcheson and Shaftesbury showed in the eighteenth century, is certainly one element in what we call a conscientious conviction. But it does not follow that conscience essentially consists in such a feeling and nothing more. If that were so, as Butler pointed out against Shaftesbury, we should be able to find no ground whatever for the authority of conscience. If conscience is only a specific feeling, to say 'I judge this action to be wrong' means no more than 'it excites in me a feeling of disapproval.' And if you say that it excites no such feeling in you, there is an end of the matter. There is no sense in asking which of us is right. *De gustibus, non disputandum.*

Moreover, if we reflect we can easily distinguish between an element of rational cognitive judgment and an element of moral feeling within our consciences. Suppose as a boy I have been brought up to think that all playing of cards for money is wrong. The playing of cards for money will then always excite in me a feeling of moral disapproval. But when I grow up and reflect on the matter for myself, I may see no good ground for this general condemnation, and conclude that the practice is not really wrong at all. If so, it is probable that the feeling of disapproval will not at once disappear. In that case I shall feel to be wrong a practice which my reflective conscience judges not to be wrong. The possibility of such a conflict shows clearly the existence in conscience of a rational and cognitive element, which is quite distinct from mere feeling.

We conclude, therefore, that St. Thomas's conception of conscience is the true one. Conscience is genuinely cognitive; and it is really on that fact that its authority depends. It is a fallacy to assign questions of truth to the intellect divorced from conscience, and questions of right conduct to conscience divorced from intellect. There is a truth to be discerned by conscience, and equally there is a moral standard of honesty which the intellect is bound to observe. Conscience must be intellectual in seeking to judge what is really right, and the intellect must be conscientious in honestly pursuing truth without fear or favour.

But we have not yet mentioned what in the popular mind is the most persuasive argument in favour of the view that moral judgments are mere matters of taste, temperament, or training. How otherwise, it is asked, can we account for diversity and conflict in the content of such judgments?

The fact of such differences is of course indisputable. But what does it prove? There seem to be equally radical differences as to what is true in other fields of thought and study. Yet differences of opinion, for example, in scientific doctrine, are

not usually held to invalidate the whole claim of science to objective truth. I notice that a writer in *Time and Tide*[1] holds it to be proved that differences of moral judgment are due entirely to accidental differences of culture and environment, because among the Kwakiutl Indians and the people of Dobu moral standards prevail which appear to be quite fundamentally opposed to what our Western civilization regards as right or even sane. One wonders why Dobuan and Kwakiutl opinions on psychology or astronomy do not stir in the writer a similar scepticism as to the main doctrines on those subjects which are characteristic of our own culture.

Moreover, it is easy to exaggerate the diversity of moral judgments which actually exist. No doubt believers in a natural moral law have tended to exaggerate the agreement. But an opposite mistake is possible, and is very commonly made, partly perhaps because the word moral is mainly associated with matters of sex, and it is in sexual morality that the most difficult problems and acute differences of opinion are to be found. But, after all, sexual morality, however important, is only one department of ethics. And if we enlarge our views and survey the whole field, the amount of moral unanimity is hardly less striking than the extent of the divergence. At least the vast majority of sincere and well-informed persons would agree that Socrates was a better man than Alcibiades, Francis of Assisi than Cesare Borgia, or Abraham Lincoln than Napoleon I. We have even been assured by those competent to form a judgment that the character of Jesus as presented in the Gospels excites the honest admiration and reverence of multitudes of different races and nationalities, many of whom are far removed from membership of any Christian Church. Even the international politics of the twentieth century have borne impressive witness to the existence of an international conscience, however hypocritical may have been the acknowledgments of its demands. Hypocrisy itself after all is but the homage which vice pays to an acknowledged standard of virtue.

No doubt it may be urged, on the other hand, that Communists, for example, often denounce Christian morality. But, when they do so, it is usually the actual practice of Christians which they mean to attack rather than the moral ideal of Christianity. Popular assailants of Christianity seldom seem to have made up their minds whether they wish to condemn Christians for being too Christian, or for not being Christian enough; and their invective derives much of its psychological force from this logical defect. But on the whole it is difficult to avoid the impression that it is the failure of Christians, not their success, in living up to Christian standards which is the real ground of objection in most cases. Communists do not condemn our present social system, as Nietzscheans might, for failing to keep the masses under and to send the weak to the wall, or for providing something like an equal brotherhood of men. On the whole they condemn capitalist society for just those defects which most of its thoughtful upholders acknowledge to be defects, though the latter do not believe in Marx's remedy. And the Communist praise of self-sacrifice is an odd feature in an anti-Christian creed.

Again, it may be pointed out that a certain modern school of Protestant theology seems to deny by implication that there can be any important degree of consensus in the moral judgment of mankind. These theologians translate into the obscurer language of their own dialectic the ancient doctrine of the total depravity of reason and conscience in the natural man. It would seem that some of them at least recognize no validity in any moral standard save in that which God has by revelation communicated to Christian believers; and the very mark of the divine authority of this standard is that it contradicts all the moral valuations of the natural man. According to the logic of this doctrine, it would seem to follow that the truth, wisdom, and righteousness of Christianity are proved divine by the very fact that they appear to the best of unconverted men as falsehood, folly, and vice. Yet all the while the exponents of the doctrine are eminently respectable and praiseworthy characters in the eyes of their unregenerate fellow-men.

Perhaps the real reason for the apparently unreasonable demands made of conscience lies in a confusion, too seldom clearly recognized, between its authority in its strictly *cognitive* function, and in its *imperative*. In its cognitive aspect the judgment of conscience has an authority analogous to that of any other judgment which claims truth. In its imperative aspect it has an authority which is peculiarly its own. The cognitive aspect of the judgment is properly expressed in the form 'This action is right or wrong.' The imperative aspect is properly expressed in the form 'I ought, or ought not, to do this.' And the two forms of the judgment, though closely inter-related, are not quite identical in their proper meanings. We have seen that the whole authority of conscience depends on the fact that it expresses itself in genuinely cognitive judgments, taking the form, 'This action is right.' If such judgments were not genuinely cognitive,

[1] Geoffrey Gorer in *Time and Tide*, May 23, 1936.

and expressed no more than a specific feeling, the imperative judgment, cast in the form 'I ought,' would lose its moral authority altogether. Nevertheless, in so far as it is strictly cognitive, the conscientious judgment, 'This action is right,' is in principle as fallible as any other cognitive judgment of the mind. Its authority depends on its truth, and, since there is no infallibility, the authority is relative and conditional. It may subsequently be invalidated, if the judgment is found to have been erroneous. On the other hand the imperative judgment, 'I ought to do this,' though it rests upon the cognitive judgment, 'This action is right,' has an authority for my conduct which is unconditional and absolute. For its authority does not rest upon the *truth* of the cognitive judgment, but simply on the fact that the cognitive judgment has been made. Therefore no subsequent discovery of error in the cognitive judgment can invalidate the imperative. If I have followed the judgment of my conscience I have done what I ought, whether or not the judgment that the action was right was mistaken. No doubt, to say 'I ought to have done this' is equivalent to saying (in a certain sense) 'This action was right *for me*,' but it is not equivalent to saying 'This action was right.' In many cases it may be a particular man's duty to do what, objectively considered, is wrong. Even when the cognitive judgment of conscience is uncertain, so that a man can only say, 'On the whole I think this action is probably right,' it may nevertheless be certainly and absolutely his duty to do that action. It is because the peculiar absoluteness of the conscientious imperative is wrongly transferred to the conscientious cognition, that people suppose either that conscience is infallible, or that divergences of moral judgment invalidate its authority.

(3) *Right Action as Expression and Means.*

The most difficult problems of all come to light when we consider the question whether right action derives its moral value from being a means to a good end or rather from being an expression of a good will. Here we come to the central point at issue between the various forms of utilitarianism, very much alive among us to-day, and the doctrine of right for right's sake usually associated with the great name of Kant.

Let us briefly examine utilitarianism first. By utilitarianism I mean the doctrine that actions are to be judged right or wrong according as they are or are not means to a good end. If right action is right solely because it is a means to a good end, it is obvious that the value of the end must be something quite distinct and separable from the value of the right action, which is only a means to it. This point can be made clear by an illustration. If I say that the taking of medicine is valuable only as a means to bodily health, I speak truly; for healthy men have no need of medicine. If I say exercise is valuable only as a means to bodily health, I am talking nonsense; for healthy men certainly need exercise. Exercise no doubt *is* valuable as a means to health; but it is also valuable as an expression of it. The value of health is quite distinct and separable from the value of taking medicine; but it is not quite distinct and separable from the value of taking exercise.

This illustration is really by itself enough to show what a hopeless case strict utilitarianism in all its forms has to defend. The wanderings of the argument always lead back to the one unanswerable point that any kind of life or happiness which can be proposed as a worthy end for the effort of right action must possess something of the same essential value of which we recognize the expression in that action itself. And therefore the value of right action turns out to be not merely instrumental at all. A sphere of being in which the worth of heroism has ceased to exist, in the same way as the worth of medicine has ceased to exist for a perfectly healthy body, would certainly be no land fit for heroes to live in. And this truth is quite as fatal to certain conceptions of heaven as it is to certain other dreams of a Utopia upon earth.

The doctrine, however, that right action is a mere means to an end can be used, not to set before moral effort a goal really unworthy of it, but rather to justify, as means to an apparently worthy end in the future, conduct which would otherwise be altogether repugnant to the conscience. And such is the principal use of the doctrine in the modern world. The older utilitarians, like Bentham and Mill, were too much under the influence of liberal and Christian standards to suppose that acts of oppression and persecution could be instrumental to the realization of human happiness. It is far otherwise with the Communists, National Socialists, or Fascists, who are the modern exponents of utilitarianism. In the future society which is the goal of their efforts they are willing or even eager to admit that quite liberal, if not Christian, standards of conduct should prevail. Personal freedom will then be protected, and love and peace will reign in an equal brotherhood of men. But meanwhile realism leads them to the conclusion that in the present state of the world what is needed for the attainment of that golden age is a ruthless dictator-

ship of the proletariate, a sordid persecution of Jews, the organized misrepresentation of fact by controlled news-agencies, or an unrighteous war of aggression against a primitive people. All such acts, they argue, are really right in view of the end. For in the present all ordinary laws of justice and good faith are abrogated, when the future of State, race, or nation is at stake. In the future Utopia no doubt it will be otherwise. But Utopian standards are for Utopia only.

Here we have the really vicious form of the doctrine that the end justifies the means. Sober reason is not at a loss to point out its fallacies. The moral worth of any future state of society must depend upon the moral temper of its members. But the right moral temper cannot really be produced for the future by the encouragement of an immoral temper in the present. Men do not gather figs from thistles. Either the means which our Communists and Fascists take to promote their end are not really appropriate means at all. Or else the end which they seek has no moral worth, but consists in some 'brave new world,' where man, or some lower animal who retains by courtesy the human name, has abandoned morality altogether. Ends do indeed justify means. But the abrogation of moral standards is not really a means to a moral end. And if the end has no moral value, to talk of moral justification for any means to it is nonsense. So speaks sober reason. But the reason of those to whom it speaks is not sober: it is intoxicated with a false sense of power derived from the use of wireless, aeroplanes, high explosive, and poison-gas.

Perhaps, therefore, it is useless to raise further criticisms of their creed. But a final question must be asked. Granted that a Utopian life of genuinely moral worth is to characterize some future age of history, how and in what sense could its combined happiness and virtue justify as a means to itself the misery and vice of the ages which went before? The end, we may say, is intrinsically more important than the means, inasmuch as the end determines the means and not the means the end. But on what principle can the age latest in time be given this superior importance? Can the life of earlier generations of men be rightly or truly valued as strictly instrumental to the life of the later? Is not the suggestion repugnant to the conscience of us all?

We turn to the doctrine of right for right's sake. According to it it is a matter of indifference for the moral value of right action whether or not in fact it achieves any end that can itself be called good. The rightness of an action consists, not in its being a means to a good end, but in its being the expression of a good will. The right is related to the good as the means, not of its attainment, but of its expression. If, then, we say that moral goodness consists in the will to do what is right, it seems that the desire to do right must always be the good man's dominant motive. I ought to desire to do what is my duty, simply because it is my duty to do it. Such is at least one interpretation of Kant's teaching.

This doctrine is not as simple as it sounds. Its exponents sometimes forget that all purposive action consists partly in taking appropriate steps to bring about an intended result which does not follow automatically on the decision of the agent's will. We may say that, if A. owes B. £100, he ought to pay him regardless of results. But the actual reception of the money by B. is itself a result which A. may find it difficult or impossible to bring about. Kant would have said that if A. cannot pay B., then he has no duty to do so. And the assertion may, on Kantian principles, be explained by saying that in any case the only moral value of the act of payment lies in the fact that it is the expression of A.'s will to pay: and if the will is present, that is what matters from the point of view of morals. But this analysis of the situation is incomplete. At least it is A.'s duty not merely to will to pay, but also to take all available and legitimate means to do so; and the taking of such means must involve, in a case of difficulty, the use of such thought, prudence, and skill as A. has at his disposal. Unless, therefore, the expression 'the will to pay' is understood to include a good deal more than at first sight it seems to include, its presence is by no means enough to acquit A. of moral censure, if he fails to make the payment. Or again, we may say that it is our duty to tell the truth without recking of the consequences. But to tell the truth is to convey a really true impression of something to somebody, and perhaps to a large number of persons with various capacities for understanding. This is a task which may require the utmost care and skill, as well as mere honesty of purpose; and success in the end is a matter of degree.

It cannot therefore be maintained that the doctrine of right for right's sake simplifies morality by substituting obedience to plain rules of duty for any difficult devising of means to ends. It can do nothing of the kind. It may, however, teach us that, if it is our duty to attain a certain end, we ought not to regard the ulterior consequences which its attainment will have, nor to consider whether the state of things in which the attainment immediately issues is in itself good or bad. Thus, if A. owes B. £100, the doctrine of right for right's sake

maintains A. ought to pay B., even if he has every reason to think that B. will put the money to some criminal use, and that it is a bad thing that he should have it. Similarly, since to tell the truth is right in itself, and the truth ought to be told simply on that ground, a man ought in all circumstances to do his best to convey a correct impression of the facts to those to whom he speaks or writes. What the consequences of doing this may be, or whether it is or is not a good thing that it should be done, does not concern him as a moral agent. In short, the doctrine maintains that we ought to do what is good only because and in so far as it is right to do it, and that we ought not to do what is right because or in so far as it is a good thing to do. This canon rests on the principle that the right is related to the good as the means, not of its attainment, but of its expression. It is the good will of the agent willing to do right which alone gives moral value to his action.

This doctrine can be made plausible in argument, and undoubtedly it emphasizes an important truth against all forms of utilitarianism. Nevertheless, once it is admitted that the moral agent is bound to consider results at least up to the attainment of the immediate object of his purposive action, a doubt arises whether it is not arbitrary to rule out absolutely the consideration of all further results or consequences. It is indeed commonly held that the consideration of such consequences does sometimes justify exceptions to an ordinary rule of duty. Few people would feel bound to tell the truth to an armed assassin concerning the whereabouts of his intended victim. It is difficult to maintain that a physician is always wrong in telling a falsehood in order to save a patient's life. Laws of duty concerning property are similarly held to admit exception 'in cases of necessity.' It is from the possibility of such exceptions that the need for casuistry mainly arises. But the justifying principle of them all seems to be the same. Common rules of duty derive their imperative authority partly from the fact that the observance of them is a condition of the health and well-being of human society. Habits of truth-telling, the keeping of promises, and the honouring of contracts, are foundations of that mutual confidence without which co-operation is impossible. Exceptions to the rules can be admitted only in so far as the exceptions are based on a principle which does not endanger the mutual confidence which the rule aims at establishing. Thus they become exceptions which prove the rule rather than break it. But the consideration of *some* ulterior purpose in the duty to keep the rule must be allowed. Otherwise we shall find ourselves, as rigorists always do, involved in ethical absurdities.

It thus becomes impossible to avoid the conclusion that utilitarianism and the doctrine of right for right's sake are each of them one-sided and defective. The main interest of the utilitarian is the realization of the good in human society. He judges individual conduct as a means to this end. But he forgets that moral action is from the beginning more than an effort to bring some unrealized good into existence, and cannot therefore be judged simply by its success or failure. Moral action is also the expression of a good will, and its value as such an expression is at least to some extent independent of any success it may have in achieving the object aimed at. On the other hand, the main concern of the upholder of right for right's sake is the expression of the good will in individual conduct. All questions of the consequence for society seem to him irrelevant in estimating the moral value of action. He does not want the goodness of the thing achieved to enter into the reckoning at all. He does not want to judge by success or failure. But he is apt to forget that all purposive action consists in using means for ends, and that therefore the wise direction of the means so that the end may be really achieved cannot be altogether left out of the account. If we maintain that it is irrelevant to the strictly moral value of an action whether or not it is rightly calculated to achieve some external end, we are saying that ethics must treat action solely as a *gesture*, a gesture being definable as an action the purpose or value of which is confined to what it expresses. Thus, while utilitarianism tends to make virtue merely prudential, the doctrine of right for right's sake tends to make it merely quixotic. For it is the essence of quixotic action that it has no value beyond that of a gesture.

Again, utilitarianism is so occupied with the goodness of the object or end to be achieved by action, that it omits the consideration of the agent's will and motive as morally valuable in themselves. The doctrine of right for right's sake, on the other hand, concentrates its attention so exclusively upon the agent's will and motive that it forgets that the very goodness of the agent's will must depend upon its being directed to achieve something good in itself, not something which is good simply because it is the agent's duty to do it. The doctrine of right for right's sake sets a high value upon disinterestedness. The good man, it tells us, must do what is right simply because it is right, *i.e.* because it is his duty to do it. But if the agent

is to be directly desirous of doing his own duty, rather than of doing what is in itself good, he ceases to be really disinterested at all. For he becomes interested in his own disinterestedness, and his virtue is self-centred after all. Dr. Kirk has suggested that it is precisely in order to avoid such a danger that our Lord so constantly taught that the unselfish service of God and His Kingdom does bring a reward.

It is in truth the Janus-faces of moral action which are the moral philosopher's perplexity. It looks both ways, backwards towards the motive of the will which initiates it, and forwards towards the object in or through which it finds its end. The right in action is doubly related to the good, both as the expression of a good will and as the means to a good end. Neither relation can fairly be excluded from the account in the full moral valuation of an action. No doubt it may be pointed out that, in certain cases at least, failure to achieve its object in no way detracts from the moral value of an act. But certainly if we suppose that the moral activity of mankind as a whole must end in failure, however heroic, to achieve and realize the good, then it is difficult not to judge that its moral value is impaired; for we are then obliged to think of human virtue as a mere impotent gesture, as Mr. Bertrand Russell represented it in *The Free Man's Worship*, so that it begins to wear a tinge of self-centredness and melodrama. The highest self-sacrifice requires some faith that sacrifice is not ultimately made in vain, but achieves an object which is not confined to its own self-exhibition. Yet, on the other hand, moral endeavour and self-sacrifice are certainly in vain, if all they succeed in producing is a state of being, whether in heaven or earth, wherein they themselves have been entirely left behind as a ladder can be kicked away when the climb is finished.

The only ultimate solution of the problem lies, I believe, in the Christian doctrine of the creative and redemptive love of God. If we believe in this love as the source and guide and goal of human effort after the good, we do not in any way invalidate the moral consciousness of mankind with its conceptions of right and of duty, but we are enabled to pass beyond it and to solve its problems on a higher level. It is instructive at this point to borrow an analogy from art. The master artist or composer or poet does not invalidate the elementary rules of technique which he once learnt as a pupil, although in his mature work he is clearly their master, not their servant, and seems occasionally to break them altogether. His ultimate justification lies in the fact that the rules were not intended to be rigidly observed for their own sake, but to be observed as aids and guides to true artistic creation. In that creative activity both their value and their limitations are clearly seen. The man who has never learned to observe rules of technique will never be a great artist; but the mere observance of rules will never produce a genuine work of art.

Now Christianity with its doctrine of the new creation in Christ Jesus calls all men to be, each in his manner and degree, creative artists in good life, which is then seen as the expression and embodiment of that same love in which Christ Jesus was incarnate and died and rose again for men. The ordinary rules of moral duty are not invalidated by this fresh call. But they are seen not as rules to be slavishly observed for their own sake, but as tutors designed to bring us into the freedom of Christ's new creative work of love, so that in Him we can co-operate in building up that new corporate humanity which has the eternal at its heart. There are many degrees of attainment as well as different kinds of vocation even in Christian living here below. In many ways we still have to be pupils under tutors, and dare not yet claim our full freedom as children of God in Christ Jesus. Yet Christians know that there is a motive in action higher than mere duty, and an end to be achieved higher than the mere doing of right for right's sake. There is the giving of life for the love of God and man; there is the self-sacrifice which finds its reward beyond death itself in the final redemption of mankind. And the Christian knows also that he will not be judged at last by the degree in which he has kept mere rules of moral conduct, but rather by what he has succeeded in creating even here below in the service of that love in which he has believed.

The Christian therefore cannot be a believer in right for right's sake or be content with a merely Kantian moralism. But neither can he be a utilitarian. To suppose that right action is a mere means to an end is an absurdity to him. For the ultimate end for which he serves God is nothing but the perfect expression in all created beings of that same love which is even now the source and inspiration of every act which in the highest and deepest sense is right. The perfect expression of that love in all things is what the Christian means by the life of the world to come. But that life of the world to come, just because it is eternal, is not simply future in the sense that it leaves behind altogether the self-sacrifice by which it is attained. A creator's perfected creation, even if it

be only a human artist's creation of which we are speaking, does not leave behind the effort, or even the agony, by and through which it was wrought; they remain for ever expressed even in the beauty and peace of its achievement.

Finally, it is this view of morality as ultimately serving the purposes of creative love, which alone can enable us to keep our heads as well as our hearts, and direct wisely and rightly the changes of our changing world. Mere common rules of moral conduct may have to be revised to an indefinite extent. Let us not shirk the fact, or the pain and disturbance which it must bring. But if we hold fast to our belief in God's love for human souls, and in His will to express that love in this world and the world to come, through life and through death, then we shall hold fast also to that permanent principle which will prevent change from slipping into chaos. The one prophecy which can be made with some degree of assurance about the world as we see it to-day is this, that, if it does not become much more Christian than it is, it will speedily become much less moral than it has been. But there is hope as well as fear in the signs of the times.

The Beatitude of the Forgiven.

By the Reverend James Reid, D.D., Eastbourne.

'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile' (Ps $32^{1.2}$). This is a picture of the soul which has found the final secret of peace and blessedness. It is the doxology of the forgiven heart. It describes, as fully as a man in these days before Christ came could know it, what forgiveness really is and, what is even more important, the only way into it.

What we call the conviction of sin is the inescapable experience of those who would know God or who become alive to goodness and its challenge and appeal in any noble form. We cannot admire a fine deed of self-sacrifice or unselfish devotion without the thrill of admiration being followed by the sense of our own defect. That, in a rudimentary form, is the conviction of sin. There are other ways in which it may come home to us. A disastrous moral failure will bring it home—what Stevenson calls 'a killing sin.' It disturbs our self-complacency. It slays our self-respect. It is felt within us as an act of betrayal of that ideal which somewhere slumbers in the breast of every man. It may come home to us also when we look round on the world with all its dark injustices, and realize that we are enjoying our privileges at the cost of a mass of human suffering and sacrifice which we do little to relieve and for which we may be returning little or nothing to the community. 'Will anyone tell me how I can live an innocent life?' asks one of the people in *Legends of Smokeover*, as he thinks of the cost to others of our privileges. But this conviction of sin comes home to us fully when the vision of God in His goodness and love breaks upon us. It was the immediate result of Isaiah's vision of God. 'I saw the Lord high and lifted up. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' So it was also with Job. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' When Bunyan's Pilgrim began to read his Bible he came under conviction of sin. He was not a bad man according to his lights. He had done no crime. He was loving and kind to his family. But the immediate result of seeing that Face which looked in on his soul from the pages of the Bible was a sense of sin that was as real as a load upon his back and by no jugglery or strategy of the mind, nor by any kindly expostulations or friendly badinage of his companions, could it be lifted. It is one of the most realistic descriptions of guilt in literature, and it rings true, for it was Bunyan's own experience, and it has been repeated in every case where the sense of God's reality comes home to the heart. A modern version of the same thing is found in Masefield's *Everlasting Mercy*. The village drunkard was awakened to the conviction of sin when the woman in the public-house brought him face to face with Christ and showed him that