# ETHICS

*A Thematic Compilation*

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# Abstract

***Ethics*** is a collection of thoughts on the method, form and content of Ethics.

This book is a thematic compilation drawn from past works by the author, over a period of thirteen years. The essays are placed in chronological order.

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# 1. CHAPTER ONE

Drawn from *Judaic Logic* (1995),
Chapter 13.

## ON THE CONCEPT OF *MITZVAH*

*Jewish tradition assigns various technical characteristics to the concept of* mitzvah*. In this chapter, we will try to clarify some of them, and analyze their formal implications, making comparisons to natural ethical logic.*[1]

### 1. Basic Properties

The term ***mitzvah*** (pl. ***mitzvot***) is usually translated as commandment(s). Mitzvot ***asseh*** (do's) are positive commands or imperatives; mitzvot ***lo-taasseh*** (do-not's) are negative commands or prohibitions. Strictly-speaking, this is not quite correct. Some of the 'mitzvot' are indeed imperatives or prohibitions, but some, whether directly or by

[1] Kahan's *Taryag Mitzvos* is worth reading in this context, as an illustration of how mitzvot are currently taught to laypersons. Many of the examples proposed here were drawn from that work, though their analysis is my own.

implication, are rather only permissions (i.e. negations of prohibitions) and/or exemptions (i.e. negations of imperatives).

For examples: Deut. 23:25, “when you come into your neighbour’s vineyard, you may eat grapes” (which refers to a laborer at work), is a case of direct permission; or Exod. 13:13, “and if you will not redeem it, you must behead it” (which refers to a firstborn donkey), is a conditional imperative, which by implication implies a permission. In some cases, the imperative and permission do not have the same logical subject; thus, in Lev. 19:10, the crop-owner’s obligation to leave gleanings for the poor, implies the right of the poor to go into the field and take them.

But note that, in some cases, a statement which has the form of a permission, is received rather with emphasis on an implicit imperative (for instance, Deut. 14:11, which reads “every clean bird, you may eat” is taken to mean that one must examine a bird and make sure that it is kosher before eating it; similarly with Lev. 11:2, 9, 21). Some passages which might more naturally be understood as merely permissive, are seemingly interpreted more extremely as imperatives (for instances, Deut. 15:3 or 23:21, which read “from a gentile, [go ahead]“ - “exact repayment [of loan, even in *Shemitah* year]“ or “take interest”, are interpreted by some as meaning ‘you *must* do so’, rather than as merely ‘you *may* do so’; similarly, Deut. 17:14-15 is understood to mean that Israel not just may but must (eventually) have a king.

So we have to interpret the term mitzvah/command, here, as including ‘command to allow’ and ‘command to exempt’, as well as ‘command to obligate’ and ‘command to forbid’. This

sort of nested reiteration might raise formal problems, if taken too literally. Rather, I think, the best thing is to understand the term ‘command’, for lack of another, as having as well as its narrow sense of imperative, a broader sense which includes prohibitions, permissions and exemptions, as well.

One might argue that reiteration does reflect an aspect of the concept of mitzvah, namely that even contingent ethical propositions, if true, are products of God’s will and therefore imply a command. But then, a command to whom? Some might answer, to the religious authorities, telling them to tell the lay people what they must, must not, may, may not do. However, I do not think that Judaism wishes to be so extremely authoritarian; it acknowledges a more direct relation between layperson and God.

Also, I do not think that we are logically forced to regard contingent ethical propositions as expressions of God’s will; it is not inconceivable that God is simply open to either course implied by such propositions. In other words, the totalitarian thesis, that “everything is regulated” within a religious ethics, is not logically inevitable; it is quite conceivable (though some people, with fanatical inclinations, would doubt it) that God allows for (perhaps even rejoices at) some human spontaneity, so that humans have some (however much or little) freedom of choice, not only in the sense of natural capacity, but also in the sense of ethical liberty.

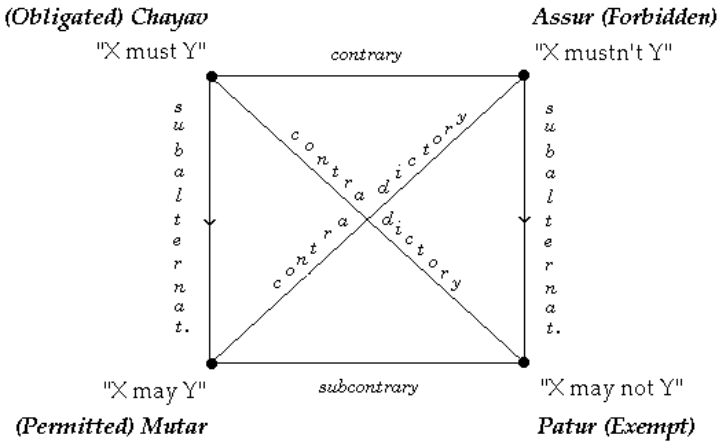
In more formal terms, the issue may be expressed as follows: in natural modality, a proposition of the form “X is *capable* of doing Y” is usually associated with a proposition of the form “When X is in such and such a situation, he is *forced* to

do Y", which expresses the conditions under which the potentiality is necessarily actualized. One hypothesis (known as determinism) is that such association is not only usual but universal; the opposite hypotheses (positing spontaneity or freewill) are that there exist cases where a potentiality does not imply a conditional necessary actualization.

Similarly, the issue totalitarianism versus partial liberty arises as follows in ethical modality: a proposition of the form "X is *permitted* to do Y" may or may not presuppose a proposition of the form "When X is in such and such a situation, he is *obligated* to do Y" - the issue is not formally resolvable; either position, ethical determinism and ethical indeterminism, is a hypothesis. Note in passing that the English language, by using passive verbs like 'is permitted', already implies that liberty is endowed; but a more impartial terminology would reflect more the inherent independence of liberty, its conceptual primacy.[2]

The following are some of the terms found in Talmudic discussions referring to mitzvot:

[2] The simplest explanation of permissive and/or exemptive ethical propositions in the Torah, is to suppose that God wanted to preempt us (or the Rabbis) from drawing a prohibitive or imperative conclusion.




There are many other equivalent terms, needless to say; in Hebrew, such as *tsarikh*, *zakai*, in English, such as prescribed, prohibited, allowed, and so forth (check out your thesaurus for more). These concepts are normally understood by logicians as ethical modalities - attributes of relations, conceptually similar to (indeed subsets of) necessity, impossibility, possibility and unnecessity, but in the ethical field, implying some prior standard(s) of value, ultimate norms - and having (among others) the following logical characteristics:

(a) They are in principle obvertible, so that if, for subject X, the doing (in the widest sense) of Y is an obligation, then not-Y is forbidden, and if Y is forbidden, then not-Y is an obligation; and likewise, if Y is permitted, then not-Y is an exemption , and if Y is an exemption, then not-Y is permitted.

(b) They form a normal ‘square of oppositions’, so that obligation implies (but is not implied by) permission, is contrary to prohibition, and contradictory to exemption; and likewise, prohibition implies (but is not implied by) exemption, is contrary to obligation, and contradictory to permission.

However (as already discussed in an earlier chapter of *Judaic Logic*) Talmudists would be likely, more often than not, to interpret these concepts somewhat differently. For them, at least *ab initio*, permission and exemption would be understood as *davqa* positions, and therefore as implying each other, and being together contrary to both obligation and prohibition. In that case, one may educe “X may not-Y” (as well as “X may not not-Y”) from “X may Y”; and similarly “X may Y” (as well as “X may not Y”) from “X may not-Y”. In certain cases, the preceding *lav davqa* interpretations might be preferred, if the *davqa* ones turned out to be untenable for some reason.

Going further, a question arises as to whether the Hebrew expressions ‘*asseh*’ and ‘*lo-taasseh*’ (‘do’ and ‘do not do’) are intended as general words, signifying any verbs, or whether they signify more specifically *volitional* ‘action’ and ‘restraint from action’, respectively.

In the general sense, verbs are fully obvertible: ‘does X’ implies ‘does-not do not-X’, and ‘does-not do X’ implies ‘does not-X’; this is the sense preferred by formal logic, because of its simplicity. Whereas, in the more special sense, concerning human will, with its psychological, physiological, environmental, social, political and spiritual concomitants, which is the domain of interest of ethics, various nuances have to be taken into consideration.

An ‘action’ may refer to a thought (a purely mental event); to an emotion (a psychosomatic expression of pleasure, pain or indifference, love, hatred, or non-commitment, in various configurations and degrees); or to a physically-manifest event, with all its implications within the individual(s) concerned and all its consequences in the surrounding natural and social context. In this sense, then, ‘action’ refers to an act of the human will, which may *range from fully voluntary and conscious to very-nearly involuntary and/or unconscious*, but must in any case have some degree of freedom to be subject to ethical legislation, under any system.

Note that, contrary to what one might expect, thoughts are often subject to legislation: for though cognition is ultimately an objective event, the observer can often choose the direction of his/her attention, the course of his/her research, and the price (i.e. conditions) of his/her belief-attitudes. Similarly, emotions are in a sense ‘passions’, but the value-judgments originally underlying them are often a relatively free choice, and a person may often choose to suppress emotions, more or less control them or give them free rein, and actions (of varying value) may then follow. Certainly, we find within Judaism laws relating to belief (to believe in the Lord/God’s existence, oneness, sovereignty, not to believe in other gods) and to love (to love the Lord/God, to love one’s neighbor as oneself, not to hate one’s brother in one’s heart).

Lastly, while it might be that an individual can have influence on his/her natural and social surrounds directly through his/her thoughts and emotions (I mean, by telepathy), in most cases, certainly, such influence can only take shape through the medium of physical acts (be they words or

sounds spoken or unspoken, facial expressions and gestures, or pushing, pulling and other movements) of the individual.

Also to note: as far as religion is concerned, ethics concerns not only the impact of individuals on their own body and mind (including soul), and on their physical and social surrounds, but also their (alleged) effect on "upper and lower spiritual worlds" of mystical significance. While some rituals are more or less explicable in immanent terms, many are reputed or presumed to have transcendental purposes. But I will not make further remarks on such relatively metaphysical topics.

My only interest being here to point out the differing senses of 'doing', and to briefly demonstrate that once one goes beyond the simple, general sense, the issues become rather complicated. For these reasons, formal logic usually concentrates on the broadest sense of the verb 'to do', with which no essential distinction other than polarity exists between positive and negative commands.

Where the more specific sense of human action is intended, we have to keep in mind at least the following categories: 'doing' and 'avoiding doing' (both of which signify some degree of volition and awareness), and 'absence of doing' and 'absence of avoiding doing' (which merely negate the preceding two categories, without implying volition and awareness and without excluding them). All this is obvious enough, and was (it seems to me) clearly known to the Talmudists.

The following is a more technical presentation of the concepts under discussion:

For the most abstract forms, where ‘do’ refers to any verb, positive or negative, active or passive, whatsoever, (a) all imperatives with a zero or even number of negations are equivalent, and (b) all those with an odd number of negations are equivalent, and these two sets of forms are contrary to each other. This refers to the following forms (I use the formulas “that’s good,” “that’s bad,” to express the black and white value-judgments involved):

a) **X must do Y** = X mustn’t do not-Y = X must not-do not-Y = X mustn’t not-do Y = if X does Y, that’s good; if X does not do Y, that’s bad.

b) **X mustn’t do Y** = X must do not-Y = X mustn’t not-do not-Y = X must not-do Y = if X does not do Y, that’s good; if X does Y, that’s bad.

However, in contrast, if we interpret ‘doing’ as meaning specifically ‘willing’, obversions are not always feasible, and we obtain four variously opposed sets of two forms (c through f, below), instead of two contrary sets of four forms (a, b, above).

c) **X must will Y** = X mustn’t not-will Y = if X wills Y, that’s good; if X does not will Y, that’s bad.

d) **X mustn’t will Y** = X must not-will Y = if X does not will Y, that’s good; if X wills Y, that’s bad.

e) **X must will not-Y** = X mustn’t not-will not-Y = if X wills not-Y, that’s good; if X does not will not-Y, that’s bad.

f) **X mustn’t will not-Y** = X must not-will not-Y = if X does not will not-Y, that’s good; if X wills not-Y, that’s bad.

About the oppositions between these forms. Note that, given “X wills Y” and “X wills not-Y” are incompatible, whereas

"X does not will Y" and "X does not will not-Y" are compatible, it follows that "X wills Y" implies (but is not implied by) "X does not will not-Y", and that "X wills not-Y" implies (but is not implied by) "X does not will Y".

Now, the forms (c) and (d) are contrary, since they disagree regarding whether "X wills Y" is good (c) or bad (d), and likewise whether "X does not will Y" is good (d) or bad (c). Similarly, for the forms (e) and (f). However, since "X wills Y" (good) found in (c) implies "X does not will not-Y" (good) found in (f), and "X does not will Y" (bad) found in (c) is implied by "X wills not-Y" (bad) found in (f), the forms (c) and (f) are compatible, but neither implies the other. Similarly, for the forms (e) and (d).

## 2. Complementary Factors

When God tells us to do or not-do something, is He just concerned with that one thing He has mentioned, or with a much larger, unstated context?

Perhaps just doing what one is told by God to do, is all that counts. Or perhaps this bottom line is duly rewarded; but also, as one enriches the deed with better ***kavanah*** (pl. ***kavanot***), as defined below, the reward increases proportionately. Similarly, on the negative side: there may be gradations in seriousness, ranging from a minimum for "sin through error" (implying that one has a certain responsibility for ignorance or neglect), to a maximum for intentional or willful sin (implying a certain rebellion). Or perhaps, more extremely, the performance of a positive mitzvah or non-performance of a negative mitzvah require an adequate

kavanah (or, rather, a certain collection of kavanot), and does not otherwise count at all.

Kavanah includes various factors:

(a) A certain degree of **awareness** of one's activity or inactivity; so that it is a product of will, and not merely an automatic reaction (a reflex or habit or chance occurrence). For example, while praying, being aware of the meaning (at least the plain meaning, if not the deeper meanings) of the words one utters, would fall under this heading.

(b) The proper **motives**: this concerns the causal background influencing the deed. Included here are (i) more or less conscious goals, like gaining a place in the world-to-come, or earning earthly rewards, such as a wife and children, long life, health, knowledge, success, riches, and so forth; and (ii) undeclared/unadmitted, subconscious or unconscious goals, which constitute the relatively hidden psychological context, such as power-lust for instance. Apparent motives are not necessarily true motives; here, complex needs for introspection are implied.[3]

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[3] Note that in some cases, as I recall (though I cannot appose an example offhand), Scripture itself mentions a motive; if so, it would seem obvious that the specified motive must play a role. As a rule, the Rabbis disapprove of explanations for mitzvot, for fear that the mitzvot might be erroneously limited thereby. For instances: to say that shaving is forbidden *because* heathen priests engaged in it, might lead people to regard shaving as permissible so long as not performed with idolatrous motives; or again, to say that pork was forbidden *because* it went bad quickly in hot countries, might lead people to regard it as permissible in cold countries or in the days of refrigerators. But a corollary of that view would be that if Scripture ever explicitly mentions a motive for a mitzvah, then the performance of it *without* that motive would

(c) The **intention** to thereby *fulfill the mitzvah*, as such, i.e. as a command from God given through Moshe at Sinai. One may view this, though the ideal motive, as just a necessary motive, a *sine qua non*, without having to be the only motive, *exclusive* of any other. Or, more extremely, one may insist on obedience without selfish motive whatever, purely *lishma*, "for its own sake," or *leshem Shamaim*, "for the sake of Heaven."

(d) We might additionally mention, though it does not strictly qualify as kavanah, the *emotional context*. Treatises on the performance of mitzvot always stress the significance of mood or **attitude**: goodwill, doing the job at hand with joy (*beratson*), adds to the value and virtue of one's good deed, and conversely resentment and such depreciate it. This is quite understandable, at least from the point of view of the order-giver, who does not want the annoyance and interference of negative vibes (stiff-neck); from the viewpoint of the order-receiver, however, there may be a felt need to express dissatisfaction or disagreement, of involuntary compliance.

According to some Rabbis (including, as I recall, the Rambam and the Chafets Chaim), without the required kavanah the action done or not-done is considered mere happenstance, and does not constitute fulfillment of the corresponding mitzvah.

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seem, logically, to be equivalent to non-performance (i.e. to constitute, for a positive mitzvah, a useless act; and for a negative mitzvah, a legitimate loop-hole). A *davqa* reading, akin to a *klal uphrat* inference, would in such case seem justified; but I do not know if this position is accepted traditionally, or whether the Rabbis nevertheless generalize the mitzvah.

Now, the above is a very heavy doctrine, whose logical implications are manifold. For what it means, in formal terms, is that the Divine commandments given in the Torah, although expressed in simple forms like "do this" or "don't do that", are really meant as more complex forms, which include a multiplicity of tacit qualifications. Clearly, this changes their logical properties. For instance, the two ethical propositions below have very different logical properties:

- "X must do Y" (simple).
- "X must do Y *and* be aware (to degree *k*) of doing Y *and* have motives *l, n, m* while doing Y *and* do Y in order to fulfill the command to do Y" (complex).

When I say that two such propositions have different logical properties, I mean that they have different contradictories, different implications, and so forth - just as any elementary proposition 'P' has different logical properties, compared to any compound proposition 'P+Q+R'. All the more so, since the additional elements include mention of the same subject and/or predicate in a complicated variety of ways.

It follows that, if the doctrine described above is to be accepted literally and in full, so that there are effectively no simple ethical propositions in Judaism, then the logical system applicable to it is not (as often presumed) the system which applies to simple ethical propositions, but a much more elaborate system appropriate to the more complex forms, with strings of qualifications of the simple relations. It is very important to realize the full weight of this implication of the doctrine.

There are yet other complementary factors which might need to be taken into consideration:

a) In a natural ethics, the **reward/punishment** factor is built-in, because the things one should or shouldn't do have a natural causal relation, constructive or destructive, to one's standard of value - normally, human welfare. The doing or not-doing of so and so *causes* an improvement or a damage in the goal(s) which constitute our norm; and the seriousness of the measure depends on whether this causation is necessary or merely helpful, sufficient or partial, categorical or conditional, etc.

Here, "X should do Y", *because* if X *does-not* do Y, the ultimate goal(s) Z will be *dis*favored; or "X should not-do Y", *because* if X *does* do Y, the ultimate goal(s) Z will be *dis*favored; or again, "X may or may not do Y", because whether X does or does-not do Y, the ultimate goal(s) Z will *not* be disfavored, though one way may be more favorable than the other, or unfavorable consequences may arise, one way and/or the other, only under certain conditions instead of unconditionally.

But in a religious ethics, that is: one based on Divine Revelation, such causal relations are not always apparent, especially in that the ultimate goal(s) involved may not be altogether explicitly known to us (though commentators may variously presume this or that to be God's intentions). Moreover, the personal or collective reward/punishment may not in all cases be in a naturally-apparent manner causally-connected to the deeds, but may rather be connected by Divine fiat, as it were, in hidden pathways. I mean, granted that Nature is also a product of Divine fiat, religion still presumes that some relations are intrinsic to it (immanent, natural), while others use more extrinsic pathways (transcendent, miraculous).

Thus, in religion, the reward or punishment, which we will symbolize by Z1 and Z2, respectively, has the following formal relation to the command: "X should do Y, *and* if X does Y then Z1 is promised, *and* if X does not do Y then Z2 is threatened"; and similarly, in the case of "X should not do Y", *mutadis mutandis*. The imperatives are associated with promises and threats, but one may not formally *infer* from these imperatives negative natural-conditional propositions.

Here, the reward/punishment complex is a Divinely-instituted *appendage*, which may not (though it also may) have any natural causal connection to the (positive or negative) imperative. The result is not automatically consequent, under Natural Law, but mediated by *ad hoc* acts of will by God on a case-by-case basis. Even if God's choices are consistently uniform, they always retain a more voluntary character. This hypothesis would explain the irregularity of results (which might alternatively be due to the complexities of the natural causalities involved, of course), and fits neatly with the doctrine that God wishes to reserve for Himself the option of mercy and forgiveness.

In this context, the issue of *redemption* arises. In nature, some mistakes can be corrected, and others cannot. In Judaism, by special Divine dispensation, as it were, we are more often than not offered further possibilities of redemption, the undoing and forgiveness of *fait accompli*, beyond the natural, through repentance and personal change (*teshuvah*), through charity (*tsedakah*) and sacrifice in the Temple (*korbanot*). All this has logical significance.

b) Another issue with possible relevance is whether reward/punishment are related to **effort**. Is God's only interest in *tachlit*, the bottom line, getting the job done, or is

the effort expended in fulfilling a mitzvah significant to Him? Effort means work against resistance, the resistance of one's own faculties or weaknesses or diverse external factors; or, in other words, in a terminology dear to the Rabbis, the counter-pressure of the *yetzer haraa*, the "evil inclination" allegedly possessed by mankind in particular and this-world in general.

With regard to reward, if two people fulfill the same mitzvah, and for one it was an *easy* thing and for another a *difficult* thing, are they at the same moral/spiritual level? The one for whom it was easy is in a sense proved the higher, in view of the facility experienced; but the one for whom it was more difficult is in another sense proved the higher, in view of the extra effort dedicated.

More specifically, for instance, if a person never kills or never steals or never commits adultery (and many people fall in those categories), is such a person always credited with virtue? Or does the merit depend on having been tempted and resisted temptation, as some Rabbis claim, and does the merit grow as a function of the difficulty encountered? In other words, to use a technological image, is only heat-production respected in Jewish law, and superconductivity looked down upon?

More formally, does "X must do Y" imply, in the Torah, "if it takes X an effort to do Y, he is rewarded; else, not"; and does "X mustn't do Y" imply, in the Torah, "If X is tempted yet resists to do Y, he is rewarded; else, not"? It may not be possible to answer such questions on formal grounds; any doctrine which is internally consistent, which presents no inherent difficulty, is on equal footing from that point of view.

With regard to the negative mitzvot just mentioned, I would like to comment that people are in fact constantly tempted: any cause for anger, real or imagined, is effectively a temptation for violence and (eventually) murder, every object one can pick up (which belongs to someone else) is a temptation for theft, every woman that passes by is a temptation for rape and (if she is married) adultery. So, even if such temptations were regarded as so small as to be nearly zero, for most people, or the overcoming of them was viewed as generating a virtually negligible credit, for most people, we could still not truly claim in such cases that *no* temptation at all was involved and therefore that no resistance to temptation took place.

The idea of the more extreme Rabbis may be expressed more fully by saying that each mitzvah refers to four outcomes (leaving aside more complex issues of kavanah mentioned earlier) as follows: for example, that "X must do Y" in the Torah is intended to mean "X must will Y" (see form (c), in the previous section), so that:

- if **X wills Y** (= active performance), the mitzvah is fulfilled and rewarded;
- if **X does Y, but does not *will* Y** (= passive performance), the mitzvah is not truly fulfilled and no reward follows;
- if **X does not will Y, yet as it happens does *not do* Y** (= sin of omission), the mitzvah is breached though perhaps relatively less punishably;
- if **X wills not-Y** (= sin of commission), the mitzvah is breached in a more punishable manner.

Similarly, that "X mustn't do Y" in the Torah is intended to mean "X mustn't will Y" (see form (d)), and this entails four outcomes as above, mutadis mutandis; and likewise, supposedly, for "X must do/will not-Y" (see form (e)) and "X mustn't do/will not-Y" (see form (f)). All that in itself seems consistent.

With regard to punishment, is a person who has tried his/her utmost to perform a positive mitzvah or resist a temptation to sin, but failed, treated less severely than one who has tried less or not tried at all? This question can also, like the preceding one, be expressed in formal terms; it proposes further gradations. Our human sensibilities concerning Justice would answer yes to it; Judaism tends to agree in principle, though some stories seem to suggest that sometimes this is irrelevant.

Still further distinctions and gradations are called forth when we consider the issues of kavanah. For instance, a person who did not know the law, having say been kidnapped far from the community, and who consciously eats pork, is not comparable to someone who knew the law and wished to break it to express rejection of it. Such fine subdivisions are beyond the scope of the present study; I only mention them to remind the reader that we have far from exhausted the issues.

c) While on the topic of reward/punishment, we should mention an interesting concept of deontology (general ethical logic) found in the Bible and Talmud, that of **remedy**. For example, it is forbidden to steal (a negative mitzvah), but if one did steal, returning the stolen object to its owner (a positive mitzvah), in some cases with an extra amount of the same object, frees the thief from the penalty incurred (such as

lashes). Similar examples can be found in man-made law and 'natural' ethics.

Such corrective processes can be expressed in formal terms, as follows. In some situations, X causes Y *and* NotX causes NotY; whereas in other cases, though X causes Y, NotX does *not* cause NotY - so that the *damage done* (Y) by the violation (X) cannot be *undone* (NotY) by a remedy (NotX). This is an insight, primarily, of causal logic, namely that some causal relations are reversible, whereas with others "what's done is done" - they are 'entropic', we might say.

In a broader sense, all reward or punishment, whether in this world or in the afterlife, is considered as remedy. This is the concept of ***tiqun*** (repair), so dear to and widely used by Jewish mystics. Life is either degeneration (through sin) or putting things right (through good deeds or through reward/punishment by society or by God). Note that reward is ultimately as much a *tiqun* as punishment, in that a never-rewarded good deed is comparable to work without wages, there is an injustice involved, something which should have been completed has not been.

> It should be stressed that the Rabbis nowhere (so far as I know) explain just how they know that mitzvot were intended by God to have the various special features they ascribe to them. Certainly, the Written Torah is not as explicit as they are on such matters. Nor are any of the inferences - emerging from by the special features discussed in this chapter - included in the main lists of hermeneutic principles; nor is it anywhere shown precisely how such forms of argument might be read into the Torah text by means of the listed hermeneutic principles. The special

features of Rabbinic ethical logic are merely taken for granted, as part and parcel of the oral tradition; and perhaps viewed as implicit to some extent in the behavior of exemplary characters found in stories in the Torah, Talmud and later inspirational literature. There are, as we have pointed out, discussions among Rabbis as to their ultimate force of law. I would suggest that such special features developed gradually in rabbinic lore, generated by the idealism, and sometimes the one-upmanship, of successive Rabbis.

d) Note, finally, that mitzvot may have still **other features** (unrelated to the above). For instance, mitzvot are quite often temporally related, in forms like "**you [the person(s) concerned] must perform Mitzvah A before Mitzvah B**". These constitute complementary commands, say C, whose subject is the same as A and B, and whose predicate contains two commands in a specified sequence. Such statements may have any polarity or modality[4]; and may be - as well as categorical - conditional, in diverse and eventually complex hierarchies. Needless to say, the formal logic of such propositions can get rather complicated. This feature is not peculiar to Jewish deontology, but may be found in natural ethics, where complementary means to an end are often similarly ordered.

An example from Judaism is the sequence recommended for the mitzvot of *tallit* (prayer shawl)

[4] Other forms include "A may precede B", "A must not-precede B", "A may not-precede B", and so forth. Intermediate modalities like "should preferably" or "should preferably not" can also be used (these correspond to degrees of probability in natural modality).

and *tefillin* (phylacteries; leather boxes containing extracts from Scripture, with straps); within the latter, in turn, the *rosh* (head) *tefillin* is to be put on before the *yad* (arm) *tefillin*. Strictly-speaking, these are independent mitzvot, but the order in which they are here listed is the ideal. We are also told precisely at what stages the appropriate blessings should be recited.[5] How all this is proved (if at all) from Scripture is another matter, to do with hermeneutics; our concern here is with formalities.

## 3. How to Count Mitzvot

One of the interesting, peculiar properties of Biblical or Talmudic/Rabbinic commands is **the non-equivalence between an ethical proposition and its obverse**. That is, "X must Y" and "X mustn't not-Y" (or similarly, "X mustn't Y" and "X must not-Y"), although they logically imply each other, formally, in all cases, may nevertheless in some cases be counted as two Mitzvot! For example, Deut. 22:19, which refers to cases of libel of wife by husband, says both "she shall remain his wife" and "he may not send her away all his days"; having to remain married and being forbidden to divorce are identical, yet are here both specified. Another

[5] There are many additional prescriptions, such as that if one has taken up the *yad tefillin* before the *rosh tefillin*, one should out of respect continue to put it on, or again, if one speaks in the middle of the process, another blessing must be recited; and so on. From the formal point of view, such details constitute a host of conditional (if-then) mitzvot.

example is Deut. 25:17 and 19, the commandments to remember and not-forget Amalek's misdeeds towards Israel.

It would at first sight seem like a redundancy, to repeat the same commandment in positive and negative form; or one may suspect that the two wordings were counted as two laws to satisfy some preconceived notion of the 'number of Mitzvot'. But the explanation given by the Rabbis is quite plausible, namely that this emphasis serves not only to doubly encourage obedience of the command, but also to signify the extra possibilities of reward or punishment inherent in its performance or in failure to do so. (Note that the positive and negative mitzvot in question need not be close to each other in the Biblical text: for instance Lev. 19:13 and Deut. 24:15, concerning paying a worker his wages without delay and on time, are far apart yet complementary.)

Thus it is that there is a general (or nearly general) rule, to the effect that: the disobedience of a positive command cannot be punished by Rabbinical courts, though it may have negative social or Divinely-produced consequences, the latter in this life or in the afterlife; whereas, disobedience of a negative command can indeed be punished by Rabbinical courts, though again it may have consequences of one kind or another. With regard to obedience of positive or negative commands, the reward of such obedience is not usually within the competence of Rabbinical courts (though they may in some cases decree a person be honored, for instance), but may be programmed in nature (by God, of course) or occur as a social phenomenon (most probably due to the ambient culture produced by the Torah) or be effected Providentially (i.e. by Divine intervention) in this world or the next.

Effectively, we have here a specialized *linguistic convention* that: when a command is worded *only* positively, the courts are not competent to punish transgression, whereas when it is expressed *also or only* negatively, they are so. It is a signal, a code, not found in general language, and therefore not a rule of formal ethical logic, but peculiar (we are taught) to the domain of Torah.

Note that, in some cases, the pair of positive and negative commands are not, strictly-speaking, in a purely formal sense, obverts of each other. This may occur when the positive command refers to a finite act of will, and the negative command refers not merely to the absence of that will, but to another finite act of will in the opposite direction. For examples. Deut. 22:29, concerning cases of rape, obligates marriage and forbids divorce; these two mitzvot are not like the above mentioned case of Deut. 22:19 identical, for one might well be forced to marry someone, yet not absolutely forbidden to turn around and divorce her soon after.

Similarly, in Deut. 21:23 the prohibition to allow a man to *remain hanging* overnight and the obligation to *bury* him on the same day as he was executed, are not exact obverts of each other. In Deut. 22:1,3, the mitzvah to return lost property one finds, and the warning not to pass-by and ignore it (so as to avoid the hassle of returning it), are not implied by each other; similarly, with Deut. 22:4, concerning helping one's fellow's fallen animal. Again, the commandments in Deut. 22:6-7 concerning the mother-bird are not inferable from each other (as it might have been required that we take neither mother nor young, or mother but not young).

We also find in the Torah another form of apparent redundancy, **the repetition of certain laws in both generic and specific form**. For example, if incest is forbidden between a man and *various specified* near of kin (Lev. 18:7-18), one might ask what is the point of forbidding it additionally with *any* near of kin (Lev. 18:6). Here again, the explanation given by commentators is that such repetition signals the severity of the mitzvah, and forewarns of the double jeopardy its disobedience implies, in the case of negative mitzvot; or, in the case of positive mitzvot, their importance and double recompense. A calculus is suggested. With regard to the example taken here, one might say that whereas incest in general generates a moral debit of $x$, such practice with a specified near of kin generates a greater debit, $x + y$.[6]

This issue incidentally raises another, of even broader interest to the formal logic of ethical propositions. What are the logical relations between imperatives, permissions, prohibitions and exemptions? This question has to do with modal logic, and as we shall see it may be answered entirely **with reference to alethic (non-ethical) logic**.

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[6] The example here taken is perhaps not the best, being too complex. The text may naturally be interpreted as *klal uphrat*, meaning that the initial generality is limited to the specifics listed next [fourth hermeneutic rule of R. Ishmael]; or the generality may be viewed as referring to non-copulative erotic acts, while the specifics may refer to copulation, though the wording is the same [*lo tikrav legalut ervah*, don't approach to uncover nakedness]. Also, the subject of these prohibitions is generally masculine [*ish*, a man], without clarification concerning the status of the feminine partners. And so forth - but let us ignore such complications in this context.

We know that, in the logic of non-ethical propositions, while predication of any species syllogistically implies predication of all of its genera, predication of a genus does not suffice to imply predication of *any one* (randomly selected) of its species, though it does imply that *at least one* (without prejudice as to *which* one(s)) of its species must be predicable. By contraposition it follows that: while denial of a generic predicate implies denial of *all* relatively specific predicates, denial of *any one* (or even more than one, provided less than all) of its species is not formally sufficient to deny a given genus, but it takes denial of *all* of its species to ensure denial of a given genus.

As we shall now show, certain rules may be inferred from the above, with respect to ethical logic. The formal relation of ethical to neutral propositions is to be found in **teleology** (a derivative of causal logic). Normative statements refer to *means and ends*, they tell us whether such and such is *needed for, harmful to, or neither needed for nor harmful to,* some accepted *standard of value*. This norm may have its source in revelation, or in rational deliberations or in irrational choices, it may be more or less explicit, and it may be unitary or manifold (provided that it is internally consistent, or at least that its parts are clearly hierarchized).

In Judaism, the norm is God's Will, whose precise content we know only partly and speculatively, insofar as it is implicitly expressed in the Torah through the laws and stories (and similarly, *mutadis mutandis*, in certain other religions). In Natural Ethics, the norm is general human welfare, which may be broadened to include the ecological concerns, and this is largely explicit and consistent, to the extent that it is knowable through biology and kindred sciences. More

subjective ethical systems refer to personal emotions or the welfare of special groups (e.g. a race) as their standard, and are largely unverbalized and often inconsistent. In any case, whatever the standard of value (which we shall label **C**), the following formal relations are set by logical science, for any given action (call it **B**) performed by someone (**A**):

- **A must do B** (B is imperative for A), means that if A does not do B, C cannot occur.
- **A musn't do B** (B is forbidden to A), means that if A does do B, C cannot occur.
- **A neither must nor mustn't do B** (call this 'license', for lack of a better word), means that whether A does or doesn't do B, C can still occur.

Additionally:

- **A may do B** (B is permitted to A), means that B is either imperative or licensed to A.
- **A may not-do B** (B is exempt to A), means that B is either forbidden or licensed to A.

These, then, are the alethic interpretations of *categorical* ethical necessity, impossibility, contingency, possibility and unnecessity, respectively. Our palette of ethical modalities may be extended further with reference to *conditional* teleologies. Thus, for instances, A doing B is *conducive* to C, if it causes C in certain circumstances; and A doing B is *dangerous* to C, if it inhibits C (causes not-C) in certain circumstances. Now, our goal here is to find **the relationships between species and genera of action**. Knowing that a given genus (say **G**) is imperative or

forbidden or whatever, what can we infer concerning its species (say **S1**, **S2**, **S3**,...); and vice versa?

**a.** **If a genus G is imperative**, *no given one* of its species is logically implied to be imperative, or anything else, though it is implied that *at least one* of its species has to be performed, *otherwise G cannot occur, and therefore C cannot occur*. Note well that S1, S2, S3... are disjunctively, but not individually or distributively, and still less collectively, implied imperative by G's imperativeness; it is only the disjunction of the series of S which is affected, each and every S may just as well, in itself, be licensed, or imperative or even forbidden. It follows, by contraposition, that it does not suffice to know that each and every one of its species, S1, S2, S3, ..., are exempt, to infer that a genus G is exempt, but we must establish that the species are not disjunctively imperative, as just defined; note this well! Thus, **if any species, say S1, is exempt,** no inference concerning its genera, such as G, is logically possible.

**b.** **If a genus G is forbidden**, *all (each and every)* of its species are logically implied to be forbidden, *because if any (one or more) of the species occurred, G would occur, and thereby C couldn't occur.* Here, the prohibition of G is transmitted to S1, S2, S3, ..., distributively and collectively; the link is much stronger than in the previous case, note well. It follows, by *ad absurdum*, that **if any species, say S1, is permitted**, then all its genera, such as G, are permitted (either imperative or licensed).

**c.** **If any species, say S1, is imperative**, then all of its genera, such as G, are imperative, *because the absence of G (which is implied by S1) would imply the absence of S1, under which condition C cannot occur*. Note that G's other

species, S2, S3, ..., need not for all that be imperative; G's imperativeness, here, is rather incidental to S1's, more in the way of an inevitability, due to the fact that you cannot generate S1 without G; only if all of its species were equally imperative, would G be imperative *per se*. It follows, by *ad absurdum*, that **if a genus G is exempt**, then all its species, S1, S2, S3, ..., are exempt (either forbidden or licensed).

**d.** **If any species, say S1, is forbidden**, no inference is possible concerning its genus G, *because given that S1 implies not-C and S1 implies G, we can only conclude that G does not imply C (since if G implied C, then S1 would imply both not-C and C, whence S1 would be impossible, contrary to the premise that it is forbidden, which implies potential)*. G may equally be imperative (not-G implies not-C, in which case the remaining species S2, S3, ..., are at least disjunctively imperative), or forbidden (G implies not-C, in which case S1's prohibition is simply a consequence of G's), or neither imperative nor forbidden ('G does not imply C' only excludes the possibility that G be imperative to *not*-C, which does not concern us, since it is C that is our standard of value). It follows from all the above, that **if a genus G is permitted**, no inference is logically possible concerning its species S1, S2, S3, ...; each of them could equally be imperative (in which case, G would be imperative, and therefore permitted) or licensed (implying only that G is permitted) or forbidden (nothing implied for G).

Note well, finally, that knowing **a genus G** to be **licensed** (i.e. neither imperative nor forbidden), we can only infer for its species that they are exempt (i.e. either forbidden or licensed); and knowing **any species, say S1,** to be **licensed**, we can only infer for its genera, such as G, that they are

permitted. These relations follow from the above. We need not pursue the matter further, here, with reference to conditional situations.

It should however be noted that the above principles, describing *how ethical modality is transmitted or relayed up or down conceptual hierarchies*, can also be expressed in the form of modal syllogisms. The most obvious valid moods being (see b, c, above, which yield categorical conclusions):

| | |
|---|---|
| **G is a genus of S1** | **S1 is a species of G** |
| **and A mustn't do G** | **and A may do S1** |
| **therefore, A mustn't do S1** | **therefore, A may do G** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **G is a genus of S1** | **S1 is a species of G** |
| **and A may not-do G** | **and A must do S1** |
| **therefore, A may not-do S1** | **therefore, A must do G** |

In everyday discourse by religious Jews, we find the term mitzvah used in a loose, broad sense covering any good deed or proper restraint, which will get you brownie points. However, in the context of the doctrine that there are **613 Mitzvot** for the Jews, or of the doctrine of **7 Mitzvot** for the Bnei Noach (non-Jews), the term acquires more restricted senses, which are also not quite the same in each system. This phenomenon will now be explained, because it is rather

interesting from the logicians' point of view and rather special to Jewish (or Jewish-style) law.

Formal logic deals in meaningful grammatical sentences, each of which symbolizes some phenomenal appearance, be it concrete or abstract, material or mental, empirical or hypothetical, real or illusory. Viewed in this broad-minded way, even the subjective is objective, and logic is at all times open to all candidates to membership in the body of knowledge it seeks to gradually construct. Every event has a great many facets and a great many levels, which are interconnected in a great many ways. Each of these innumerable phenomena, each phenomenon within or next to every other, may be represented for conceptual purposes through verbal propositions; but many objects of perceptual experience or of insight are never verbalized.

In this flexible perspective, it would be absurd and arbitrary to try and dogmatically *enumerate* 'laws' of any kind, and say "there are N laws of nature in such and such a field" (e.g. Three Laws of Thermodynamics) or "there are M moral laws to follow in such and such a situation" (e.g. Seven Cardinal Sins). The enumeration would have to capture all the propositions, *at a certain same level*, which are true and from which all others relating to the topic concerned can be inferred; and it would claim a certain finality.

Such an ultra-rationalistic logistic programme, which is still found among modern logicians with Cartesian inclinations, takes no account of the moment-by-moment import of empirical data which occurs in practice. Such gradual input is bound to affect, not only the applications of laws, but their very bases and contents.

One may, in any science or body of knowledge, identify certain larger principles, however arrived at, as dominating the remaining data, in a way resembling the deductive relationship between axioms and theorems; but every wise thinker keeps in mind the inductive sources of the whole, and remains pragmatic in his approach. All this to say: rigidly *counting* 'laws' would be a very artificial procedure, particularly if one insisted on ***adhering to a given number***. Yet this is found in Jewish law, and predictably affects not only its content, but its form.

Thus it is that different Rabbis will agree *that* there are 613 Mitzvot for Jews, or 7 Mitzvot for non-Jews, in accordance with Talmudic traditions, but will disagree somewhat regarding *which* commandments precisely are to be included in or excluded from the list concerned! So long as they arrive at the correct total, even superficially, they retain a certain legitimacy; whereas a system which refused to recognize the magic number, insisting on an irreducibly larger or smaller number, would from the outset be eliminated. An additional given is that there be **248 positive Mitzvot and 365 negative Mitzvot**[7]. My purpose here is not to criticize such an approach, but to emphasize the logical specificities it generates.

> Still, it is interesting to note that the number 613 [*TaRYaG*, in Hebrew] is only based, so far as I know, on one passing mention in *Maccot* 23b, quoting Rabbi

[7] Said to correspond to the 248 bones of our bodies and 365 days of the year, and implying the necessity to involve all one's faculties all the time to service of God. (I do not know if our bodies really have precisely 248 bones; as for 365 days, that is a round number, corrected in leap years.)

> Simlai, and the Talmud has no one-by-one enumeration of these Mitzvot. One explanation of the number that I have read somewhere is that it consists of the sum of: 2 for the first two of the Ten Commandments, which the Children of Israel heard at Sinai directly from God; plus 611, which is the gematria of the word TORaH (T=400, O=6, R=200, H=5), which were received by them indirectly through Moshe. Whether this explanation was constructed *ex post facto*, or was the original reason for the number, I do not know.

One cannot, in such a context, count *just any* mitzvah (ethical sentence) as a Mitzvah (note my use of a capital M). Only certain mitzvot qualify for the honor, and their ability to do so is mainly traditional (for instance, they are in the list proposed by the Rambam in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*, or that in the *Sefer HaChinukh*). One cannot strictly say that these laws, known as *av* (father) mitzvot, are all at the same conceptual level; nor that they taken together will allow the strictly deductive inference of all other laws, though many are indeed inferable (in which case they are called *toledot* [descendants]). Thus, the enumeration has no natural basis; it is an imposed structure.

To some extent, then, the Mitzvot are a grab-bag; which perhaps reflects the complexities of the world to which they are intended to apply. Whereas from the point of view of formal logic (and indeed for codes of law like the *Shulchan Arukh*, as mentioned below), any individual injunction, be it categorical or conditional, imperative or otherwise, would count as an ethical sentence (mitzvah), a traditional Mitzvah (*av* mitzvah) may consist of a cluster of such sentences, in

conjunction or in disjunction, explicit or implicit. Perhaps most mitzvot are implied in the Mitzvot; but in all honesty, strictly-speaking, one cannot claim that all are: many details are contributed by tradition or later Rabbinic decisions, and many vary from community to community.

To give an example at random. In Exod. 20:12, "honor your father and your mother", two distinct items are listed (rather than just "parents"), and yet they count as one law. Sometimes, the composition is more complicated: for instance, Deut. 25:3, "Forty strikes may he give him, not more", prescribes the giving of strikes, permits up to 40 of them, and forbids more than forty, all in one and the same sentence. It is not always easy to predict and understand how and why the Rabbis split some sentences into two or more separate Mitzvot, while they kept others, or fused some, as single Mitzvot.

> More broadly, let us remark that in some cases, sentences which intuitively might have been considered as laws, end-up rejected by Rabbinic decision; whereas, sentences which might at first sight have seemed incidental story-telling end-up as laws. All this has to be explained on a case-by-case basis, with reference to the relevant Talmudic and post-Talmudic discussions; there is no sweeping justification. The oral tradition also stretches and delimits laws, stating how far they are applicable and detailing their exceptions.

If now we turn our attention from such numerical systems to the developed law-system of the *Shulchan Arukh*, we see that the latter is concerned with listing all the mitzvot (small m), without attempting to count them, which are generally

accepted as Halakhah, and even many subcultural traditions (*minhagim*). While the Code of 613 Mitzvot is by definition exclusive, the *Shulchan Arukh* is rather an attempt at exhaustiveness (and a degree of order, for currently relevant laws at least). It is clear that one cannot expect to mechanically derive the thousands of nuances in casuistry of the *Shulchan Arukh* from the 613 Mitzvot. Rather, the 613 could be regarded as heads of chapters, which signify certain collections of mitzvot of varying importance and consensus.

Furthermore, as Aaron Lichtenstein has ably shown in his *The Seven Laws of Noah*, the term Mitzvah does not have quite the same denotation or connotations in the legal code of 613 Mitzvot and in that of 7 Mitzvot. There are parallels and genetic relations between these systems, but there are also some radical differences and differences of detail. Here again, then, the term 'mitzvah' has a varying meaning (even after the elucidation of about 66 equivalences between the two systems proposed by Lichtenstein, as he himself argues).

The concept of 'chapter-heads', rather than 'top principles from which all others are inferred', is also made evident in this work: in the list of Noachic laws, the titles tend to describe an *extreme negative behavior pattern* (for instance, eating a limb off a live animal), without apparently limiting itself to it, i.e. without precluding other proscribed behaviors and even prescribed positive behavior patterns (in the case at hand, against other forms of cruelty to animals and for kindness to them).

We see from the foregoing discussion that the counting of mitzvot is no simple matter.

## 4. Commanded vs. Personal Morality

According to Judaism, a person has greater merit for doing a good deed if he was commanded by God to do it, than if he merely voluntarily took it upon himself to do it. Indeed, in some instances (for instance, shaking the *lulav* when it is not the festival of Succoth), doing the deed without having been commanded to is useless and gains one no credit; in some instances (as in the case of presumptive keeping of the Sabbath by a non-Jew), it is even counterproductive and punishable.

Ethics, in this perspective, is not 'universal' in the sense of uniform for all - but may vary from group to group or even among individuals. Thus, Jews may have one set of rules, non-Jews another; Israelites, Levites and Kohens may be subject to different rules, as may relatively volunteer classes of individuals, like 'nazirites', judges (within a Beit-Din, or religious court) or kings; men, women, and children need not have the same obligations, restrictions and liberties; prophets or kings may receive very personal orders; and so forth. Not only may rules vary from population to population, but reward and punishment may likewise vary, accordingly.

I see no logical difficulty in this viewpoint, in the sense that I have never agreed with the Kantian idea that the moral is necessarily reciprocal and universal. Deontology, the general logic of ethical forms, cannot be presumed to consist simplistically of exclusively categorical ethical-mode statements, but must consider a complex intertwining of conditional statements. Just as the non-ethical aspect of

nature displays diversity and conditionality, as well as some uniformity and categoricality - so may the ethical aspect of nature (to the extent that it exists), and all the more so God-given ethics, display these various modalities.

Furthermore, in both natural and religious ethics, conditioning may be of any category and type of modality: it may be extensional (schematically: 'in the case of this class of people, thusly; in all other cases, otherwise'), natural/temporal (e.g. 'when a *nazir* eats a certain quantity of grapes, then he is subject to certain penalties'), or even epistemic (i.e. 'if a person was aware of so and so, he is responsible for such and such; alternatively, not'). The search for absolutes (for an ethic which can be proved with certainty) must not be confused with a pursuit of categoricals.

Of course, where no truly convincing cause for discrimination is available, one is logically bound to revert to the idea of reciprocity and universality (known to philosophers as the Principle of Uniformity of Indistinguishables). Such positivism or minimalism is often justified and inevitable, at least within a natural knowledge framework; and indeed it is applied in the religious context, where the text of reference has not specified any distinctions to be made. For in such cases, legal differentiation between people and lack of equity (equality before the law) would be arbitrary and unjustifiable.

But, where religious ethics is concerned, our attitude is that if God, the Creator of all fact, including ethical fact, chooses to subdivide responsibilities and structure reward and punishment in uneven ways, and communicates His will in this respect to us, that is His prerogative, and we are bound to comply. The reason for this attitude is not necessarily that

there exists a cause for discrimination invisible to us though visible to God (though in some cases, this may be true), but that God is free to assign different functions and wages to His various workers, however indistinguishable they be in their natural or spiritual characteristics. He is the Boss.

> However, the said viewpoint is difficult to accept, at another level, for someone in modern democratic western society, at a time in history and in places where the experience of the totalitarian oriental or medieval monarch has thankfully virtually disappeared. Our society is very permissive and liberal (and nevertheless, thank God, it is not totally and extremely amoral or immoral, and is even in many respects more moral than ever before). This stance is the product of a development, which has even been noticeable within the space of my own lifetime, but has its roots far in the Enlightenment (including, to some extent, Immanuel Kant, but many others too) and subsequent philosophical and political events.
>
> It is hard for us to accept, as the paradigm of morality, the behavior-pattern of a frightened slave, doing his assigned duties with nothing in it for his or her self, simply because the master commanded it threateningly, thinking only as far as necessary to fulfill the command, and so forth. We want to understand things more, we expect fairness more. Selfless submission and pure obedience seem to us to be remote theoretical constructs, inventions of austere and insensitive moralists; they no longer seem so

beautiful and ideal. Such attitudes must be taken into consideration.

What I want to discuss here is whether an externally imposed course of action, Divinely commanded, to be sure, but done in the way of a duty, is morally higher, as norm-setting Judaism seems to suggest - or whether a person is more credibly moral who acts from a deep internal intuition of right and wrong, spontaneously, without being forced to, out of genuine love for the world, for fellow creatures, and for God. More simply put, the question is really: who is the nicer guy, the one who gives you charity or who doesn't kill you, just because he has been so commanded - or the one who gives you charity or who doesn't kill you, because he himself loves you?

Bound with this issue is that of the actual psychology of religious study and observance, which suggests that the answer to our question varies from case to case. For there is surely a difference, for the most part, between the motivations religion ideally demands of its adherents in theory, and those which actually move them in practice. And while religion views this gap hopefully as a passing phase, which it is precisely the job of study and observance to close - we must linger on it more attentively. We must ask, what *in fact* makes most religious people act as they do, i.e. in apparent accordance with the precepts of the religion.

And the reply cannot be that such people have at the outset the same value-judgments as the religion. It may be that they do, if they happen to have been culturally prepared since youth to that effect, though this does not prove that under other influences they would not have acquired other values and convictions. But in any case, new arrivals to the religion,

whether Jews doing *teshuvah* (return) or *gerim* (converts), while they may have out of personal life-experience acquired some values and convictions in common with those proposed by the religion - enough to draw them to it - new arrivals, I say, are systematically *acculturated* and made to acquire desires and beliefs they previously lacked.

Thus, while the initial motives drawing a new arrival may have been the desire to escape painful experiences, like loneliness and confusion, or more positively the desire to gain an edge in a competitive world by receiving the favor of the Ruler of the world, or perhaps even simply getting material help from the Jewish community - the religion induces new, additional desires in the newcomer, as its condition for belonging to the group, which may include various material, psychological, familial, national, political and spiritual desires. For example, the newcomer may have no initial interest in the world to come or the messiah, but the religion gradually makes him believe these are his own most fervent wishes, and even that they always have been.

Objectively speaking, at any given time in a person's spiritual development, some aspects of his indoctrination have become internalized, and others are still essentially at an artificial level of pretense or mimicry, while yet other aspects are still being rejected. Whereas in the case of role-play a distinction is possible between the subject and his response or behavior pattern, in the case of an internalized doctrine such an objective distinction is rather difficult to make. The difference between traits and habits acquired, on the one hand through the natural process we call "experience", and on the other hand through the social process we call "indoctrination", becomes at some point academic - except

insofar as or to the extent that the method of influence used involved violence or conscious lies, so that the subject was forced or tricked rather than a voluntary participant.

Similar doubts exist even with regard to the person motivated to virtue by non-religious forces. While good deeds (or restraints), like acts of charity (or non-violence), may have external resemblances, their internal roots vary widely, from mean and ugly ulterior motives to beautiful, uplifting examples of sincere human love and siblinghood. It would be unfair to assume only negative subtexts, and naive to suppose only positive ones.

For these reasons, it is not clear to me why some Rabbis insist that good deeds (or restraints) based on purely secular motives are automatically suspect. I find it hard to believe that human nature is intrinsically evil and lowly, when without explicit Divine guidance. Rather, I think that humans have an innate minimum of morality, expressed in various ways and different in degree from person to person, which it is difficult for them to fall below. Often, to be sure, an individual's 'minimum of morality', the limits he/she will not pass no matter what the stress or temptation, has cultural roots (which may indeed be ultimately religious), but it is there all the same.

A conformity, however superficial, with the law (whether the 7 Mitzvot for non-Jews or the 613 Mitzvot for Jews), is still respectable, even though deeper accord with the spirit of the law is always more admirable. The Rabbis argue that when a law exists (or, rather, is known or thought to exist) the 'evil impulse' to resist it is greater, and therefore the obedience of the law is all the more commendable; whereas, actions (or inactions) performed against no such resistance are almost

worthless. This may explain why one should rather do right in obedience of a law (applicable to one) than for personal motives, or why a person to whom the law was applicable is more creditable than a person to whom it was not, though both obey it. But in my opinion such argument has only comparative force, it cannot be taken to the extreme.

In brief, even though we can formulate a typology of the more desirable and the less desirable motivations, differences between motivations are in practice often blurred and moot, and it is difficult to judge without prejudicial type-casting just where each person stands.

A person who is well-practiced in the art of self-knowledge may in the limit have a good idea of his/her own motivations; but understanding other people is much more difficult and mostly a guessing game. For our judgment is highly colored by our level of tolerance and love, for ourselves and others. People who habitually judge themselves too harshly will tend to judge others just as or even more harshly; those who are overly complacent with themselves may either be equally so with others (to excuse themselves) or nevertheless judgmental towards others (using double standards).

The true conclusion is that human beings are not like material objects, definitely this or definitely that, their character traits are indefinite - a ‘was somewhat’, a ‘seeming to become’, a ‘tending to be’, rather than a being. It is not always clear just what they are - not merely to us, the subjective or objective observers, but in reality, in fact.

> While on the subject of harsh judgment, I would like to comment on an indecent mode of thought some religious people engage in. I refer to the tacit

suspicion of every victim, if not every sufferer. They think: 'if God is just, then every victim/sufferer must have committed some crime/sin in the past for which he/she is thus punished'[8]. In this view, there are no *innocent* victims/sufferers, and all pity is misplaced, all compassion gratuitous; misfortune becomes *proof of* hidden fault!

It does not seem credible that God would use a criminal's misdeed as His instrument for the punishment of the victim: that would imply that, even while condemning such crime, He is in a way an instigator or accomplice of it, and the criminal is in the service of justice! No: crime must be viewed as a person's initiative, entirely disapproved of by God. God may *ex post facto* balance the victim's ledger a bit, but He had no need of the crime for that. We might more credibly regard natural misfortunes as God's doings for purposes of justice; but even that is, I think, simplistic. Just as God *lets* crimes take place, so (or all the more so) He *lets* natural misfortunes occur.

Sufferings suggest *a distance* taken by God, letting the human drama unfold within certain parameters, usually without interference. (Why such negligence and how to reconcile it with justice, I do not know.) There are *some* evident causal connections between

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[8] There are hints of this view in the Talmud. In Hindu/Buddhist philosophy, the argument refers to 'karma', and presumes a victim to have committed a *similar* crime in a past life, if not the present one. But this presupposes an infinite regression; crime must have started somewhere, sometime.

sufferings and previous misdeeds, but very often (as e.g. with the *Shoah*) credible explanations are lacking. Balancing of accounts must be a later matter, after life (if at all). That seems to be the only empirical and reasonable viewpoint.

# 2. CHAPTER TWO

Drawn from *Buddhist Illogic* 2002),
Chapter 9.

## KARMIC LAW

### 1. Karmic Law Denied

Finally, let us consider Nagarjuna's comments on the moral principle of 'karma' (as we commonly call it). **He denies karmic law – for him, "necessary connections between good deeds and rewards, and bad deeds and punishments" are, as Cheng describes[9], "not objective laws in nature and society, but subjective projections of the mind".** This is of course not an argument, but a statement, so his reasoning cannot be evaluated. The statement is notable, considering the context of Indian and Buddhist belief. And again, Nagarjuna makes this statement, not out of a desire to oppose normative Buddhism, but in an attempt to be consistent with his own overall philosophical

[9] See p. 88. Cheng there refers to MT XVII:1-33, XXIV:18, and *Hui-cheng-lun*, 72, as well as to TGT II.

programme of consciousness beyond reason, the ‘middle way’.

## 2. Empirical Observations

I will take this opportunity to make a few comments of my own regarding karma. The claim that there is moral order in the world is partly, but only partly, based on empirical grounds. Without prejudice as to what constitutes morality, we can agree that certain actions have certain consequences, and that some of those actions and consequences happen to be morally orderly by our standards. The ‘actions’ referred to are actions of a person; the so-called ‘consequences’ referred to are things happening to that person beyond his control.

It so happens that sometimes a person who has acted in a way he (or an observer) considers ‘good’ (e.g. being kind to others, or whatever) is soon after or much later a recipient of something he (or the observer) considers ‘positive’ for himself (e.g. health or children or wealth, whatever). Similarly, a ‘bad’ action may be followed by ‘negative’ events. In some of those cases, a causal relation may be *empirically* established between the ‘action’ and ‘consequence’, without appeal to a moral principle. For instance, the man works hard and prospers. Such cases can be considered evidence in favor of a karmic law. In other cases, however, the causal relation is *merely assumed* to occur subterraneously, because it is not empirically evident that such ‘action’ produces such ‘consequence’. For instance, the man gives charity and prospers. It would be begging the question to use cases of the latter sort as evidence in favor of

karmic law, since it is only by assuming karmic law that we interpret the events as causally connected.

Furthermore, it so happens that sometimes, despite good actions, no positive consequences are forthcoming or only negative ones follow; or despite bad actions, no negative consequences are forthcoming or only positive ones follow. The saint suffers and the evil man enjoys. These cases are all empirical evidence *against* karmic law, granting the value judgments involved, since we are not assuming karmic law to establish the causal relations between such actions and so-called consequences (be they happenstance or evidently produced by the actions). Of course, one might mitigate this conclusion somewhat, by stating that one has to know all the life of a person because no one only suffers and no one only enjoys, and that anyway it is difficult to estimate the merits of a good deed or demerits of a bad deed.

## 3. Inductive Conclusions

Thus, whereas karmic law might be viewed as a generalization from the cases where actions are empirically causally connected to consequences, it cannot be inferred from the cases where such connection is not established without presuming karmic law, and it is belied by the cases where the order of things predicted by karmic law is not matched in experience. In order to nevertheless justify karmic law, religions may introduce the concept of rebirth, on earth as a human or other creature, or elsewhere, in heaven or in hell, suggesting that if the accounts do not balance within the current lifetime, they do in the long run balance. But again,

since we have no empirical evidence of such transmigration and the process is anyway very vaguely described, such argument begs the question, making the assumption of karmic law superficially more palatable, but not providing clear concept or inductive proof of it.

Some might hang on to karmic law all the same, by arguing that what we have been calling good or bad, or positive or negative, was wrongly so called. These postulate that a set of moral standards, of virtue and value, might be found, that exactly coincide with empirically evident causal processes, or at least which are not belied by such processes. Good luck.

> But what bothers me most about the assumption of karmic law is this: *it logically implies that whoever suffers must have previously done evil*. For instance, the millions of Jews (including children) murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. This seems to me an unforgivable injustice – it is an assertion that *there are no innocent victims of crime* and that *criminals are effectively agents of justice*! Thus, in the name of morality, in the name of moral order – merely to satisfy a 'rationalist' impulse to uphold a 'law of karma' – justice is *turned upside-down* and made to accuse the innocent and exonerate the guilty. Clearly, the idea of karmic law is inherently illogical. We have to conclude that the world functions differently than such a principle implies.

We seem to have reached, with regard to karma, the same negative conclusion as Nagarjuna, though perhaps through a different argument. If there is no karmic law, is there then no need for liberation, no utility to virtue and meditation? It does not follow. Even if souls come and go, like bubbles in water,

it may be good for them to realize their true nature while they are around. ‘Virtue is its own reward’ and the benefits of meditation are obvious to anyone engaged in it.

# 3. CHAPTER THREE

Drawn from *Phenomenology* (2003),
Chapter 9.4 and Appendix 2.

## 1. Harmonizing Justice and Mercy

Just as God's existence cannot be proved (or disproved), so also His attributes cannot definitively be proved (or disproved). If an attribute could be proved, that to which it is attributed would of necessity also be proved. (If all attributes could be disproved, there would be no subject left.) We may however admit as conceivable attributes that have been found internally coherent and consistent with all known facts and postulates to date. (Conversely, we may reject an attribute as being incoherently conceived or as incompatible with another, more significant principle, or again as empirically doubtful.)

Among the many theological concepts that need sorting out are those of justice and mercy[10]. Justice and Mercy: what is their border and what is their relationship?

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10 This essay was written in 1997, save for some minor editing today. Reading it now, a few years later, I find it unnecessarily aggressive in tone. I was obviously angry for personal reasons at the time of its writing. Nevertheless, I see no point in toning it down today.

Mercy is by definition injustice – an acceptable form of injustice, said to temper justice, render it more humane and limit its excesses. But many of the things we call mercy are in fact justice. Often when we ask (or pray) for mercy, we are merely asking not to be subjected to injustice, i.e. to undeserved suffering or deprivation of well-being.

Justice is giving a person his due, either rewarding his virtues or punishing his vices. Asking (or praying) for either of these things is strictly-speaking not a request for mercy, but a demand for justice.

So, what is mercy? A greater reward than that due (i.e. a gift) or a lesser punishment than that due (i.e. partly or wholly forgiving or healing after punishing). In the positive case, no real harm done – provided the due rewards of others are not diminished thereby. In the negative case, no real harm done – provided there were no victims to the crime.

An excess of mercy would be injustice. Insufficient punishment of a criminal is an injustice to victim(s) of the crime. Dishing out gifts without regard to who deserves what implies an unjust system.

But in any case, this initial view of moral law is incomplete. Retribution of crime is a very imperfect form of justice. True justice is not mere punishment of criminals after the vile deed is done, but *prevention* of the crime. Our indignation toward God or a social/political/judicial system stems not merely from the fact that criminals often remain unpunished and their victims unavenged, but from the fact that the crime was at all allowed to be perpetrated when it could have been inhibited. In the case of the fallible and ignorant human protectors of justice, this is sometimes (though not always)

inevitable, so they can be excused. But in the case of God, who is all-knowing and all-powerful, this is a source of great distress and doubt to those who love justice.

There are, we usually say, two kinds of crime: those with victims and those without. The latter include crimes whose victim is the criminal himself (they are his own problem), or eventually crimes against God (who, being essentially immune to harm, and in any case quite capable of defending His own interests, need not deeply concern us here). With regard to crimes with victims, our concern is with humans or animals wrongfully hurt in some way. The harm may be direct/personal (physical and/or mental – or in relation to relatives or property, which ultimately signify mental and/or physical harm to self) or indirect/impersonal (on the environment or on society – but these too ultimately signify an impact on people or animals).

A truly just world system would require God's prevention of all crime with innocent victims, at least – which He does not in fact do, judging by all empirical evidence, which is why many people honestly doubt His justice or His existence. To say (as some people do) that the failure to prevent undeserved harm of innocents is mercy towards the criminals, giving them a chance to repent, is a very unsatisfying response. It doesn't sound so nice when you consider that it was 'unmerciful' (i.e. *unjust*) to the victims: they were given no chance. Perhaps, then, if not in a context of prevention, the concept of mercy has some place in the context of *ex post facto* non-retribution.

Avenging the victims of crime seems like a rather useless, emotional response – too late, if the victim is irreversibly harmed (maimed, killed, etc.). If the victim were not

irreversibly harmed, his restoration and compensation would seem the most important thing, preferably at the expense of the criminal. But we know that vengeance also to some degree serves preventive purpose: discouraging similar acts by other potential criminals (raising the eventual price of crime for them) or educating actual criminals (so they hopefully do not repeat their misdeeds). To be 'merciful' to actual criminals with victims is therefore not merely to abstain from a useless emotional response, but to participate in eventual repetitions, of similar crimes by the same criminal or others like him.

It must be stressed that taking into account extenuating circumstances is not an act of mercy, but definitely an act of justice. Not to take into account the full context in formulating a judgment is stupidity and injustice. Perhaps the concept of mercy was constructed only to combat imperfectly constructed judicial systems, incapable of distinguishing between nuances of motive and forces. The law says so and so without making distinctions and is to be applied blindly without variation – therefore, 'mercy', an apparently 'irrational' exception to the law, is necessary! It would not be necessary if the law were more precisely and realistically formulated. Thusly, as well for allegedly Divine law systems as for admittedly human law systems. If the system and those who apply it are narrow-minded and inhumane, of course you need 'mercy' – but otherwise, not.

Another way the concept of mercy is used is in wish or prayer. We hope that the 'powers that be' (Divine or human) will indeed give us our due, rewarding our good efforts or preventing or punishing our enemies' evil deeds, even though this is not always the case in this imperfect world. Such calls

to mercy are a form of *realpolitik* – they are not really calls for injustice, but calls for justice clothed in humble words designed to avoid a more fundamental and explicit criticism the failure of true justice of the powers-that-be. Again, if absolute justice were instituted, there would be no need for such appeals to 'mercy'; the right would be automatically done. Well, human justice is inevitably deficient: even with the best of intention and will, people are neither omniscient nor infallible, so uncertainty and even error are inevitable, and in such context 'mercy' is perhaps a useful concept.

But in the case of God, what excuses can we give? How can we justify for Him the imperfection of the world? We try to do so with reference to freewill – justice presupposes responsibility, which presupposes freedom of choice. But this argument is not fully convincing, for we can dig deeper and say: if the world *couldn't* be made just, why was it made *at all*? Or if it had to be made, why not a world of universal and unvarying bliss – who ever said that freewill was required? For this question there seems to be no answer, and it is the ultimate basis of the complaint of theodicy. The counter-claims of ultimate justice – causes of seemingly unjust reward or punishment invisible to humans, balancing of accounts later or in a reincarnation or in an afterlife – seem lame too. If justice is invisible it is also unjust, and justice later is too late since for the intervening time injustice is allowed to exist. So we are left perplex.

Even when we see two equally good men unequally treated, one rewarded as he deserves and the other given better than he deserves, or two equally bad men unequally mistreated, our sense of justice is piqued. All the more so when the one with more free gifts is less deserving than the one with less

free gifts. And all the more so still when the bad is not only not punished but given gifts and the good not only not rewarded but mistreated. For then all effort toward the good and away from the bad is devaluated and rendered vain. If there is no logic in the system of payment, then what incentives have we? Certainly, the resultant effect is not to marvel at the love and mercy of the payer, but rather at the injustice and lack of love that such chaotic distribution implies.

Perhaps then we should ask – what is good and what is bad? Perhaps it is our misconception of these things that gives us a false sense that injustice roams the world. The way to answer that is to turn the question around, and ask: should we construct our concepts of good and bad empirically, by simply judging as good all actions which seem to result in rewards and bad all actions which seem to result in punishment (the 'market' value of good or bad.)? Such a pragmatic approach (which some people find convenient, until they bear the brunt of it themselves) is surely contrary to humanity's intuitions. For in such case, criminals become defenders of justice (*justiciers*) and victimization should always be a source of rejoicing for us. This is the antithesis of morality, which is based on human compassion towards those who suffer indignities and indignation towards those who commit indecencies. These intuitions must be respected and supported, against all claims of religion or ideology or special interests.

Some say there are no innocent victims – implying (for example) that even those who perished in the Holocaust must have been guilty of some *commensurate* crime, in a previous lifetime if not in the current one. Some say there are no

culprits – for instance, many Buddhists apparently hold this view, with reference to karmic law. These propositions are two sides of the same coin. As soon as you have a doctrine of perfect justice, divine or natural, you stumble into this pitfall. Only by admitting the imperfection of justice in the world can we become sensitive to the undeserved sufferings of people (others' or one's own).

## 2. Feelings of Emptiness

There is another sense of the term "emptiness" to consider, one not unrelated to the senses previously discussed. We all have some experience of *emotional* emptiness.

One of the most interesting and impressive contributions to psychology by Buddhism, in my view, is its emphasis on the *vague enervations* we commonly feel, such as discomfort, restlessness or doubt, as important motives of human action. Something seems to be wanting, missing, urging us to do something about it.

> These negative emotions, which I label feelings of emptiness, are a cause or expression of *samsaric* states of mind. This pejorative sense of "emptiness" is not to be confused with the contrary "emptiness" identified with *nirvana*. However, they may be related, in that the emotions in question may be essentially a sort of vertigo upon glimpsing the void.[11]

11 These emotions are classified as forms of "suffering" (*dukkha*) and "delusion" (*moha*). According to Buddhist commentators, instead of floating with natural confidence on the

Most people often feel this "hole" inside themselves, an unpleasant inner vacuity or hunger, and pass much of their time desperately trying to shake it off, frantically looking for palliatives. At worst, they may feel like "a non-entity", devoid of personal identity. Different people (or a person at different times) may respond to this lack of identity, or moments of boredom, impatience, dissatisfaction or uncertainty, in different ways. (Other factors come into play, which determine just which way.)

> Many look for useless distractions, calling it "killing time"; others indulge in self-destructive activities. Some get the munchies; others smoke cigarettes, drink liquor or take drugs. Some watch TV; others talk a lot and say nothing; others still, prefer shopping or shoplifting. Some get angry, and pick a quarrel with their spouse or neighbors, just to have something to do, something to rant and rave about; others get into political violence or start a war. Some get melancholic, and complain of loneliness or unhappiness; others speak of failure, depression or anxiety. Some masturbate; others have sex with everyone; others rape someone. Some start worrying about their physical health; others go to a psychiatrist. Some become sports fanatics; others get entangled in consuming psychological, philosophical, spiritual or religious pursuits. Some become workaholics; others

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"original ground" of consciousness as it appears, a sort panic occurs giving rise to efforts to establish more concrete foundations. To achieve this end, we resort to sensory, sensual, sentimental or even sensational pursuits.

sleep all day or try to sink into oblivion somehow. And so on.

As this partial and disorderly catalogue shows, everything we consider stupidity or sin, all the ills of our psyche and society, or most or many, could be attributed to this vague, often "subconsciously" experienced, negative emotion of emptiness and our urge to "cure" it however we can. We stir up desires, antipathies or anxieties, compulsions, obsessions or depression, in a bid to comprehend and smother this suffering of felt emptiness. We furnish our time with thoughts like: "I think I am falling in love" or "this guy really bugs me" or "what am I going to do about this or that?" or "I have to do (or not to do) so and so". It is all indeed "much ado about nothing".

If we generalize from many such momentary feelings, we may come to the conclusion that "life has no meaning". That, to quote William Shakespeare:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*
*That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*
*And then is heard no more: it is a tale*
*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*
*Signifying nothing.*

Macbeth (act V, scene 5).

Of course, we can and often do also react more positively, and give our life more constructive meaning. I believe this

becomes possible *once we are able to recognize this internal vacuum when we feel it*, and make sure we do not react to it in any of the negative ways we unconsciously tend to react. Once we understand that this feeling of emptiness cannot be overcome by such foolish means, we can begin to look for ways to enjoy life, through personal growth, healthy activities, helping others, learning, creativity, productiveness, and so forth.

Regular meditation is a good remedy. Sitting quietly for long periods daily makes it easier to become and remain aware of emotional emptiness when it appears. Putting such recurring bad feelings into perspective gradually frees us from them. They just seem fleeting, weak and irrelevant. Life then becomes a celebration of time: we profit from the little time we have in it to make something nice out of it.

# 4. CHAPTER FOUR

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 3.

## FURTHER ANALYSIS OF VOLITION

### 1. Knowledge of Volition

There is little mystery left as to how to theoretically define causation and how we get to establish it in practice. A mixture of epistemological and ontological issues is involved, which are resolved with relative ease. Causation in general may be expressed in terms of conditional propositions, or more profoundly with reference to matricial analysis. And particular causative relations can be established inductively, by observation of conjunctions and separations of events and their negations, and appropriate generalizations and particularizations.

Not so easy for volition. Many philosophers and psychologists are discouraged by the difficulties surrounding the concept of volition (or will). How is it known? How can it be defined in general? How are particular acts of will apprehended? How can we prove they belong to the agent, are his responsibility? How to conceive freedom of the will,

let alone prove it? And so forth. But a thinker should not despair too early. We can gradually build up our reflection on the subject, and hope to clarify issues.

As earlier suggested, volition – unlike causation – cannot entirely be defined by means of hypothetical (if–then) propositions. However, we can *partially* delimit volition that way, as follows.

First, we focus on volition as the presumed 'causal' relation between an agent (soul) and certain events in or around him (called events of will), whatever be the exact form of that relation. That relation may intuitively be assumed to be *other than* causation, though some causation may be involved in it. A general causative statement "without an agent, there would be no volition" can be invoked to show partial involvement of causation.

Second, we point out that without that *particular* agent, those particular events would not – indeed could not – occur; they are reserved for that soul, it is irreplaceable in their genesis. This may be expressed as a conditional proposition: "**if not this particular soul, then not those particular events**". The latter just means that the agent concerned (as an individual, and not just as an instance of a kind) is a *sine qua non* of the particular events (presumed 'of will') under scrutiny.

However, while the soul is thus a necessary causative of the events, it does not causatively necessitate them, i.e. it is not a *complete* causative of them. For it is clear that, in what we call volition, the soul is not

invariably followed by those events (the presumed events of will), but remains at all times – till they do occur – also compatible with their negations. That is to say, with regard to causation, the compound conditional proposition "**if this soul, not-then these events and not-then their negations**" is true[12].

However – and therein lies the mystery of volition – we intuit that the agent *alone* does somehow 'make necessary' or 'completely cause' the events concerned *when they do occur*. At that time, the proposition "if this soul, then these events" becomes effectively true, although such a change of 'natural law' is not possible under the relation called causation. Therefore, some other category of causality must be involved in such cases, which we call volition.

That is about as far as we can get into a definition by means of ordinary conditional propositions. We can delimit the concept of volition to a large extent, and clearly distinguish it from causation, but that is still not enough to fully specify its formal structure. We can, however, go further by other means, step by step, as we shall see by and by.

Certain epistemological questions can be answered readily. To begin with, as I have argued in *Phenomenology*, the raw data for the concept of volition has to be personal 'intuitions' – in the sense of direct experience, self-knowledge – of one's own particular acts of will.

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[12] The "if–not-then" form of hypothetical, I remind the reader, is the exact contradictory of the "if–then" form. It simply means that the consequent "*does not follow*" the antecedent.

Will has no phenomenal qualities: it should not be confused with its phenomenal products in the mental or material domains; volition cannot therefore be an abstraction from material or mental experiences. We evidently know introspectively – at least in some cases, when we make the effort of honest introspection – when we have willed, and what we have willed, and even the effort involved, i.e. to what degree we have willed. Such *particular* intuitions of will in the present tense give rise to the abstraction of will, i.e. the concept of volition.

Thus, the conception of volition is an ordinary inductive process, except that its experienced instances are not phenomenal percepts but intuitions. This of course does not tell us the definition of volition as a causal relation. But it does tell us that there is something to discuss and define, as in the above initial attempt.

But of course, we do not only assign volition to ourselves, but we assume it in other people (some of us assume it further in other animals[13], and also in God). Here, the thought

[13] As I write, it is mid-February, and almost every day, as I drink my morning coffee, I watch a pair of magpies not ten meters away, enacting a ritual. Each in turn tears a twig off the tree they are perched on, and places it precariously on the same branch for a moment, letting it eventually fall. They are, evidently, not yet trying to build a nest; rather, they seem to be making common plans, coming to an agreement as to where they intend to do it when the time is ripe. I even once saw them rehearsing feeding, with one bird pretending to put a small nut into the other's beak. They, supposedly the same birds, actually started building their nest in late March. What I thought was rehearsal of feeding may have been that of cementing, because I saw that they bring each other what seems to be mud pellets that are stuffed between twigs. Anyone observing animals cannot but suppose they are able to

involved is more intricate. A person knows from his own experience which externally visible actions of his are due to will (and which are not) – for example, moving one's arm (as distinct from having it moved by someone or something). Having recorded the descriptions and conditions of willed (and unwilled) externally visible actions, we can by generalization assume that, when we see the same external behavior in others, we can infer a similar internal behavior in them.

In other words, whereas with regard to ourselves, we know the cause first and thereafter observe its effects, with regard to other agents, we infer the cause from the observed effect, by analogy.

Of course, none of this implies omniscience, either of our own acts, and much less of others' acts. Sometimes, we have difficulties discerning our will – for instance, what we really wanted, or whether we acted voluntarily or involuntarily. Introspection is not always successful, especially if one has the habit of keeping one's inner life murky and inaccessible to scrutiny. Sometimes, even if one is sincere and transparent, contradictory subliminal forces are at play, causing confusion in us. All the more so, with respect to other people: we may not have all the evidence at hand allowing us to draw a conclusion. What we observe of their behavior may be only a partial picture, leaving us uncertain as to their intentions. And so forth; no need to go into detail at this stage.

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imagine goals and to pursue them, as well as communicate (at least by such physical demonstrations) and cooperate (effectively sharing duties).

Thus, it should be understood that in this field of knowledge, as in all others, our conclusions are ultimately inductive rather than deductive. We have a certain database – consisting of our own self-observations and all other information – and we use it, and our powers of imagination, to formulate and test hypotheses. The logic involved is similar to that in the natural sciences. The only difference is the nature and source of some of the data used: it is non-phenomenal and personally intuited. This is of course a significant ontological and epistemological difference, but once realized the issues are much simplified.

## 2. Freedom of the Will

With regard to the concept of *freedom* of the will, the following can be said at the outset.

> We can roughly define freedom of the will by saying that "**agent A is '*free*' to will or not will something (say, W) in a given set of circumstances, if neither W nor notW is inevitable in those circumstances**". This of course does not define 'will' for us; but granting the term willing (or doing, in the sense of volition) understood, its freedom is relatively definable. Note that strictly speaking it is the agent who is free, not his will.

This definition is rough, in that it does not tell us how we are to know that under *the exact same* conditions, either event W or notW is potential – since conditions are *in fact never* identical again. However, this is an epistemological issue regarding the degree of empiricism of our knowledge of

freedom. We can suggest that we have intimate knowledge (intuition) of our freedom as well as of our volition; or we may propose that freedom is known more hypothetically, by way of extrapolation from *approximately* similar conditions, i.e. by adduction. The former would be direct, particular knowledge; the latter, indirect, general knowledge.

A way to distinguish causation and volition is with reference to *identity*. In causation, the cause is viewed as being 'caused to cause' the effects it causes, by virtue of the underlying natural characteristics or essences of the entities involved; whereas in volition, the cause is 'free' – its nature or identity does not allow a hundred percent prediction of all its actions. In comparison to a deterministic entity, what distinguishes a volitional agent is such lack of definite identity.

Even the agent of volition cannot till he acts definitely predict his own acts, for he may at the last moment 'change his mind' for some reason (or even, perhaps, for no 'reason' – in which case we characterize the will as pure *whim* or caprice). The agent of volition is distinguished by creating (some of) his own identity as he proceeds. His 'identity' at any given moment is the sum of previous such creations, but they do not fully determine his next creations, his later identity. The agent of volition has a distinctively 'open-ended' nature.

A way to express the freedom of (direct) volition is by reference to *autonomy* – that is, own (auto) lawmaking (nomy)[14]. Whereas natural objects are effectively subject *to*

[14] The free agent is 'autonomous' – this term is of course not to be confused with 'autonomic' motor system, which means the opposite, referring to the functioning of certain organs without recourse to will. Descartes' term for autonomy is 'self-determination'.

law, the agent of volition (to some extent, within certain natural boundaries) makes up his own laws for himself as he proceeds. These 'laws' may be ad hoc or they may have some regularity, of course. For the agent may choose to will on a *singular* basis, or may act by instituting personal *rules*, i.e. intended longer term patterns – predictable or repetitive behavior, plans, habits, etc.

We may, in the latter case, fashionably speak of self-programming. Such temporally stretched intentions may require a discipline of will to fulfill; often, however, by presetting personal conduct, we achieve an economy of effort, as comparatively less attention may be needed to perform. Many of the rules people adopt are of course collective, interpersonal promises. Some are imposed on them; still, most are ultimately self-imposed. Even when one fails to keep such personal or social promises, they may have considerable influence on action.

Perseverance of will (in the face of difficulty of some sort, over time) may be due to a series of punctual wills, or have some real continuity. Whether punctual or persistent, acts of will vary in the intensity of awareness and reflection they invest – some are the fruit of long and careful consideration (emotional or rational), others are seemingly impetuous (though often in fact merely the end product of a long gestation of more or less conscious thought).

The distinction of the freedom inherent in volition from that of chance must be stressed. Though there is an element of spontaneity in volition, it is not the blind spontaneity of chance. On the contrary, volition is in a way even more 'deterministic' than natural law, in the sense that the causal entity (agent) does not merely react into producing some

effect (whatever is willed), but specifically chooses it out of two or more possibilities. Some awareness and intention is involved in all choice. At its most focused, choice is very conscious, with a clear goal in mind; the volitional act is normally purposive, it has an 'end' or, in Aristotelian language, a 'final cause'. Notwithstanding, we should not at the outset exclude the possibility of truly purposeless acts of volition, with a strict minimum of awareness.

Volition may be influenced in some direction rather than another by the agent's right or wrong view of the world in which he acts. But that influence is not determining: this is what we mean by freedom. You may coerce a man into doing what you want by threatening him with violence or other punishments, but even so, as experience shows, he can still disregard such threats, and even act in a suicidal manner. You may dangle great rewards under his nose, but he may still act seemingly against his own interests. Acts of will may equally well be rational or irrational, intelligent or stupid; they may be explicable by self-interest or altruism, or be quite whimsical. Their 'logic' may be sound or faulty; i.e. logic does not definitely determine them.

Another important concept is that of *degrees of freedom*. Freedom of the will is not absolute, except perhaps for God. And even in that case, He is supposedly limited by the laws of logic, and cannot create things without identity, or that both are and are-not, or that neither are nor are-not. In the case of humans, freedom of the will varies; from time to time in any individual, and from one individual to another, according to the health and structure of his or her many faculties.

Likewise, the freedom of our will is broader than the freedom of will of other animal species in some respects, and admittedly narrower in other respects. To affirm that animals have some volition does not imply that one has to regard them as having powers of choice equal to those of humans. Each animal species has specific volitional powers, some of which may be found in other species and some not. Similarly, we suppose by extrapolation, God's will is the broadest possible of all.

But furthermore, one may have the freedom to do or not do something, and yet not have the freedom to do or not to do some *other* thing. One may have the freedom to do something conditionally, lacking it if certain conditions are not met. Some people (laymen or philosophers) are confused by the term 'freedom', thinking that freedom can only be total and unconditional! Freedom need not be viewed as limitless. We are quite able to develop a logical discourse about freewill, such that each specific freedom is predicated specifically to a given individual subject, at a given time or in given circumstances. We can then inductively generalize, and describe ranges of freedom applicable to classes of individuals, as the case may be.

Some people tend to deny volition to animals, because they confuse the issues and think volition has only one measure. Indeed, some deny volition even to humans, thinking that the concept requires absolute freedom. Not so. Each agent, according to his natural constitution, has or lacks freedom in relation to each kind of action. A duck can apparently choose to fly off or not, as you approach it; some do, some don't. But a duck cannot apparently choose to add five and six together,

nor can an elephant flap its ears and fly. Likewise, humans are favored in some respects and deficient in others.

Many, or perhaps all, freedoms are also conditional. One may be free to run or stay, except in cases of extreme fear, or under hypnosis, which might exceptionally 'force' one to behave mechanically (like a zombie). Emotions normally play a role in volition as influences, but in some more extreme circumstances, they might become determining factors that paralyze freedom of the will altogether or generate automatic reactions. Likewise, one may temporarily lose certain freedoms, as when one cannot move because one is physically tied up or sick; or more permanently, as when one is deprived of a limb. In such cases, volition is temporarily or permanently lost and causation takes over.

To construct a realistic logic of volitional causality one must take all such variations into consideration; i.e. consider its intertwining with causation. Each agent has specific powers and limits, which may vary in time and according to surrounding conditions for any given individual, and which may vary from individual to individual of a species and from species to species.

## 3. Decision and Choice

The precise relationship between consciousness and volition, or between the status of being a Subject and that of being an Agent, needs elucidation. Empirically, the two seem tied together, though it is not clear just why. Conceptually, at first sight at least, one can imagine a Subject, floating in the universe as a pure observer, unable to do anything; and

likewise, perhaps, an Agent that simply wills certain things without awareness. Maybe such entities exist somewhere, but we have not encountered any.

In any case, we must keep in mind that consciousness varies in intensity or scope. An insect's consciousness (which we infer from its sense-organs and its responses to stimuli) is seemingly weak and limited; that of a bird is somewhat more elaborate; and so forth. The powers of volition of different organisms seem proportionate to their powers of consciousness.

However, some intelligent people seem weak-willed (perhaps through indecision) and some stupid people seem strong-willed (perhaps through inability to conceive alternatives). It may not be merely an issue of character flaws; there may be an issue of uneven biological development of faculties.

In humans, at least (and perhaps, though to a much lesser extent, in higher animals), acts of will are usually preceded by some thought (in the largest sense, not necessarily meaning verbal deliberation; possibly merely an imaging).

There is usually a ***decision*** (which may be wordless, to repeat), followed by a choice of one course rather than another (or than no choice). But it should be stressed that some acts of will seem virtually devoid of decision-making (this is one more sense of the concept of spontaneity); however, a minimal level of consciousness may be involved even in such cases ('without conscious decision' may simply mean without very-conscious decision).

Also, decisions do not necessarily result in corresponding acts of will. The issue, here, is not whether an effort of will is successful in producing some intended result, but what we

call *will-power*, arousing one's faculty of will. Sometimes, of course, hesitation or paralysis is due to indecision, when the pros and cons of a course of action seem balanced or too full of uncertainties.

A decision may be punctual or large, specific or general. A punctual decision relates to a single act of will; but a decision may be large, in the sense of an indefinite general resolve to pursue some goal over time, through numerous acts of will yet to be intellectually determined as events unfold. For this reason, the concept of decision is distinct from that of will.

An example of such general policy is what we call 'good will', the resolve to do whatever happens to seem like the right thing at any time, and avoid doing what seems wrong; good will implies a certain openness or eagerness, which facilitates many actions. The contrary attitude is that of 'bad will', a tendency to resist doing what one is supposed to, if not to perversely prefer doing what one is not supposed to; this often makes things more difficult.[15]

What we call ***choice*** is the logical aspect of a decision – two or more alternative courses of action are open to the agent, though possibly to different degrees, i.e. requiring different expenditures of effort, and one of them is 'taken' or 'opted

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[15] Note how the attitude tends to influence results. Good will gives us moral credit for trying, even if we do not succeed; and bad will tends to discredit us, even if we do succeed. Of course, often we role-play good will, to give ourselves a good conscience, or to look good in other people's eyes. Also, of course, as the saying goes: "hell is paved with good intentions", and good will cannot be taken as the sole basis of moral judgments – contrary to Kant's doctrine that the intention (to act as duty dictates) is the overriding consideration.

for'. The alternatives may simply, of course, be to do or not-do one thing; or there may literally be several contrary or combinable alternatives.

Another important aspect of decision is ***intention*** – the pursuit by the agent of some *goal or purpose*. Without intention, the agent has no 'reason' to do anything. This is why Aristotle regarded 'final causes' (intentions) as causes of motion. Intention, note, implies memory and anticipation, both of which imply consciousness. We project an image of the kind of thing we wish to attain.

In volition, purposeless motion seems virtually impossible. The purpose may just be to keep moving, or to exercise one's faculties, or to discover or demonstrate one's abilities, or to prove one can will without motive, but there seems to be need of some purpose. 'Art for art's sake' or 'spontaneous art' also have a goal of sorts, be it self-expression, beauty or humor, money or sex. Of course, the result of one's action may not be what one intended.

Non-willing entities remain essentially passive objects, even when they are causes (within the domain of causation), or the result or theater of spontaneous events (in an apparently causeless domain, one governed by chance). Whereas willing entities are truly active: they are more than objects, they are subjects and agents.

Influence is the interface between these two kinds of entity: objects impinging on subjects; or in some cases, subjects producing objects that impinge on subjects. The impact may be to stimulate, inhibit, or direct hither rather than thither, some event of will.

## 4. Goals and Means

What we have just said about volition requiring intention shows the interdependence between meta-psychology and ethical and legal studies. In formal logic, aetiology leads to *teleology*: "**To obtain Y, X is required**" is based on "If not X, then not Y". Philosophically, consideration of intention naturally raises the question: what ought we intend – what *goals* or ends shall we pursue? Thereafter, the question arises: by what *means* may such goals be reached, i.e. what is needed or required to attain them?

Goals may be broad and long-term, or narrow and immediate. They may be consciously ordered in a consistent hierarchy, or may be a confused mix of unrelated or even contradictory directions. They may in either case, for any individual, change over time, or be doggedly adhered to. Some may be very consciously developed, others very instinctive. Our goals may be reduced to a limited number of basic goals, or standards or norms.

Means also vary greatly. They may be appropriate or inappropriate to one's goals. They must be timely, to be effective. There may be many possible means to the same goal, of which some are known and some not (or not yet). Some may be easier, some harder. Means may take time to identify, and the identification, as said, may be correct or incorrect. All these details will emerge in the course of formal analysis.

It is a common error to think that logic has nothing to say in the setting of standards for ethics or politics. The anarchist premise that 'anything goes' in these fields is logically untenable. The anarchist cannot plead against legalism, since by virtue of his advocacy of general unlimited freedom he allows for legalism; but the legalist can in all fairness frown on the anarchist without inconsistency. Thus, whereas anarchism paradoxically allows for its logical opposite, legalism – the latter logically excludes the former. It follows that anarchism is a self-inconsistent and so false thesis, while legalism is a coherent and true thesis. That is, we can in principle aspire to justifying some 'objective' norms of behavior.

> Note well *the form of norm-setting argument*; it is essentially dilemmatic: "**If X, then Y, and if not X, then Y; therefore, in any case, Y**".
>
> In this way, we can argue, for instance, that *the use of logic* (meaning: any epistemological ways and means that are demonstrably effective in increasing or improving knowledge of reality) is an absolute imperative. No matter what our norms or standards of value be, whatever the goals we pursue – to find out the means that indeed result in these desired results, we need to know reality; it follows that all aspects of scientific methodology are imperative, since they are the way the truth gets to be known, i.e. the way any intellectual issues encountered are resolved. Thus, science (in this broad, open sense) is a means common to all goals, a fundamental and general imperative.

From a biological point of view, of course, the ultimate (minimal) goal of all volitional action is or should be *survival* of the individual living organism, or at least of its descendents, or its other family or larger group members, or the species it belongs to, or life itself on earth and perhaps beyond. That is because survival is the necessary precondition, the *sine qua non* of all other pursuits.[16]

It is a minimum need; but of course, maximum health and wellbeing is preferable; and this implies realizing one's full potential, psychologically and spiritually as well as physically. In other words, our cognitive and volitional nature must be taken into account in our understanding of what we mean by 'life'.

For ethics in general, then: life, cognition and volition are three natural norms, insofar as nothing that a particular ethics might recommend can be done without these three basic values. Being relative to no norm in particular, these values are absolute for all in general.

Intention presupposes *imagination*: one imagines something not yet there and proceeds to bring it about. Such imagination of a goal presupposes an informational context, which may be realistic or unrealistic, i.e. based on knowledge or mere belief. Even if the subject's ideas on what it is possible for him to have and how it is possible for him to get it are illusory, they are influential; and they may even be efficacious! Realistic ideas are, of course, likewise influential; and in principle, and statistically, no doubt more

[16] In more artificial perspectives (viz. certain religious, political or behavioral doctrines, like sadomasochism), survival is not essential; however, the founding arguments of such doctrines are logically very debatable.

efficacious, but they do not always or necessarily lead to success.

The *motive* of an action is the thought of its goal, or perhaps more precisely, the pressure or attraction one feels towards that goal. This is stated to clarify that it is not really or directly 'the goal' that influences one's action; logically, the goal cannot do anything since it lies in the future! So rather we must refer to the *present thought of* that intended end; and even that mental image has little power, except insofar as it stirs a desire within the agent. Thus, the relation of the goal to our striving activity must be specified with reference to a motive (analogous to a force, a motor), a present influence by a mental image and the stirring it produces in us to get into action.

Note in passing that having a certain motive, and being aware of having it, and publicly admitting to having it – are three different things. Often, we conceal our real motive from ourselves or from others, and replace it with a more acceptable *pretext*. Such *rationalization* is made possible by the fact that our actions often have incidental or even accidental consequences, in addition to the goals they intended to pursue. We pretend these side effects are our 'motive', to divert attention from our effective motive, and give ourselves a good conscience or a virtuous facade.[17]

The most fundamental faculties of the soul are, in that order, cognition, volition and valuation. Cognition refers to consciousness, volition to actions, and valuation to affections

[17] The problem with such distortions of reality is that they eventually boomerang psychologically and socially. Deceiving ourselves, we lose track of the truth; deceiving others, we lose their trust.

and appetites. The soul has three corresponding and interdependent roles, as subject, agent and evaluator. Volition implies, and is impossible without, cognition. Valuation implies, and is impossible without, cognition and volition. With regard to goals and means: the goal is the value sought (seeking implies consciousness anticipating, note) by act(s) of will; the means is identified (rightly or wrongly) by consciousness, and is executed by the act(s) of will.

# 5. CHAPTER FIVE

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 4.

## CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

### 1. The Consciousness in Volition

Volition as an inner effort of the soul requires some degree of consciousness – else it would not be volition but mechanical movement. But the question arises: 'consciousness' of what? There are several answers.

Firstly, every act of will requires some minimum amount of awareness to be at all performed. To produce a volitional act, some attention to one's inner faculties of volition has to be invested.

If all we invest is only just enough attention to perform the act in the most perfunctory manner, we call the act effectively ***unconscious*** or inattentive or mindless or involuntary, because as volitions go it is *almost* so. Note well that the negative terms used in this context are not meant as full negations, but as hyperbolic. Such conduct may be reproved as essentially lazy; for example, one may wash the

dishes barely aware of what one is doing, while thinking of one hundred other things. Often, such actions are gauche and fail, because one was ‘absent minded’, one’s ‘heart was not in it’.

As we deliver more and more consciousness to our volitional faculty, the act becomes increasingly ***mindful*** or conscious, attentive or voluntary, till a peak of awareness is attained. In this case, contrary to the preceding, we are fully focused and concentrated on what we are doing; our mind is empty of extraneous thoughts, our action is pure and uncluttered. Everything we think or do is relevant to the job at hand; there is little hesitation, decisions are efficiently made, timely action proceeds. For example, a good fighter has this consciousness; whoso has experienced it knows its magic.

Note that the terms here used are sometimes mixed up in practice – so that mindful action may be called ‘unconscious’, meaning unconscious of irrelevant matters; we are not attaching to words but to their intended meanings. Also note, the expression ‘self-conscious’ is sometimes used to mean ‘mindful’, whereas at other times it is meant pejoratively, with reference to an interference of ego. In the latter case, we are conscious of other people looking at us, and careful to appear at our best so as to impress them; this implies a lack of self-sufficiency or self-confidence, and more important, turns our attention from the job at hand, so that we in fact lose our ‘presence of mind’.

Between unconsciousness and mindfulness, as above defined, there are many degrees of awareness. Just as cognition may involve different intensities of awareness, so does volition. This distinction explains why movements requiring will may nevertheless seem almost automatic or ‘involuntary’ to us: it

is because they have no more than the minimum awareness in them, the agent being distracted by many other things, almost absent. In the case of 'voluntary' will, the agent is by virtue of his greater presence more of a volunteer, who will therefore more readily acknowledge the action as his own.

The possibility of minimal awareness helps explain *self-programming*: once a choice of freewill is launched, its continuation has a momentum of its own, hard to stop without special dedication; this means that *more effort of consciousness and will is needed to stop it than to continue it*.

A component of what we have called mindfulness is ***awareness of the influential context***. This refers to consciousness to some degree of all the influences impinging, or seeming to impinge or possibly impinging on one's current volitional act – including attitudes, concerns, motives, goals, feelings, moods, emotions, mental images, memories, imaginations, anticipations, thoughts, arguments, bodily aches and pains, physical sights and sounds perceived, that disturb or please, distractions, obstacles, and so forth. One should also mention awareness of one's level of awareness. To the extent that one is conscious of all eventually influential factors, one's volition is lucid and efficient.

Such consciousness is of course momentary and peripheral to the volition. It serves to minimize or even dissolve negative influences, and maximize or empower influences in the direction of our will. It makes the will as free as possible, or at least freer than when unconscious. It is a preparatory act, making ready for volition, aligning its resources, helping to focus and concentrate it. But if we exaggerate it and linger on it too long, we miss the point: instead of facilitating our volition, it confuses and interferes with our action. So, one

has to know the right balance. Awareness of influences does not consist in weighing volition down with irrelevant thoughts, but on the contrary in emptying the mind of extraneous material.

> In yoga meditation, by the way, this is known as *pratyahara*. We just calmly observe internal or external disturbances. As we do so, they either cease to exist or to appear, or they at least cease to disturb us. In this way, our consciousness can settle and become more intense.

A second important aspect of consciousness in volition is its intentionality, the direction of its aim. If agent A specifically wills W, then W is what A 'has in mind' as his aim as he stirs his volition into action, i.e. W is indeed what A 'wanted to do'. In such case, we say that A ***intentionally*** or *purposely* willed W; and W is called the *object* or *purpose* of his will. If however A wills something else, of which W is a mere side effect, then we say that W was *unintended*. In the latter case, W is not the object or purpose of A's act of volition, although it is a *de facto* product of will; we label this an ***incidental*** *consequence* of will.

Note that the 'intention' of the will resides primarily in the agent, as the intelligence of his act; thereafter only, is the term applicable to the act of will or to its object. The agent is conscious of the object-to-be, and exercises will towards it.

A third way consciousness is involved in volition is through deliberation, which serves to aim will in some appropriate direction. This may be a quick, almost instantaneous thought and decision, or it may require a long process of thought, involving complex research and difficult choices, gradually

'making up one's mind'. A ***deliberate*** act is thus filled with intelligence, in contrast to an ***inadvertent*** or haphazard act. Deliberation also implies adjusting action as one proceeds, to make sure one gets it right on target.

Volition may consist of a simple act of will or a series of such acts. The degree of attention, effort and appropriateness involved in either case is a measure of the ***endeavor*** in willing, how hard we try. That A intends W does not guarantee that his endeavor is bound to result in W; he may ***succeed*** or ***fail*** to achieve his purpose. W may be an necessary consequence of A's act of will, in which case success is ***inevitable***; or W may be a contingent consequence of A's act of will, in which case failure is *possible*.

If A's intention to achieve W is strong enough, A will do all in his power to increase the chances of success and reduce those of failure. If A's endeavor is half-hearted, as we say, the chances are proportionately small. Agent A may also make no attempt to will for W, but merely *wish* for it to occur somehow; a wish may be a nice thought, but it is not will. If agent A pursues some goal W, and does not take the necessary and sufficient *precautions* to ensure success, then when failure occurs he may be said to have been *negligent*. Note that, in the case of more complex goals, success or failure may be partial; i.e. they both may result, and more or less of the one than the other.

In some cases, although A intends W, but (whether due to insufficient endeavor or circumstances beyond his control) fails to achieve it, W *happens anyway* through other causes (as an incident of some other will by A, or due to another agent's volition, or through natural causes). From the

perspective of A's said intention of W, the latter cannot be regarded as success, but at best as 'lucking out'.

A fourth measure of consciousness in volition relates to knowledge of conditions and consequences.

Agent A may intend W by his will, and yet fail ***to foresee*** whether W will inevitably follow upon his act of will or merely follow 'if all goes well'. For example, he may aim an arrow in the general direction of a target, yet not be in full control of the resultant trajectory; his imperfect skill, or the bow breaking, or a sudden wind, or some unexpected obstacle, may yet impede a bull's eye hit. Thus, intention does not exclude unforeseen circumstances, nor therefore by itself guarantee success. All the more so, if W is an incidental consequence of A's will, it may be foreseen or unforeseen. In the former case, it occurs ***knowingly***; in the latter case, it is called an ***accident***.

The concepts of incidental (or unintended) and accidental (or unforeseen) consequence can further be clarified with reference to *causative chains*, as follows. Suppose P is a complete causative of Q (i.e. "if P, then Q" is true), either in all circumstances or in some given circumstances. Then, when A wills P (i.e. when A wills away with P as his intention, and indeed achieves P), Q will necessarily also follow. So, A will have *effectively* willed Q. However, if A had no interest in willing Q or even preferred to avoid Q, then Q is only an incidental consequence of A's will, not an intention of his. A may have known Q to be a necessary consequent of P; or he may not have known it, or even may have thought notQ to be a necessary consequent of P; or he may not have thought about the issue at all. In the latter cases

of ignorance, Q is just an accidental consequence of A's will.[18]

We should also distinguish between ***foreseeable*** and unforeseeable consequences (be they intentional or not). In the former case, agent A could have foreseen the consequence if he had made appropriate preliminary investigations; in the latter, not. Foreseeable consequences may be inevitable or avoidable (if avoidance should be needed). If some undesired consequence of will was foreseeable and avoidable, then its *not* having been foreseen and avoided is indicative of some failure or weakness of will, i.e. not enough effort was expended to achieve the intended result or to prevent some unintended result.

There are, of course, many degrees of ***expectation***, depending on the factual probability or improbability of the anticipated event in the circumstances considered. An unexpected event has either been unforeseen or foreseen not to happen. Whether factual expectation is great or small, or nil, it is based on belief. That is, it may be demonstrable knowledge, or it may just be more or less justifiable opinion. The latter refers to the epistemological likelihood of the event, the former to its ontological likelihood.

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[18] Often, in political discourse, people accuse their opponents of bad intentions based on unintended consequences of their opponents' actions; or they credit themselves with good intentions they never in fact had.

## 2. The Factors of Responsibility

Volition implies responsibility, which is estimated with reference to various factors and their measurements. The concept of responsibility is of course primarily aetiological. The concepts of moral and legal responsibility are more specific, since they refer to specific ethical norms or to legislation.

The important distinctions we made above, concerning consciousness, intention, deliberation, knowledge and expectation in volition, allow us to specify the measure of ***responsibility*** of the agent, the degree to which the action may be attributed to its doer, whether for moral or legal praise or blame, or (in the case of no responsibility at all) exoneration. In the case of crimes, with or without a victim, note the terms guilty or innocent used for responsibility and non-responsibility, respectively.

Agent A is *fully* responsible for event W, if W was his object of conscious will, his purpose or goal, his intention in willing, *and* a foreseeable and inevitable outcome of his actions. A is only, in one sense or another, *partly* responsible for W, in all other cases, to various degrees.

As we shall see in later chapters, influences on volition that are considered psychological, such as desires and fears, obsessions and compulsions, urges and impulses, whether operative on a conscious or subconscious level, do not

ultimately diminish or remove and agent's freedom of will and so remain his responsibility.[19]

We commonly also appeal to *extenuating* or *aggravating circumstances* in estimating responsibility (whether for good or bad acts), considering the former to somewhat diminish responsibility and the latter to increase it. This concept may be understood in two ways[20]:

(a) It may refer to *terms and conditions*, which objectively affect[21] the course of events, either before or after volition, but not through cognition. For example, if a man stole bread in a society *refusing him* both work and charity, he would have an objective extenuating circumstance, granting survival is a right. By way of contrast, if a man stole bread to save money, the fact that he did so *although rich enough* to buy bread, would be an objective aggravating circumstance, since he had no need to steal.

(b) Or it may refer to *influences*, which subjectively affect[22] volition, through cognition. For example, if a man witnessed a crime, but did not report it to the police because his child was threatened with retaliation if he did, he would also be able to appeal to 'extenuating

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[19] This is said to stress opposition to certain psychological theories, which seek to remove guilt by denying responsibility.

[20] Note that the examples given concern blame for wrongdoing; but we could of course equally cite cases of praise for good deeds.

[21] In the limit, if the terms and condition leave one no choice, i.e. if no volition is possible, responsibility is eliminated.

[22] Since influences, whether positive or negative, never abolish freedom of the will, responsibility is certainly never annulled by them.

circumstances'. He had a difficult choice to make between his duty to society and that to his family, and since both are generally acknowledged values, the choice he made (under the influence of the criminal's threat of violence) is understandable. On the other hand, if did not report the crime but also actively concealed it so as to avoid eventual blame for not reporting it, he would be regarded as having 'aggravating circumstances'. Here, the man not only failed as a citizen, but (influenced by some inexcusable laziness or antisocial feelings) he committed the additional crime of making the witnessed crime more difficult to discover and punish.

All the preceding factors refer to ***direct*** responsibility, of an agent for *his own* actions.

An agent may also have ***a share of direct*** responsibility in some resultant of the actions undertaken by two or more agents. If each of the individual agent's action has an identifiable portion of the resultant, it may be said to have a proportional *partial individual* responsibility for the resultant. But if the resultant is a collective outcome of all the individual contributions, such that it cannot be arithmetically divided among them, we may speak of *collective* responsibility. The latter is more difficult to apportion, though we can do so with reference to causative considerations. In practice, the distinction is sometimes moot, or both aspects may be involved. In any case, further clarification is possible with reference to individual intentions, common purposes, cooperation or confluence, degree of coordination of actions, and the like.

For example: if we refer to shares in a financial venture, the total capital is the sum of the parts, so each part-owner is

responsible for that portion of the whole in the company's environmental damage, say. If capital reduction by withdrawal without replacement of one of the partners would result in proportionately less damage to the environment, then that partner may be considered to have a 'partial individual' share of responsibility. But of course, in practice, the company is not just about money input, but involves the effort, skills and intelligence of numerous people, who collectively do the work. If this or that worker or manager is removed, the others may not be able to do their job; or what they do may not result in a finished product; or operations may after a while come to a standstill. In the latter case, we have to regard each shareholder, manager and employee as having a greater or smaller part of the collective responsibility in the joint project.[23]

An agent may also have ***indirect*** responsibility in another's actions, if the former knowing of the latter was possibly able to prevent it, alone or with others, but did not try to do so, or tried to but did not make a sufficient effort to. Such responsibility is necessarily partial, implying passivity and tacit acquiescence. In most cases, this is just ordinary non-interference or tolerance, 'minding one's own business'; but

[23] How exactly to quantify the relative weights of the partial causes making up a complete cause is a moot question. Certainly, common sense supports the notion of such quantification. In principle, we could proceed as in the physical sciences, postulating an algebraic formula linking the variables and repeatedly testing it empirically. In situations involving humans – which are less easy to reproduce identically – such an approach is not always practical. For this reason, our judgments in this issue are often tentative and approximate.

in some cases, this would be called criminal negligence[24]. Note that if there is any show of dissent or disapproval, or other incipient effort of protest or opposition, one's indirect responsibility is proportionately diminished; and one may claim a share of direct responsibility in the opposite direction. Inversely, if there is any show of consent or approval, and all the more so in the case of explicit encouragement or other active involvement, then one is not merely indirectly in part responsible, but acquires a direct share.

Thus, for example, during the Holocaust, history's greatest crime, the responsibility of the German population varied greatly. A very few heroically made efforts to actively or passively resist the Nazi persecution of Jews and others; these were not responsible for the genocide. Most had indirect responsibility, at least because they knowingly acquiesced. Many of the latter were additionally conscious though passive beneficiaries of the spoils. But much worse, a great many people had various degrees of direct individual or collective responsibility, having participated in the horror as conquering army, appointed mass killers, efficient bureaucrats, railway workers, death camp planners and

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[24] One special case to consider (at least for theists) is God's indirect responsibility. According to the Judaic theory of volition, God gave humans volition by a voluntary act of withdrawal (*tsimtsum*). He chose to abstain from exercising His omnipotence, so as to make possible small pockets of individual freewill. Nevertheless, this did not annul His infinite power: He retains the capacity to overwhelm any creature's will. In that case, we may well wonder why He does not prevent horrible willful crimes, not to mention murderous natural events. Why does He not limit human powers within certain more gentle bounds, to the exclusion on principle of the most heinous deeds?

personnel, slave-labor exploiters, poison manufacturers, etc.[25]

I should mention here the Buddhist principle that at the root of all evil attitudes and acts is a fundamental ignorance of the true nature of reality. Although rather convincing, this principle should be regarded critically. It is true that at the base of our selfish indifference or hatred towards others, disregarding or enjoying their sufferings, there is a stupid blindness to the common nature, source and destiny of all sentient beings. However, to refer only to this fundamental ignorance is to effectively exonerate those guilty of crimes. For the term 'ignorance' refers to a failure of knowledge or understanding, a paucity of consciousness – and does not include reference to volition. Yet, it is precisely through our will, our choices, that we may be held responsible and subject to moral judgment. Of course, ignorance mitigates responsibility, if we have sincerely sought wisdom. But insofar as our will is misguided by inadequate cognitive practices, we remain responsible for it.

## 3. Judging, and Misjudging, People

What we have said thus far concerning responsibility provides some guidelines for making just judgments about

[25] See for instance Paul Johnson: "The German people knew about and acquiesced in the genocide" (p. 498). Of course, not just Germans, but many other European peoples (he mentions notably the Austrians and Romanians), were actively involved; some did not collaborate but did nothing to help Jews, some resisted and did what they could to help.

people. But such judgments are no simple matter, and we all very often err in making them. Even knowing in general terms, ontologically, what constitutes responsibility, it does not follow that we are fully armed, epistemologically, against misjudgment. We shall here, in passing[26], attempt to describe some of the methods and pitfalls involved, without claiming to exhaust this vast subject.

Above all, it should be stressed that judging responsibility is a category of *factual* judgment. It is not in itself moral judgment, though evaluations may subsequently be based on it; that is, it involves no standard of value. The question posed by judgment about responsibility is "whodunit?" (who did so and so, and to what extent is he or she the doer), rather than "was the thing done good or bad?" (which is a separate issue). Of course, judging responsibly is a moral imperative – an absolute one, since whatever our norms, logic dictates we apply them realistically, and to do so we must know the truth.

The object of judgment may be oneself or other person(s). Indeed, judgment about responsibility is relevant to both the inner life and to social life. We may also use such judgment to philosophically judge God's responsibility in world events, or to determine whether one's dog or cat ate the cheese – i.e. it relates to any presumed volitional agent. However, here we shall concentrate on humans.

Assessments of responsibility depend on three factors: the facts of the case as we see them, our skill or wisdom at determining responsibility on the basis of such data, and our

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[26] This section is not directly relevant to our analysis of volition at the present stage, but is nevertheless inserted as a continuation to the discussion of responsibility, dealing with some of the epistemological issues relative to that topic.

capacity for objectivity or fairness. Judging one's own responsibility differs from judging that of others in two important respects.

Firstly, *the empirical data* at our disposal is greater in the case of self-assessment, since we have direct cognition of our subjective states and actions, as well as perception of their mental and physical consequences. Such introspection is not infallible, since it depends on the degree and clarity of one's awareness of internal events as they occur, and on the durability of one's memory of those facts. In the case of assessing others, our database consists essentially of externally perceivable data (physical words and deeds), from which we infer (spiritual or mental) internal events by means of analogies to one's own experiences.

Secondly, although in principle *given certain data, the conclusions we draw from them are dependent on our conceptual framework*, and so likely to be about the same whether the object of judgment is self or any other, in practice the identity of the person judged and our *predisposition* or partiality towards that person affects our judgment considerably. For instance, if we are well disposed or sympathetic to the latter, we will make more effort to find extenuating circumstances; whereas, if badly disposed or antipathetic, our efforts will be directed at condemnation. One usually judges oneself and one's loved ones favorably, and those one dislikes as unfavorably as possible; although, to be sure, some people have masochistic tendencies, and some people do make an effort at objectivity or impartiality.

The function of self-judgment is generally attributed to a faculty called *conscience*. In truth, this concept is a mere abstract construct, though a useful one. One's conscience is

not a structure separate from oneself – it is a part of one's soul (in time, rather than place) acting as judge in relation some other part of one's soul. If one is judging sincerely, with objectivity and honesty, one 'has conscience' – if our judgments are not in earnest or non-existent, one 'lacks conscience'. By judging conscientiously, one effectively gives oneself a 'conscience'. The concept extends to one's judgment of others, insofar as we are responsible for the supervision of our own intellectual faculties, including those involved in our judgments about other people.

*Introspection* aims at identifying subjective, mental and physical data. Subjective data includes: (a) one's volitions, velleities, or inactions; (b) one's knowledge or ignorance of something; and/or (c) one's attitudes towards someone or something, including affections and appetites, hopes, fears, and so forth. Mental data includes: one's memories, fantasies, expectations, whether expressed as phenomenal qualities (sights, sounds, etc.) or verbally, indeed all our mental projections, emotions and thoughts. Physical data here refers to sensations and sentiments appearing in the body, such as feelings of sexual arousal or indifference, or feelings of love or hate.

Subjective data is known *intuitively*, i.e. it is a direct self-knowledge, not based on phenomenal (mental or physical) data, although it may be confirmed and reinforced by such data. In practice, subjective events are not always perspicuous, so that what we assume them to be must be regarded as an inductive construct. That is, based on fleeting, vague and partial intuitions, one proceeds *by trial and error* to a firmer, clearer and fuller estimate of one's volition, knowledge or evaluation. The elements of doubt in

successive intuitions are attenuated by repeated experience. Although the database is composed of direct experiences, judgment is still involved in comparing and contrasting such experiences and distilling a considered summary of them.

Additionally, we may and do infer such deeper, more subjective events (when they are not evident by intuition) from mental and physical data, on the basis of past conjunctions in experience (i.e. apparent causations). In this context, we often reason according to the format *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (sequence, therefore consequence), proposing an adductive construct ("this sort of mental or physical phenomena seem to imply that kind of event in the soul"), which we repeatedly test with reference to all direct and indirect experiences and reasoning, maintaining our assumption so long as it seems plausible to us, and abandoning it if ever it ceases to do so.

Mental data, i.e. sights, sounds and other phenomenal qualities projected by memory or imagination or anticipation within one's mind, are known by inner perception. Physical data, is known by sensory perception, i.e. through the organs of sensation deployed in one's body, whether these organs have been stimulated by psychosomatic events (occurring in the body, due to mental causatives; e.g. anxiety feelings), physiological events (in the body, due to bodily causes; e.g. indigestion), or external events (bodies around one's own, impinging on it).

It should be stressed that these distinctions between soul, mind, body and beyond, are somewhat conventional, in that in practice events in these four domains are very tightly intertwined, and we may only assign an event to the one or the other after considerable reflection. The resultant

classification of the event concerned is therefore not purely empirical data, but itself a product of conception and inductive judgment.

*Judgment of others* is both extroverted and introspective. It is extroverted, insofar as based on information we have directly or indirectly 'perceived' concerning the person to be judged. And it is introspective, insofar as that data is *necessarily interpreted according to one's own inner experience and its customary relation in oneself to similar externally perceivable events*. Scientific data, based on the objective observation of the behavior of many people under similar circumstances may be brought to bear, as a third factor of judgment; but such data, note well, itself also logically falls under the preceding two categories, namely 'externally perceivable data concerning others' and 'the interpretation thereof based on one's own inner life'.

With regard to the external 'perceptions' involved – this refers to (a) the things *oneself* actually sees or hears the person judged do or say, and (b) the things that *someone else* has actually seen or heard that person do or say. The former (a) is *direct evidence*, and refers to any data (prior to any interpretation) available to one's own senses, which cannot be distorted or faked by third parties. If such data can in principle be manipulated, it should be considered with due caution, and of course regarded as open to revision. The latter (b) refers to *hearsay evidence*, which depends on the reliability of the alleged witness, who may intentionally lie for a variety of personal motives, or be too emotionally involved to distinguish fact from fantasy, or merely be a very incompetent observer.

Note that direct evidence includes *concrete evidence* of any sort, i.e. physical traces or leftovers of the past events under scrutiny, which may be considered as emanations of the person judged, still available for perception by the one judging. *Circumstantial evidence* – concerning time, place, opportunity, possible motive, and the like – can be similarly considered, although more abstract or speculative.

Also note, hearsay evidence may be *first-hand* testimony by a participant in the events, reporting his or her *own* thoughts, words and deeds; or second-hand testimony about the words and deeds (but not the thoughts) of someone else. The latter witness may be a participant testifying about *another* participant, or a bystander (a non-participant who observed without affecting events).

Obviously, the person judged may intentionally project a fictional representation of his or her external actions or inner workings; for example, a murderer may wipe off his fingerprints from the weapon used or loudly proclaim his innocence in court. This too must be taken into account when estimating data.

With regard to witnesses, obviously, the more there are of them, the more reliable their common testimony. If their testimonies converge, they corroborate each other, though conspiracies are of course possible. If their testimonies diverge, the judge would want to know why. Perhaps some partial common ground is found between them; perhaps some of the witnesses are more reliable than others.

Obviously too, even when one bases one's judgment on one's own perceptions, one must be attentive to one's competence as an observer, emotional involvement and personal interests

(including financial and other advantages) in the affair; i.e. one should clearly distinguish between raw data and subsequent interpretation – no easy task!

The insight that interpreting the actions or words of others depends largely on one's own inner life and behavior patterns is very important. It means that when we judge others, we are to some extent exposing and judging ourselves. Criminals actualize certain potentials; by doing so, they reveal to all of us what we, as humans, are probably equally capable of (if not actually guilty of); for this reason, by the way, every crime is doubly so, in that it further diminishes one's self-trust and trust in others, fragmenting society. Conversely, when we project presumed motives or behaviors onto suspects, we are extrapolating these from motives or behaviors we suppose potential (if not actual) within ourselves; i.e. we are also saying something about ourselves. Thus, judgment is a two-edged sword, to be handled with care.

Judgments about responsibility are a heavy responsibility, which few manage to discharge equitably in all cases. A person may unfairly judge himself or herself, claiming undeserved credit or discredit. People may misjudge each other in the family, the workplace, the community at large, the media, and of course the courthouse. Such injustices may befall groups (e.g. religious, racial or national groups), as well as individuals. The legal principles "a person must be presumed innocent until proven guilty" and "guilt must be established beyond a reasonable doubt before condemning" are often ignored in the courtroom, and more often still outside it.

Many people lack intelligence and intellectual rigor in their everyday life and dealings, so it is not surprising to find them exercising the same stupidity and laxity when they are required to judge people. Such people liberally mentally project their delusions, fantasies and fears on those around them, lacking the training to distinguish fact from fiction. Many people (men, women and children) take pleasure in slander and talebearing, thinking that by bringing shame and disrepute on others they enhance their own status. In fact, all they do is reveal their own foolish thoughts and their hatred: Judaism rightly compares such people to murderers, and wisely commands: "thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour"[27].

Nowadays, with the advent of mass media, gossip, slander and talebearing have become an institution, a full-time livelihood! Here, certain thought patterns should be pointed out, which promote prejudice.

One is the very human tendency of *generalizing* – we take the behavior of some people in certain circumstances and assume the same behavior for other people in similar circumstances. Generalization is a legitimate process, provided it is subjected to checks and balances. The need for repeated testing and, when appropriate, particularization is true for all natural objects – but all the more so with regard to volitional agents, and in particular people. The latter, by definition, do not act in a uniform manner in the same circumstances – so in their case, generalization should be indulged in very carefully. Especially in view of the disastrous consequences of wrong judgments in this field,

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[27] See for instance Talmud: *Arachin* 15b. Quotation is from Torah: *Exodus* 20:13.

one cannot allow oneself to generalize *at first sight*, without due research and verification of hypotheses.

Another common tendency is that of *stereotyping* – trying to fit all human behavior in a limited number of pre-established categories. Here again, there is some epistemological basis to the process: the human mind naturally pursues categorizations, as neat summaries of information. This is an aspect of conceptualization: seeking out patterns in data, by comparing and contrasting cases. The problem lies in the need to keep an open mind and continue this process all the time, whereas people tend to get lazy and stop it when they have one, two or three such stereotypes in mind. Thereafter, all natural flexibility is lost, and the mind tries to force-fit new cases into the few, rough and ready, prior patterns, instead of modifying categories or generating new ones as and when necessary. Many people misjudge, simply because they constantly refer back to clichés that have little to do with the persons or situations under scrutiny.[28]

Erroneous generalizing and stereotyping are related, the former concerning propositions and the latter concerning terms. Both are due to the failure to practice the logical

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[28] It should be pointed out that people who judge others by stereotypes tend to adapt even their own behavior to stereotypes! They absorb a number of behavior patterns from TV, movies and novels – which are often artificial concoctions in the first place, based on the fiction writer's superficial understanding of the human psyche. When faced with a real life situation, rather than draw out an appropriate response from within their own soul, they simply apply one of the formulas they have been fed by the media. They play set roles: the rebellious protester, the macho politician, etc. Even the dialogues are standardized. The sum total of available roles and dialogues is called 'a culture'.

virtues of open-mindedness and empiricism, careful adaptation, clarity and precision. If one is satisfied with approximation and fixation, one is bound to judge wrongly sooner or later. Another major pitfall is, of course, emotiveness. Under the weight of an intense emotion, a real effort is required to judge correctly. And, of course, emotions are most stirred precisely when people are involved – the very circumstances when cool judgment is called for. In such situations, one must consciously remind oneself to be objective and impartial.

Note lastly that reasoning about responsibility is not just concerned with volition, but often has more to do with causation. Arguments involving if–then statements are often crucial to determinations of responsibility, or the share of it. For example, the premises "if A + B, then E" and "if A + not B, then not E" suggest the conclusion that, given A (which may in turn refer to a conjunction of causes, C + D +… etc.), B causes E and not B causes not E. By such means, we would determine that agent B, rather than potential agent(s) A, is currently responsible for effect E (although to get the full picture, we would have to also check out what happens in the absence of A)[29].

A more thorough analysis of reasoning about responsibility is outside the scope of this book. A volume on this topic, with emphasis on legal issues, which I have found very interesting and recommend, is that of Hart and Honoré.

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[29] See my *The Logic of Causation* for a full treatment of such arguments.

# 6. CHAPTER SIX

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 5.

## INFLUENCE AND FREEDOM

### 1. Influence Occurs via Consciousness

An important and complex concept in causal logic, and specifically in the logic of volition, is that of *influence*. This refers to the impact on one's volitional act, before or while it occurs, of some cognized natural event(s) and/or other volition(s) by oneself or other agent(s). Note well, the agent of volition concerned must have cognized the natural event(s) and/or other volition(s) in question, for the latter to count as 'influences'. The distinguishing characteristic of influence, compared to other 'conditions' surrounding volition, is ***the intermediary of consciousness***.

The philosophical importance of this concept is due to the confusion of most people relative to the concept of freedom of the will. On the one hand, most people in practice believe the will is free somehow; on the other hand, they realize it is varyingly affected by surrounding natural events and persons. These givens seem theoretically irreconcilable because the

latter is mistaken for conditioning or partial causation, whereas it is influence, a different, subtler sort of causality.

For example: a man's muscles are *conditions* affecting his volitions, in that he can *in fact* lift a certain weight with them and also in that he cannot lift more weight than they physically make possible; these same muscles however become *influences* on his volitions, only when *thinking* of their supposed limited strength he chooses another course than he would if they seemed stronger or weaker. Note well the subtle difference. Conditions and influences both *affect* actions, but not in comparable ways.

Influence is *a special kind of conditioning*, differing from an ordinary condition in that it operates specifically through the medium of consciousness, i.e. of *any kind of cognitive process*. The *influencing object* is one that has been sensed or imagined, perceived or conceived, remembered or projected, found evident or inferred, induced or deduced, or in any way thought about. *What it influences*, strictly speaking, is the Subject of such cognitions or thoughts, i.e. the eventual Agent of volition. When the agent finally 'makes up his mind' and wills something, he does so either in the direction of or against the *tendency* implied by the influence at hand.

Thus, influences imply positive or negative tendencies, temptations or spurs to voluntary action. If such tendency was in the direction of the eventual will, the will was facilitated by it; if such tendency was against the eventual will, the will had to overcome it. The agent is always free to accept or refuse to 'follow' a given influence, i.e. to 'yield' to its weight or 'resist' it.

The concept of ***effort*** refers to a degree of will. Volition is not an either-or proposition, something one switches on or off; it has degrees. Powerful will is required to overcome strong opposing influences; a weak agent is easily influenced to go against his will. Thus, we may speak of *amount of* effort involved in an act of will. If influences are favorable, the effort required to complete them is comparatively minimal. If influences are counteractive, the agent must pump proportionately more effort to get his way.

We may also view effort as a measure of the agent's responsibility, his causal contribution or ownership of the action and its outcomes. The more effort he requires, the more wholly 'his own' they are. The less effort he requires, the greater the part played in them by surrounding influences.

The ***postulate of freedom of the will*** is that an influence is never alone sufficient to produce some effect, irrespective of the will of the agent concerned. Granting surrounding conditions allow the power of will in a given case, the agent always has 'final say' to resist the tendency implied by the influence, though such resistance might require a maximum of effort. As of when conditioning occurs via consciousness, i.e. in the way of influence, *necessity does not apply*, though the effort required to overcome influence may be daunting. Wherever necessity *does* apply, one cannot say that there was possibility of will, *nor therefore* speak of influence. The subject was simply overwhelmed, proving in this case to be not an agent but a mere patient. He may have been an observer of the events, but he was in this case a passive recipient of natural forces.

*If this postulate is correct, it means that consciousness of an object cannot by itself move a spiritual entity (soul, subject)*

*to action, by way of complete causation. Though such consciousness may play a major causative part in the action, approaching one hundred percent, still the action cannot effectively occur without the final approval and participation of the spiritual entity concerned. If necessity is indeed observed occurring, then the conditioning involved was not via consciousness of the object but directly due to the object.*

Note that not only an influence cannot by itself ever move an agent into action, but also – granting the possibility of pure whim – the agent can well move himself in the absence of any influences. Therefore, influence is neither sufficient nor necessary for volition.

Thus, note well, we are not here involved in verbal manipulations. Freedom of the will is a thesis, a hypothesis, concerning the causal relations possible in the domain of the spirit. Consciousness may well occur in cases where there is no volition, i.e. where causation (necessity) takes over; but when this happens, consciousness has played no part in the effect. Consciousness becomes a condition only as of when causation recedes, and a space is leftover for volition to intervene; in that event, consciousness (or its objects, through it) becomes influential, and the will remains free (to at least some extent).

All volition seems subject to some influences to some degree. This seems evident of human volition, which usually occurs in response to an apparent mental and material context, though it could be argued to be at times indifferent to all influences. Other animals, likewise, and perhaps much more so, have powers of volition subject to influence.

With regard to God, our theoretical conception of Him by extrapolation to extremes suggests we should consider God as the quintessential 'unmoved mover', i.e. His volitions as always entirely independent of influences. That need not be taken to mean He acts without regard to anything, but rather that His power of will is so superior to influences severally or collectively that the latter are effectively negligible. A tiny drop of water cannot affect the ocean!

As for the relation between God and lower volitional beings, we should consider that just as God retains the power to interfere in causative processes (i.e. to Him all natural laws are inertial rather than necessary, as earlier discussed), He retains the power to '*overwhelm*' the willpower of any creature's soul. Thus, the power of will of any limited creature is in principle always conditional upon the infinite God's continued tolerance. However, the Divine power to dominate or overwhelm lesser wills seems unused in practice (judging by our religious documents, at least[30]). Rather, God seems to *condition and/or influence* lesser wills – giving agents life or prematurely killing them, or affecting their bodily, mental or external environments, or again making items appear that (strongly or to some extent) influence them in some way. This Divine preference

[30] I make no claim to special knowledge of the Divine, of course. As a philosopher, I merely conceive possibilities, cogent hypotheses, concerning God. Here, I note that while 'overwhelming of lesser wills' would seem doctrinally consistent with the idea of God's omnipotence, it is not a doctrine stressed within Judaism and similar religions.

is assumed to stem from an ethical motive, to sustain freedom of the will and therefore personal responsibility[31].

## 2. Knowledge of Effort, Influence and Freedom

Effort and influence are, clearly, derivative concepts of cognition and volition. The empirical basis of our knowledge of them is therefore the same as for cognition and volition, primarily introspection or subjective apprehension. This direct self-knowledge, which I call intuition (or apperception), concerns objects that do not *per se* have inner or outer phenomenal qualities – i.e. no shape, shading or color, no sound, no smell or taste, no touch qualities – although they may produce perceptible objects.

Just as we intuit our own will, so we intuit the amount of effort we have put into it. Colloquially, we say that effort is 'felt'. 'Physical effort' is experienced as a sensation in the body; but 'mental effort', or more precisely 'spiritual effort', is a more subtle experience, which may or not give rise to discernable phenomena. Measurement of effort is therefore, of course, not exact and absolute, but rough and comparative. It depends not only on the immediate intuition, but also on

[31] Clearly, the problems of theodicy remain whether we assume God's action to include overpowering wills, or to be limited to conditioning and influencing. It would have mattered little to victims of the Holocaust whether God saved them by overwhelming Hitler's hate-filled will, or by killing or otherwise neutralizing him early enough.

personal memory of past intuitions for purposes of calibration.

If estimate of effort is inexact with regard to oneself, it is all the more so with reference to the effort of others. We can only guess it, by analogy to one's own experience and by observation of indirect indices, like (in the case of physical effects of it) the sweat on someone's brow or his facial expressions or bodily postures. Thus, as for will, knowledge of effort is generally based on adductive arguments.

It is not inconceivable that one day soon biologists succeed in measuring effort more objectively and scientifically, by means of physical instruments. Quantification of effort would then become more precise and verifiable. Such practices will of course involve adductive reasoning, an initial hypothesis that such and such detectable physiological or neurological phenomena may be interpreted as proportional to the effort of will. But in the meantime, we do have a rough yardstick in our personal experience.

Influence is a more abstract concept, not experienced or measurable directly, but constructed with reference to amounts of effort involved in willful action (making it easier or harder). An object is said to influence one's action if *its appearance* to oneself directly or indirectly affects or conditions the action, in contradistinction to an object affecting or conditioning action by *mere existence*. Note well the phenomenological differentia.

If the influence occurs only by perception of the object, it is simple, direct. If it occurs after considerable mental processing of the image of the object, it is proportionately complex, oblique. Since thought about an object perceived

may have many pathways, of varying intricacy, the influence by one and the same object may be multiple, involving many theses and layers, some of which may well be conflicting. Even at the perceptual level, the various sense organs yield different aspects of the (presumably same) object. Thus, *one and the same object may give rise to many, variant influences*. We must keep this insight in mind, to avoid oversimplification in our understanding of influence and volition.

Another epistemological issue concerns our estimates of *the relative weights* of different simultaneous influences. Such estimates are based in part on generalization of personal observations (when data on conjunction and separation is available); but in large part, they are hypotheses, adhered to so long as they continue to be confirmed by our experiences of effort. Knowledge of one's own psyche is very often as tentative as that of nature, or of other people's or animals' psyches. People often think that they have 'direct insight' into, or at least 'deductive knowledge' of, inner events or relations, when in fact all they have is inductive knowledge. What is important is to realize that the latter is pretty good, quite enough.

Knowledge of freedom of the will is partly introspective, but mainly adductive. Our inner sense of freedom of will provides the occasion for the theoretical search for supporting data and postulates. We may have faith in freewill as a working hypothesis, but are still called upon to develop over the long term convincing definitions of it and arguments in its favor. The formula above proposed for freedom of the will is, I think, a good start.

The doctrine of freewill is important psychologically and socially, the foundation of morality and law. The doctrine declares our responsibility for our actions, however many and strong the forces impinging upon us may seem. Thus, a criminal cannot disclaim responsibility for his crimes, arguing he was 'driven' against his will.

We should note the doctrine's own influence on human action, by the power of suggestion: if one believes he *can* do or avoid something he is more likely to be able to do so, than if he thinks that he cannot do so no matter how much he tries. Thus, belief in freedom of the will increases one's 'freedom', and disbelief in it is an added obstacle.

## 3. Formal Analysis of Influence

It is empirically evident that the Agents of will are all conscious beings: they are Subjects. This observation suggests a fundamental feature of volition, that it is allied to and inconceivable without consciousness. Given that insight, we can better understand the mechanics of influence.

We have seen that a natural event or another agent can influence an agent in his will, by presenting to the latter *an idea* which, though it does not definitely determine or control his subsequent will, constitutes a more or less important parameter in its exercise. Note that the idea presented may be illusory, just as well as real; but insofar as it is aroused by something or someone, the latter is influential. Note also that the 'other agent' influencing one may be an earlier moment of one's own existence (as e.g., in the case of habits).

Influence is a causal relation of sorts, though a weak one since it is never determining due to the essential freedom of the willing soul. Our linguistic practices are evidence that we do consider influence to be a form of causality. We often use verbs suggesting it, e.g. 'he *caused me to* do it ' or 'he *made me* do it'. Influence involves causation, in that some object or appearance (if only partially and contingently) gives rise to some cognition or idea. We may also consider as causation the relation between the appearance, or its cognitive effect, and *the fact that* the eventual volition, if any, is 'made easier' or 'made harder' by it. But influence in itself, as a relation between the object cognized or its cognition, on the one hand, and the outcome of volition, cannot be classified as causation, nor for that matter as volition. It is another category of causality, mediating those two.

We might express influence formally as follows: let **A** be an agent, and **W** be his will at a given time. Let object **Y** be some event *naturally occurring, or willed to occur* by some agent(s) **B** (which B may include agent A at a previous time). Let content of consciousness **X** be some belief, opinion or knowledge *aroused in A by Y* (X may of course simply be Y as cognized by A, or X may have some more complicated cognitive relation to Y).

> Then, we can say "**X influences A to will W**", *provided* "**A *with* awareness of X requires *less* effort to will W, than A without awareness of X**" – that is, provided X inclines *towards* W, the will of A. If, alternatively, X inclined *away from* W, then A would need ***more*** effort to will W with X than without it, and we would say that "**X influences A *not-to* will W**".

These forms define positive and negative influence, both of which may be referred as simply 'influence', leaving the direction of influence (for or against) indefinite. If the effort requirement is exactly equal either way, there is effectively *no* influence. The amounts of effort involved are known in various ways, as earlier discussed. Note that in everyday discourse the implied forms "X inclines to W" and "X inclines away from W" are sometimes be taken as equivalent to the forms of influence, because it is tacitly understood that X was cognized by A and A willed W.

We can of course, mutadis mutandis, similarly clarify various forms of influence involving notX and/or notW as terms, such as "notX influences A to will notW".

In practice, we would consider that whatever gives rise to an influence is itself an influence. That is, the occasion of X that we have labeled Y, or its natural causatives or its volitional agent B – can all be called influences once X is so established. But, *note well*, whether that practice is strictly speaking valid needs to be discussed. The issue is a logical one, concerning causal chaining or syllogism. It is left open for now.

Thus, to review the process of influence in sequence:

a. Something (Y) natural occurs, or is made to occur through the will of some agent or agents (B, which may be or include A).

b. That occurrence (Y) comes to the attention of a subject (A), or causatively produces some physical, mental or spiritual affect in him that he becomes aware of, and possibly thinks about further (X).

c. This subject (A) then engages in some act of will (W), whether a direct volition or an indirect one.

d. And it so happens that such will (W) involved less effort for that agent (A) in the presence of that thought (X) than in its absence.

e. Then the thought (X) can be said to have positively influenced the agent (A) in so willing (W).

Note that Y and X may be one or two. If A is directly aware of Y, then it is the term of reference. If, however, A is not aware of Y, but of some effect of it labeled X, then X is the influential term. The influential term is whatever is the object of cognition, i.e. some appearance, be it real or illusory, faint or intense, far or near. The cognition involved may be sensation (then X is a physical phenomenon) or introspective perception (then X is a mental phenomenon), or even intuition. In the latter case, A is aware of prior reactions of his own soul (so X is a spiritual event). Objects of sensory perception include things observed outside or within one's body, including visceral emotions. Mental objects include[32] memories, imaginations, and possibly mental emotions. The object of awareness may also be an abstraction (then X is a conceptual object, a term within a more or less complex thought). Usually, all these means of cognition are involved, in various combinations.

It should be remarked that the causation by Y of X is a principle to be separately established, but which need not be known to A to be operative. More interesting is the question concerning the comparison of amount of effort, involved for

[32] One could here also include telepathic communications, if we suppose that telepathy exists.

A to will W in the presence or absence of X. For A might well be aware of his effort while he wills W in the presence of X; but that does not tell him what effort he would feel in the absence of X! The answer is that *one does not need to be aware of the influence of something for such influence to be operative*. Consciousness is crucial, but it is the consciousness by A of X, not the consciousness by A of his effort with or without X or of the influence of X. The agent need not at all take notice of the effort expended, though his attention is likely to grow with the effort expended.

> Indeed, the agent may positively think or claim to think that something has no influence which in fact has some influence, or inversely that something which in fact has no influence has some! In such cases, note, the thought or claim must be considered as a separate, superimposed item, which may or not have a degree of influence of its own, quite apart from the fact.

The above formula is relevant only to the logician, or to whoever wishes to establish the existence of a causal relation of influence between something (X) and an agent (A) engaged in a volition (W). Just as the relation of causation, for instance between Y and X at this moment, cannot be established with one observation, but only through repeated observation over time – so with influence. We cannot say for sure that X influences A to will W with reference to any one observation, like the amount of effort in the presence of X. We must refer also to other events, such as the effort in the absence of X.

And indeed, here as with induction of causation in general, certainty is proportional to the frequency of such observations. The more often we have observed the

conjunction, the more confident of a causal relation we become. *Knowledge of influence is empirical and inductive.*

Notice the relation between the object X (as cognized by A) and the amount of effort (say E, for A to will W) – it is a standard causative relation. It consists of two if–then propositions (natural hypotheticals), "if X, then effort E(X)" and "if notX, then effort E(notX)", and a comparative proposition "effort E(X) is less than effort E(notX)". Nothing special – the procedures for such knowledge are commonplace. This refers to the case of positive influence by X. In the case of negative influence by X, E(X) would be greater than E(notX); and in the case of no influence, the effort needed would be the same either way.

Of course, any calculation of effort must take into account not just one influence, but all influences currently active for or against the intended will. The total effort requirement call it E, would be the effort requirement if the will was uninfluenced by anything ($E_0$), plus all the additional efforts required to overcome negative influences ($E_-$), minus all the reduced efforts made possible by positive influences ($E_+$). That is, $E = E_0 + E_- - E_+$.

Effort is something the volitional agent must call forth out of himself or put forward, as a precondition to his succeeding in doing his will. Effort is known to us by inner experience; but the agent need not be conscious of his effort every time he exercises it. Nevertheless, in our definition of influence we have assumed that some effort is always involved in volition, and that its quantity varies, being greater in some circumstances than in others. Whether or not it is focused on, effort is there wherever volition occurs. Volition implies effort.

Also remember, effort is relative. The quantities of effort required for each action vary from individual to individual, and even within the lifetime of a given individual. I may find a job easier to do today than yesterday, for a variety of reasons (e.g. I no longer have a cold); and some other person may find the same job more difficult any day (being less muscular or brainy than me, say).

## 4. Incitement

We have distinguished influence from ordinary conditioning, with reference to the consciousness that mediates the cause and effect in the case of influence. We have pointed out that influences may equally be natural events or events brought about by volition or both, provided in any case the one influenced has cognized these events. Let us now consider more closely the possible interactions of different volitional agents.

One or more volitional agent(s) may impact on another in the way of ordinary conditioning, i.e. by causation. For example, a man while knocked out is tied up by others; as he awakens, he tries unsuccessfully to move his arms and legs, before becoming conscious that he is tied up. His attempt to move are acts of will, whose limited scope is not due to influence but to causation, since he did not notice the rope before trying (but rather became aware of his predicament by trying). If the man happens to be Samson or Superman, he might break the ropes on first trial: his will has overcome the man-made obstacle they present. On the other hand, if the man feels or sees the rope before trying to move, his will is then braced

against the resistance of the ropes – and in that case, it is appropriate to say that influence is involved.

A subsidiary concept of influence, by one or more volitional agent(s) of another, is incitement – which may be defined as ***intentional influence***. In the case of *un*intentional or accidental influence the influencing agent(s) will something with certain purposes in mind, which do not include the goal of influencing the other agent in a certain direction; yet that other agent is indeed influenced, since he cognized that previous will or its outcomes and acted in the same direction, or against it, in relation to such cognition. We have incitement, by contrast, if the one of the goals of the influencing agent(s) was in fact to influence the other agent a certain way, interfering with his life, presenting him with some enticement or obstacle.

We may formalize incitement by means of propositions like "**X incites A to will W**". This is a specialized form of "X influences A to will W", which it implies, where X is something willed by some agent(s) B, *who intend(s)* agent A to will W. (Thus for the positive form; similarly, mutadis mutandis for the negative form and for forms with negative terms.)

Here, the will X of B could be any perceivable physical activity or product thereof, such as a push or pull, a punch or arm-lock, a gesture or speech, a written text, or whatever. Such will, note well, has to have as one of its goals the orientation of A in a certain sense. The mere awareness by B that A *might perchance* be so led does not qualify as intention; B has to *want* that result. Though A must cognize X (and that before willing W), he does *not* have to cognize any of the intentions of B. But X must in fact influence A to

will W, i.e. reduce the effort needed for A to will W and thus the likelihood of his doing so. Influence without intention and intention without influence are equally inadequate to qualify for incitement. And of course, just as influence does not eliminate freedom of the will, so incitement does not.

Thus, whereas influence refers to the consciousness of the influenced agent, incitement refers to both that and the consciousness of the influencing agent(s). The concept of incitement has gray areas, with regard to who and what (and where and when) the intentions involved are aimed at. We must distinguish *specificities* of intention, ranging from general intentions to more and more defined ones. The former intend a kind of result, whereas the latter focus on a designated agent performing a precisely specified action. For example, advertisers want to sell a product to as many people as possible; but it would not be accurate to say that they incited Mr. Smith in particular to buy a particular sample of it (even on a given date in a given shop).

The most obvious case of incitement is *physical* coercion or intimidation. This may involve actual blows or incarceration, to someone or to others that this person cares for, or merely the threat of such direct or indirect physical suffering, with a view to get the victim to do or not-do something. The legal authorities may resort to such measures to protect society. Or thugs of all kinds may use them for their own selfish ends. Depending on one's courage, training and motivation, one may often resist such attempts at domination. Sometimes, individuals try to and fail; sometimes, yielding to fear of pain, they do not try at all. People usually manage to defend themselves collectively, if not individually.

Intimidation, involving the threat of force to someone or the use of it against his loved ones, is of course a *psychological* rather than physical means of incitement. Indeed, most incitement is psychological, ranging from promises of some advantage or reward to threats of some disadvantage or punishment. The promise or threat is often very tacit and vague, though sometimes explicit and defined; it may in either case be true or false. Its content may fall under any existential category: it may be physical, psychological, spiritual, economic, social, political, or whatever.

Incitement by means of *language* in any form (gestures and sounds, speech in words, written language) is considered as special enough to be named distinctively, say as 'persuasion'[33]. We may make further distinctions with reference to the interrelation involved: 'ordering' (by an authority or superior), 'entreating' (by an equal or inferior), 'instructing' (by a teacher), 'example giving' or 'emotionally inspiring' (by a role model), 'advising' (by a friend), and so forth. Often, pressure is applied by seemingly merely giving information (true, false or uncertain), without specifying what it is in aid of; an idea is imbedded in a mind, with the likelihood that it will lead to certain desired conclusions and actions. A promised reward for a certain course of action is an 'incentive'; a promised penalty is a 'disincentive'. If an incentive turns out to have been a false promise, it was probably intended as 'bait'.

Note that in relationships of influence between two or more volitional agents, the interaction of wills may be competitive or cooperative. We should not necessarily view the

[33] I use the term very broadly, including both fair persuasion and persuasion by distortion.

influencer(s) as active and the influenced agent as passive. The agents may have conflicting or shared purposes, with or without intention to do so. They may work at cross-purposes or together, struggling or in harmony, in a variety of relations – for examples, as commercial partners or political opponents, as equal co-workers or as boss and employee or as master and slave, as parents and children or as teacher and student.

All such relations can in principle be defined by analyzing the intentions of the players involved. Some interactions are *de facto*, some are contractual, mutual agreements by word of mouth or in writing; some are more or less enforceable, some not. We see here how the whole range of human or animal social life becomes an object of aetiological study.

An important issue in this context is that of parsing *responsibility*. Volitional acts are primarily the responsibility of their agent, no matter how much they are influenced by external factors or persons, since he has free will. Nevertheless, in a more nuanced sense of the term, his responsibility may be mitigated with reference to the influences impinging on him. If something good was very easy to do, the praise in doing it is less marked than if it was difficult. If something bad was very hard to do, the blame in doing it is more marked than if it was easy. Our concern may be moral or legal.

When we consider human influences, and especially intentional ones, sharing the praise or blame is necessary, since more than one agent is involved in the result. Obviously, unintentional influence implies a lesser share of responsibility for the influencer than intentional influence (i.e. incitement). In some cases, the scenario relates to an

association between two or more persons who perform some deed in common. We might then ask, who played what role, and what their mutual relationships were, to determine the hierarchies of responsibility involved. Such judgments are not based on exact science (to date). Many virtues are needed to arrive at a fair judgment, among them respect for facts, attention to detail, impartiality, the sense of justice, a pure spirit, wisdom.[34]

[34] I particularly recommend in this context the already mentioned work of Hart and Honoré.

# 7. CHAPTER SEVEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 6.

## FURTHER ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCE

### 1. Some Features of Influence

We defined influence as the relationship, to the action of a volitional agent, of contents of consciousness that make his exercise of will easier or harder. To 'make easier or harder' means that: in the presence of these objects, provided one is minimally aware of them just before acting, the effort of will needed for some purpose is increased or decreased *by comparison to* that needed in their absence. If they are not contents of consciousness, they are effectively absent as influences, whether present or absent as facts.

The contents of consciousness involved may be experienced material, mental or even intuitive objects. That is, they may be concrete environmental or physiological factors or conditions, or phenomenal contents of mind (memories, imaginations, verbal thoughts, emotions, whatever), or again acts or attitudes within the agent himself. The operative contents of consciousness may also include abstractions from

any such experiences (that is, concepts, inferences, any intellectual considerations). The degree of consciousness involved may be intense ('conscious'), peripheral ('subconscious') or virtually nil ('unconscious'); this may or not affect the degree of influence.

But in any case, the medium of consciousness is essential to characterization of something as an influence. If something has an effect on an agent's actions independent of consciousness, i.e. (as we say) 'objectively', we may speak of ordinary conditioning, but not of influence. Thus, for instance, a person's natural constitution (such as brain makeup or bodily structure, in comparison to other individuals of the same species or to other species) certainly affect his actions, but not in the way of influence. These may well yet be influences – if their apprehension plays a role in his actions. For example, if a man seeing his poor physical appearance in a mirror is discouraged from pursuing a woman – his ugliness ceases to be a mere condition and becomes an influence (on his own volition[35]).

Influences are not sufficient conditions for will, but are 'efficient' in the sense that without them or others like them the willed act would be improbable, though still possible somehow. Positive influences make things more readily accessible (facilitate); negative influences make things more difficult (hinder). It depends which way one is headed.

A simple way to represent these tendencies is to visualize someone moving an object up or down a hill: the hillside (or

[35] Of course, regarding the woman's volition, it may be influenced by the man's appearance in her sight, whether such appearance is a mere condition or an influence relative to his volition.

the force of gravity) is analogous to a positive influence on a person moving the object down, but analogous to a negative influence on a person moving it up. The degree of influence may be illustrated by the inclination of the hillside. If it is steep, influence is great, pro or con. If it is not steep, the influence is small, pro or con. If the inclination is strong in a favorable direction (downhill), little effort is needed to achieve the desired end; but if it is unfavorably strong (uphill), much effort is required. If the inclination is not strong, comparatively more effort will be needed for positive goals (down) and comparatively less effort for negative ones (up) – comparatively to a stronger inclination, that is.

For this reason, we often speak of people's proclivities or inclinations. The term inclination carries a useful image, suggesting a landscape with valleys or canals symbolizing the easy (more inertial) paths, and hills or other obstacles as requiring special (more volitional) effort to go over or overcome. We can imagine a marble (one's will) traveling over such variable landscape, subject to alternative developments and the conditions of transition at different times from one to the other. The landscape idea allows us to view effort not merely in terms of modifying the paths of a marble (going with little effort on the easy courses, or with more effort on the harder ones), but also more radically in terms of remodeling the landscape itself[36].

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[36] For example, in a physiological context, we might refer to the general health and tonus of one's body as the underlying landscape. Every action occurring within a favorable bodily context is easier, so in the long run it is best to keep fit without having to predict what one will eventually undertake. Similarly, with regard to the mind and soul.

To influence the course of events is to make them *tend* to go a certain way rather than any other. To clarify this, we might refer to effort, since effort is diminished or increased according as it goes with or against tendencies. But we should not confuse a heuristic formula with a description or an explanation. Our impression is that influences stimulate or stagnate our responses, i.e. increase or decrease our will. This aspect of influence can perhaps best be expressed with reference to the ***likelihood*** of a certain response.

It seems that the *more* effort an act of will requires, the *less* likely is the agent to provide it; the *less* effort it requires, the *more* likely will he do so. The agent is naturally lazy or economical: if things are made easy for him, he will probably go for it; if difficult, probably not. This is said 'all things considered', i.e. taking into account all the influences involved, and not just focusing on some and ignoring others. It does not exclude that the agent may indeed invest more effort, and overcome some great resistance, especially if motivated accordingly by some other influence (for instance, a moral principle or a vain self-image).

A tendency may be viewed as a 'force', which goes in the same direction as the 'force' of one's will, reducing the amount of effort needed and increasing the likelihood of such will, or in the opposite direction, making more effort necessary and the will less likely. The advantage of this concept of 'force' is to provide a common measure between tendencies and will, although they are very different in nature, making a calculus (additions and subtractions) possible.

Note that here, when we speak of probabilities (more or less likelihood), we mean something radically different from the

statistics intended in causation, in that it does *not* signify that, under certain unknown or unspecified conditions, the likelihood becomes a necessity. We here just report that that the greater the effort required the less likely it is to be provided; and the less effort required, the more likely provided. That effort and likelihood are thus inversely proportional may be viewed as a sort of *principle of inertia* observed in the spiritual realm. But such analogy is not meant to imply inevitable behavior patterns.

As we have pointed out, the assumption of freedom of the will is that irrespective of all influences, where volition occurs it is nevertheless 'freewill'[37]. Perhaps an inner sense of freedom is involved, which allows us to think that, even if we have always behaved in a certain way in certain circumstances, we are still free to behave otherwise in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, we are inwardly aware that had the influential circumstance been different, we might well have behaved differently. In other words, the influential factor played a role in our decision, though not a determining one.

A person is said to have a (relatively) 'strong will', if over time his conduct is less readily influenced – especially by other people's wills, but also more broadly by any circumstances. A person with 'weak will' is often (comparatively) driven or thwarted in his will, i.e. his effort is rarely equal to his intentions. Note that these two concepts are relative: they may compare different periods in the life of

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[37] Influence may therefore be likened to natural spontaneity in that its results are only probabilistic, never determining. See chapter 1.3 of *Volition*.

the same person, as well as the behavior patterns of different people.

The influence of something on one's will is essentially subjective, since it depends on a cognitive act. Nevertheless, the influence as such is objective enough, in the sense that its increase or decrease of the effort requirement for a given volition in given circumstances may be considered as a 'natural law'.

One's cognitive assessment of a situation may be true or false, objectively justifiable or unjustifiable; the influence of something 'perceived', or assumed to be a fact, does not depend on its being a fact in fact. It suffices that one *believe* something to be a fact, or to be likely enough, for it to have considerable influence. Whether such belief is based on experience, reason, emotion, wisdom, intelligence, stupidity, faith, guesswork, confusion or self-delusion is irrelevant, so long as it is operative.

It follows that a molehill may seem like a mountain, and vice versa. Thus, one man may be brought to a standstill by the prospect of resistances that were in fact minimal, while another may heroically overcome enormous odds because the challenge seemed puny to him. Neurotic doubts may ignore all evidence, and artificially inhibit volition, bringing on defeat. Shining faith may ignore all rational objections, and fire volition to triumph.

It should be made clear that influences on our actions are rarely singular and simple. Just as a mass of ordinary conditions underlie them, so influences are multiple and complicated.

To give an example: suppose I lift a heavy load. The lifting is objectively difficult because of the great weight of the load and the inadequacy of my muscles, or the wetness of my hands, or my having insufficiently eaten lately, or my feeling drowsy. But there are also mental factors, like my self-confidence, or my fear of dropping the load and making a noise, or my being in a hurry, which affect things more subtly and obliquely, in the way of influence. My considering myself strong encourages me, my fear of falling upsets my concentration, my feeling rushed spurs me. All these factors play a role in shaping my physical movements.

At any given moment, with regard to any pending act of will, there may be a multitude of influences. We may view them collectively as making one resultant influence. But it is more accurate to view them severally and analytically. Some point in one direction, others in the opposite direction; the resultant is the net influence, which may be positive, negative or balanced. Moreover, while volition is still undecided, there may be a range of options; each of these has its own resultant influences, so that the options may be ranked, ordered according to the degree and polarity of influence concerning them.

Furthermore, influences should not be considered as isolated forces, because they often mutually affect each other in some way. Causal chains and structures may interrelate them. This may mean ‘mutual reinforcement’, such that one gives rise to or increases another, and then the latter generating some more of the former, till both reach a certain stable level. Or it may mean ‘mutual counteraction’, such that one decreases or eliminates another or vice versa.

Thus, a detailed calculus of influences is theoretically possible, and needed to fully clarify each situation of will. In practice, such calculations are very tentative and approximate, since we do not have sure and precise data. We should also note the difference between identifying and estimating influences before the fact, i.e. as an aid to choice and decision, and doing so after the fact, i.e. as an aid to judgment about a completed volition. In the latter case, we are taking stock, to reward or punish ourselves by rating, or to learn lessons for the future.

## 2. Processes of Influence

Natural objects or events influence an agent when appearing before him, as objects of consciousness (through his perceptual faculties, outer or inner, or, more broadly, through his conceptual faculties). Such cognitions may generate emotions, imaginations and deliberations in him, as well as consequent actions: these all involve or are influenced acts of will. Emotion involves evaluation, an act of will; imagination is largely willed projection of mental images; deliberation is thought, also largely willed; and of course, action means will.

Also, subjects normally influence other subjects via such natural objects or events. Thus, for instance, a woman may attract a man by walking or dancing in front of him (light), by speaking or singing (sound), by her odors or perfume (smell), by physical contact (touch), by her cooking (taste), or more abstractly by her beliefs and values made evident through the preceding sense data. These external items may generate

emotions, imaginations and deliberations in the man, which eventually influence him into appropriate action.

Various subdivisions of influence need to be considered. One may be influenced by *information*, which may be perceptual givens or conceptual insights, whether in the material world or in the mental matrix, arising naturally or through research or by the suggestion of other people (through oral, written or visual means). The information need not be true; it suffices that it is believed. Our individual beliefs evidently influence our individual actions; moreover, our belief systems give rise to behavior patterns[38].

One may also or alternately be influenced by *emotions*: felt in the body or in the head, concretely or abstractly. Emotions, of course, often arise in the face of information (be it true or false). Though information may influence via emotions, it may also influence without intervening emotions. Some emotions are apparently 'spontaneous', arising without clear relation to any new information; we experience an emotional charge in us, but cannot offhand interpret its origin. This is quite normal; but if it happens too often without rational explanation, it may become a source of anxiety and pathology.

> Some people believe, rightly or wrongly, in the possibility of direct 'spiritual' influence. In this view, one may transmit ideas to another by mysterious pathways, or even will one's will on another's will. In such cases, if influence need not happen through natural objects or events (i.e. mainly via matter), are

[38] One might add that, conversely, our behavior patterns sometimes affect our belief systems.

> the mechanics of influence more complicated than normally conceived? In the case of telepathy, this possibility changes nothing essentially; the label 'influence' remains accurate[39]. In the case of takeover of will or domination, we may simply refer to an effective annulment of the power of will of one subject by another: such overpowering is not 'influence' in a strict sense, but more precisely a far-reaching volition[40], effectively a 'conditioning'.

As earlier stated, information may influence actions in a roundabout way, as well as directly. The following is a more detailed analysis of such oblique influence in the case of emotions, for instance (similar analysis is possible for all information).

We can, by the way, distinguish three types of 'emotions' – visceral 'feelings' in the body, some of which are products of physical sensation (e.g. a pleasure during massage or a pain upon burning) and some of which seem of psychosomatic

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[39] If telepathy exists, it would mean that the thoughts of one person could receive information originating in the thoughts of another. The latter might be an already influential person (a guru, a parent, a teacher, a lover, a friend), but possibly even an unknown person. This could occur in waking hours, or equally well in the course of dreams. It is difficult to account for all dreams with reference only to subconscious volition of scenarios, coupled with 'spontaneous' eruptions of content from the brain. Dreams occasionally contain totally unexpected scenes, seeming beyond one's usual creative abilities and too complex for chance. Is the explanation for them perhaps that they occurred by intermingling of two or more minds? Do all minds meet in some 'collective unconscious', maybe?

[40] A sort of telekinesis of among spiritual entities. This would be another hard to prove thesis of 'parapsychology'.

origin (e.g. a person wakes up in the morning with a cloud of anxiety in the stomach area or bubbles of joy in the upper chest[41] or throat), and purely mental emotions whose phenomenal qualities are very subtle if at all discernable.

It should be stressed that an emotion may be present and felt – but *unadmitted*. In such case, it is said to be 'subconsciously' cognized, because one is aware of it with a low or minimal degree of consciousness. This is in contrast to 'conscious' emotion, which is more explicitly recognized, which means that *one identifies with it* to some extent, at least enough to consider and deal with it. We may also distinguish between awareness *of* an emotion, and awareness *that it is* emotion; the latter classifies the former, implying an additional cognitive act.

When an emotion occurs, our usual response is to try to explain it, so as to (a) quash it, or at least diminish it, if it is negative, or (b) continue it, if not intensify it, if it is positive. We naturally prefer the positive to the negative (unless we are masochistic, but then the desired positive emotion is further down the line, more tortuous), and cling to what we desire and escape from our objects of aversion.

This response of 'trying to explain', is a search for the cause(s) of the emotion or for its exact meaning (besides its being pleasant or unpleasant) – and the important thing to understand is that the interpretations we (or others) suggest are merely hypotheses, which may be right or wrong. In fact, they are very often mere conjectures, i.e. probably wrong, in

[41] I suppose that until modern times people believed the seat of the soul to be in the heart due to the experience of certain feelings in that region.

that the more complex particular emotions usually have multiple causes, and it is hard to establish which of these are the dominant ones even when we manage to list them all.[42]

Thus, emotions influence actions in two ways: simple/direct or complex/roundabout. First, the emotion itself may affect conduct, by easing or obstructing certain actions (e.g. a light-hearted child skips around; whereas a person with a headache avoids movement). Second, the emotion supplies the data around which we construct hypotheses about its causes, and these explanations in turn affect our actions (e.g. thinking I feel good or bad because someone said something to me, I pursue or avoid that person).

Psychologists study *specific* influences, which group together various combinations of the above-mentioned genera of influences. For example, the various categories of influence on one's life might be listed, including one's parents and other family members, one's school teachers, other friends and acquaintances, certain books read (novels, religious documents, histories, philosophies, scientific treatises), the other media (movies, TV and radio programs, etc.), and so forth. Then for each category, the nature of the influence would be ascertained – e.g. *what* did one's father or mother influence? Perhaps one's moral inclinations, one's manners, one's choice of spouse, or one's political beliefs. And *how* did such transmission occur? Perhaps by example, by

[42] Whether emotions are necessarily 'intentional', i.e. aim in the direction of some object, is an issue. I think some do and some do not. The latter may just be bodily or mental phenomena without significance. In that case, no interpretation will be found for them. Another question we might then ask is whether all emotions are perceived at some level or they can exist without being ever felt. Again, I suspect the latter may be true.

preaching, or through some shared experience. A nexus of information and emotions is involved.

## 3. Instincts in Relation to Freewill

With regard to the statement made that all volition is freewill, we have to answer a question concerning *instincts*, i.e. seemingly inherited (or at least individually innate) environmental information and behavioral responses that are not mere reflexes. How are certain surprising observed behaviors to be explained? How come all members of a species behave in the same way in the same circumstances? Can some cognitive data be genetically stored and passed on? Can some volitions be controlled by genetic factors?

For a start, we should avoid confusion between intentional acts and acts with certain incidental consequences. In both cases, there is will, indeed free will – but the former are consciously aimed at some goal, whereas the latter *only seem* to have a certain direction to an ex post facto observer. The *intention* of instinctive acts is obscure, vague and internal; it is not to be confused with the biological *utility* of such acts identified by scientists. The instinctive act responds to an inner urge, in a way that calms or gains relief from that urge. The soul's consciousness is focused on that urge, and the will's aim is to answer that pressing demand anyway it can (whether the 'how' is immediately evident, or has to be discovered or learned). The soul is not told 'why' it has to do it, i.e. need not know what the life-sustaining value of its instinctive response might be. The *urge* to so act, on the other

hand, may well be viewed as 'programmed' by nature (i.e. a product of evolutionary selection).

Consider for example a baby sucking at its mother's bosom. The action as a set of mouth muscle movements is one we would consider volitional, yet we would not seriously suggest he has consciously directed his muscles for feeding purposes. The baby's volition is surely influenced by hunger and perhaps by the smell of its mother's milk. In such cognitive context, there may be a number of reactions the baby's volition may choose from, including sucking, crying, waving arms, say. In this sense, the baby *has choice*. But it just so happens that sucking movements are the primary choice, the most likely choice, i.e. *the easiest* option in the range of available options.

Thus, the event involved is equivalent to trial and error learning, except that *the first choice volition is influenced to take* is the 'right' one. The other options are therefore not tried.[43]

Thus, 'instinct' is a legitimate and definable concept: it may be fully assimilated to our concept of influence. The volition

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[43] Similarly for animals. For instance, in the case of a baby turtle rushing to the sea before predators get it, after its egg hatches on the seashore. How did the poor beast know the danger and where and how to escape it? I have not studied the matter; but may suggest possibilities. It may well be born with a nervous urge to run immediately, a sort of angst it gains relief from by running; the issue is then what makes it run in the specific direction of the sea? Perhaps the smell of the sea, the breeze, the light or the temperature influence it. In any case, we need not assume some mysterious source of innate knowledge on its part. It suffices to say that the influences, whatever they be, are such as to favor that behavior rather than other possible alternatives.

involved in instinctive acts is not exempt from freedom and responsibility. We can therefore side with the proposition that genes do not transmit foreknowledge of the environment or complex living skills. Technically, the influence of instinct functions exactly like any other influential item. ***Simply, an instinct is an innate influence, which may or may not be partly affected by environmental circumstances or their cognition; and this influence happens to be the most powerful of other innate or acquired influences.***

Influences are not all equal: this is true in all contexts, as we have seen, and not just with reference to instinct. Influences are of varying effect on volition; some influences are strong, some are weak; they may be ranked. Influences are all operative simultaneously on the soul about to will; but the soul is most likely to will in the easiest direction, i.e. the one in favor of which the influence is strongest, loudest, most manifest. That this direction is consistently taken by a baby or a lower animal does not imply that other options are in fact absent; they are indeed present as potentials in the background of the volition, only being less influential they are less likely to be felt or acted upon.

For a more mature or more spiritually developed soul, the easiest option is not always the one taken; the soul has discovered its own volitional power, and can therefore choose less obvious directions. Note that even an animal may swerve (or be influenced to swerve) from its instinctive path; for example, a dog trainer can get a dog to resist its hunting instinct and obey the injunction to walk on when it comes across some prey.

In formal terms, we may refer to a disjunctive proposition, where “P or Q or R…” are the alternatives open to volition in

given circumstances and influences. However, P may be more likely than Q, and Q more likely than R, etc. In such case, the agent will 'instinctively' opt for P, the most obvious and influential choice, although he may eventually discover his capacity to opt for Q or even R, notwithstanding their being less manifest and influential.[44]

## 4. Liberation from Unwanted Influences

When we meditate on our internal workings, we can easily see the force of inertia existing in us. It is very evident that though we may to some extent have freewill, it is not always and everywhere immediately operative. Thoughts, imaginings, memories, emotions, faces, musical tunes, words – may go on and on for hours, without our being able to stop them or channel them for more than a few seconds, if that. It may however be possible to control such dull mental activity in the long run, thanks to disciplined spiritual exercises like meditation. Thus, freewill seems to exist, not in all things 'at will', but often only by 'working on oneself' over time, i.e. going through a time-consuming process.

This is how the yearning for inner *liberation* may first arise. Once we have witnessed our own incapacity to concentrate our will over a period of time, we are appalled and become anxious to remedy this weakness of the will. Some philosophers think the solution to be asceticism, considering that most of the force that drags us down into such endless

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[44] Note that I use a similar schema of ordered disjuncts in my work *Future Logic*, with regard to 'factorial induction' (see part VI).

chatter of the mind is the body's innate desire for food and drink, physical comfort, sex, and so forth. Others argue that more pondered methods must be used to overcome mental scattering and sluggishness.

Many people are not even at the level where they are concerned with the ongoing obsession and anarchy inside their minds, but are rather frightened by some of their compulsive external behavior patterns, such as anti-social anger and violence, or self-destructive and socially dangerous lust, for examples. Such actions may be viewed in religious terms as sins, and fought by prayer and other pious deeds; or they may be confronted in a more secular perspective. But what concerns us here is their relationship to freedom of the will.

Every punctual or sustained attempt to gain ascendancy over such subtle or coarse tendencies is an expression and affirmation of freewill. Self-mastery is possible, if we do not 'identify with' the influences on our will, i.e. if we do not say or think of them 'this is me' or 'this is part of me'.

But in addition to the influences already within us, in the way of thoughts and feelings, we may need to look further out and consider the way nature and other people condition and influence our mental and physical actions. I will have different life-support issues to face if I live in a hot country or in a cold country. If someone imprisons me, or creates a totalitarian society around me, it affects the things I need to think about and what I may do or not do. The contents of my thoughts are affected by my environment.

Anything that affects our subjective world, or objectively broadens or narrows the choices open to us in our life,

anything to be taken into consideration in the exercise of volition, is an influence. If it is considered good, if facilitates our pursuits; if bad, it makes things more difficult for us. We logically prefer the former, and so far as possible oppose the latter.

Volition is capable of being influenced, but is also capable of overcoming influences or diminishing their impact. This is made possible through a policy of awareness, or mindfulness – 'working on oneself'.

## 5. Propositions about the Future

Volition is expressed through propositions of the form "A wills W", which may be called 'volitional propositions'. Although the simple present tense is needed to discuss volition as it occurs (whether in categorical or conditional propositions), mostly we use such form in the past or future tenses. Usually, except for introspective reports, we only know after the fact that "A wills W" was true: i.e. such a proposition is derived from the past form "**A willed W**". The future form "**A will will W**"[45] has always been of especial interest to logicians and philosophers, because it seems to claim as a fact something that depends on free will and therefore cannot strictly be predicted with absolute certainty.

Many propositions less explicitly involve prediction of free will, yet depend for their truth on the will of someone or

[45] It is no accident that the same word "will" is used both for volition and for the future tense. It has the same etymology in either sense [O.E. *willa*].

those of many people. For example: “the sea battle will take place tomorrow”. It should be noted that *such propositions about future will(s) are not only about volition, but also about the amount of influence on volition*. In our example (it is actually Aristotle’s), the likelihood that the prediction come true is very high (though not absolute), because all the people involved are so entangled in their war that it would be very difficult (though not inconceivable) for them to make peace overnight. Thus, propositions about influences involved are tacitly implied.

All forms concerning the relation of influence may be called ‘influential propositions’. This includes positive forms, like “X influences A to will W”, and their negations, like “X does not influence A to will W”. Also, as we have seen, the extreme terms may be replaced by their negations – X by notX and W by notW. As for the middle term, A, there is no point considering its replacement by its negation, notA, since that would not refer to an agent; we can only substitute another agent, say B or C. A subspecies of influential forms are the forms of incitement, such as “X incites A to will W” and its derivatives.

One common form relating to both volition and influences thereon is “**When/if X occurs, then A will do W**” - where (i) X is any influential event, i.e. a natural (deterministic or otherwise) occurrence and/or a volition by self and/or other(s), which agent A is aware of or falsely believes to be true prior to acting, and (ii) agent A is any person or group of persons or other volitional entity or entities, and (iii) W refers to some act(s) of will by agent A (individually, in parallel or collectively), which act(s) of will may simply be a decision

taken but not yet carried out, or a partly sustained process, or a process sustained to its conclusion, successfully or not.

Such forms may be referred to as ‘personal conditionals’ in that they resemble logical, natural and other types of conditional propositions. However, they are different in important respects. The antecedent here is an event that has not only to occur but be perceived to do so, or alternatively it may even just be wrongly thought to occur - by the agent(s) concerned. The consequent is connected to the antecedent not through some logical or natural necessity, but through the personal *resolve* of the agent(s) concerned, which may be of varying strength - which means that though the consequent uses the copula “will do” it is at best probable but never certain that the agent(s) will bring it about. The proposition as a whole can of course nevertheless be declared true or false, according as all its intended conditions are fulfilled or not.

Note that the proposition “When/if X occurs, then A will do W” does not strictly tell us what A will do when or if X does not occur; we should perhaps rather state more clearly “Only if X occurs, A will do W” to distinguish this from “Whether X occurs or not, A will do W”. We may classify personal conditionals as a category of de re propositions, different from natural, temporal and extensional conditionals; they are not, however, to be confused with logical conditionals, and in particular not with material implication (which is a subcategory of de dicta proposition, and not at all de re as its name might lead one to suppose).

Detailed formal study of these and other such forms is beyond the scope of this book, but the job needs eventually to be done by someone.[46]

[46] But see Appendix 1 of *Volition* for some additional comments on this topic.

# 8. CHAPTER EIGHT

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 8 (sections 2 & 3).

## 1. Volition and Biology

It is interesting to note, to start with, that biology textbooks may refer to voluntary and involuntary processes without ever admitting volition or asking questions about it. Yet (I would say), volition is central to many issues in biology.

a. We have here suggested that *consciousness and volition occur in tandem*. On an abstract level, the following propositions concerning them seem reasonable. Consciousness is, of course, the prior of the two, and conceivable without volition (since we are sometimes aware of things without reacting to them). But all volition requires some consciousness, and cannot occur without it. This is even true of whim, and all the more of volition with a purpose. Volition is distinguishable from a spontaneous mechanical event by the involvement in it of consciousness. Volition is free will; there is no such thing as non-free volition. Nevertheless, the degree and range of freewill may vary enormously. The power of will is proportional to the power of consciousness.

*Consciousness would be without practical utility to an organism if not complemented by volition. By informing volition, cognition becomes meaningful as a tool of survival. Furthermore, most of our cognitive processes depend on acts of volition.* At the sensory level, for instance, opening or focusing our eyes is volition. At the mental level, recalling a memory or imagining is often volitional. In thought, volition is needed to direct our attention hither and thither and to intensify it as appropriate. *Our consciousness, not being infinite, would not get us very far without volition.* The conjunction of volition and consciousness in organisms is thus no accident of nature, but necessary.

These propositions are based on observation of living beings, but also may serve as postulates for biology. *Consciousness and volition are found wherever nervous systems are found.* In humans and higher animals, the latter include a central nervous system (brain and spinal cord), and a peripheral one, with sensory and motor capabilities. In lower animals, such as insects or worms, the physiological apparatus for consciousness and volition is much less elaborate, but identifiable nonetheless. In plant life, and (I presume offhand) in single cell animal life, no organs for consciousness and volition have been identified.

Movement following sensation does not necessarily indicate volitional reaction; response to stimuli may be reflex. All the same, at least for higher forms of animal life, volition to some extent comparable to ours may be assumed, in view of their observable *behavior*. Such assumption seems further justified by the major *morphological* and *genetic* similarities between them and us, suggesting our evolution from common life forms. It remains true that human cognitive and volitional

capabilities, including speech and reasoning[47], are significantly superior, suggesting a quantum leap in evolution. But we can point to notable differences in brain structure and size to explain this; it does not ignore or contradict any law of biology.

Also noteworthy are the observable facts of social interaction among animals and/or humans, and in particular the emergence of culture in human groups. These are indicative of consciousness and volition. They make possible the transmission, between contemporaries and from generation to generation, of living skills (e.g. hunting techniques) and, in the case of human culture, historical and abstract knowledge, as well as possessions and technology.

In sum, the distinction between 'lower' and 'higher' animals might be made by saying that the former are more sensory and reflexive, responding immediately to present stimuli in standardized ways, while the latter increasingly function through the medium of *a mind*, i.e. with reference to memory (storing and recalling past sensations), imagination (reshuffling memories, dreaming) and anticipation (considering alternatives, making choices), which makes possible their powers of cognition, volition and valuation stretched over time. Among the latter, humans apparently excel, probably mainly due to their development of language, in thought and speech (probably concurrently).

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[47] But there is no doubt that at least the higher animals 'speak' through facial and bodily expressions, as well as uttered sounds; and we can observe them 'reasoning' to some extent, judging situations and selecting responses to them. The differences are differences of degree rather than essence. Also, we should not forget that certain species close to human have existed and are now extinct.

Biologists today are content to *describe* rather than explain physical processes in living organisms, using apparently neutral terms like "doing" or "organization", which avoid mention of volition or even consciousness, let alone soul. But to sidestep certain issues is not to resolve them. However, it is up to biologists to find some credible bridge between the philosophy of soul and their material concerns and findings. There is no hurry, and no justification for offhand rejection. If philosophers are right in postulating soul, biologists will eventually come around, and no doubt then greatly enrich the concept.

b. As we have argued, consciousness and volition imply a soul, serving respectively as subject and agent in them. Soul is logically needed to explain both them and our knowledge of them. Soul of course implies belief in some sort of '***vitalism***' (here understood as the belief that animal organisms, including humans, have a 'soul')[48], as against '***mechanism***' (the belief that beasts at least, if not also humans, are merely very complex machines). However, vitalism need not be understood simplistically, as the traditional assumption of a 'ghost in the machine' of human and animal organisms. For, as we have explained, *soul has no phenomenal qualities, not even spatial extension or position*. Thus, any imagination of the soul as a transparent cloud animating the body is misconstrued, and any attack on the soul that assumes such a symbol literally is an unfair criticism.

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[48] Though strictly the term vitalism is also applied to vegetables as well as animals. A more appropriate term would be spiritualism (compare to materialism and mentalism), though this is generally associated with mystical *séances* aimed at communicating with the spirits of the dead (also called 'spiritism').

The vitalist-mechanist dispute is of course far from academic, but scientifically, ethically and politically extremely charged. It is paradoxical that the mechanistic doctrine, which is touted as empirical and positivistic, emerged as a pillar of modern thought some 400 years ago, thanks to René Descartes. For all his intelligence in many other respects, he was nevertheless very much an 'ivory tower' philosopher, and his assumption that unlike humans, (the other) animals have no soul was based on no observation or scientific process. Yet, as often in the history of philosophy, his prestige sufficed to give respectability, credence and momentum to the idea.

The horrendous practical consequences of mechanism are today increasingly evident all around us. Many people do not look upon animals (other than their pets, perhaps) as living beings who can suffer, but as 'things' that utter cries and make faces because they are so programmed to do by 'nature'. Therefore, industrial agriculture subjects animals to brutal living and dying conditions, and daily sacrifices millions of them, under the pretense that the masses can only be fed that way. Animals are cruelly tortured daily in laboratories, under the pretext that the needs of 'life science' justify such 'experiments'. And now, we witness the coming of genetic engineering, the ultimate in disregard for the difference between living organisms and inanimate matter, driven by the utmost greed, endangering major species[49].

[49] For instance, in the case of genetically modified fish, the engineered specimens are bigger and more sexually active than their wild relatives. As the former inevitably escape into the natural environment, they are so bound to gradually genetically displace the latter. But being, very probably, physiologically weaker

Altogether, it is an orgy of unconsciousness and moral ignorance.

> The Nazis used similar degradation to justify and make possible the Holocaust of Jews in 1933-45. As Paul Johnson writes: "Rather as the medieval anti-Semite saw the Jew as non-human, a devil or a sort of animal (hence the *Judensau*), the Nazi extremist absorbed Hitler's sub-scientific phraseology and came to regard Jews as bacilli or a particularly dangerous kind of vermin"[50]. Mechanism degrades animals to the level of mere objects; racial and similar hatreds degrade humans to the level of animals, and therefore (by way of a syllogism) of 'things'.

Mechanism is not innocuous; it promotes such heartless mentality. One may well consider it as a dogma *designed* to conveniently rationalize inhumane treatment, against beasts and eventually humans. Surely, its advocates, and their practicing disciples, should be in prison, or at the very least in lunatic asylums, considering the harm they have done, are doing and are about to do on this planet; instead of which, our society honors them and enriches them.

The success of physics does not justify mechanism in biology. Mechanism cannot in reason claim the benefit of the doubt normally accorded to an untested scientific hypothesis, in view of its deadly practical consequences. As already stated, until its proponents actually come forward with mathematical formulas that *exactly predict* all the actions of

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organisms, the GMO are themselves non-viable in nature in the long run.

[50] Johnson, p. 473. Similar arguments are often used as pretexts for individual or mass murders.

animals, or even humans, they cannot pretend to defend scientific truth.

c. With regard to the theory of ***evolution***, to which I subscribe, the following can simply be said. We can conceive that when inorganic matter (itself star dust, the end result of a long history of astronomical events) coalesced in certain sufficiently complex structures, it became living matter (single cells). These structures evolved into still more complex structures, viz. plants and lower animals; then the latter further evolved into higher animals, including humans. In this latest stage, at least, nature has allowed for living organisms with souls to appear, having considerable special powers of cognition, volition and valuation. There is nothing inconceivable in that from the point of view of evolutionary theory.

These special characteristics appeared in nature, and have so far been more or less compatible with the environment. They have seemed, at first, like particularly good adaptations. They could well, however, over a longer term prove incompatible. Indeed, it seems more and more likely, in view of mankind's current propensity to destroy other species and the biosphere itself. Our own demise is perhaps even, for all we know, already now inevitable within the next few decades. So, if only on planet Earth, these special characteristics, in the degree found in the human species at least, may well turn out to have been self-destructive – an unsuccessful, overambitious experiment of nature. But for now, they are here.

(More is said on biological issues in a later chapter of *Volition*.)

## 2. Therapeutic Psychology

The special sciences aimed at the study of human (and more broadly animal) behavior, notably psychology and sociology, are of course, implicitly if not explicitly, closely tied up with the concept of volition and its allies. All too often, students of behavior ignore or conceal this basic truth, and develop their analyses without explicit reference to it, thinking by such omission to appear more 'scientific'. They appeal to chemicals and statistics, without formally analyzing what logically underlies their discourse. This is foolish, if not dishonest. My hope is that the present work will help to overcome such distortion.

A few comments are worth making here regarding mental disease and its cure, without claiming any clinical knowledge. The concept of mental disease is presumably derived by analogy from that of bodily disease. We refer by it to any state of affairs in our mental life that is experienced as chronically uncomfortable, or as seriously damaging our efficacy in dealing with our everyday life, whether intellectually, emotionally, existentially, socially or otherwise. Hopefully, such dysfunction is curable; although we may not ourselves now know how to cure it.

Some psychologists imagine 'the mind' (or psyche) as a kind of cupboard, with the top shelf containing conscious mental items, the middle shelf subconscious ones and the bottom shelf unconscious ones. The trouble with this viewpoint is that it implies the mind to be some kind of entity, made of 'mental stuff', suspended somewhere in our heads, with a

structure of some sort such that, by analogy to diseases of the human body, parts of it may be wrongly constructed or be misplaced or missing or extraneous or inappropriately moved about.

Furthermore, the contents of this cupboard (the said 'mental items') are identified principally with 'ideas', a catchall term including units of information, intentional events and bits of emotion, which are themselves viewed as 'entities' of mental substance. The motions of these entities, within a shelf and from shelf to shelf, make up the inner life of the psyche. It is not made clear how these entities arise, change, move and depart – whether spontaneously (inexplicably), by interaction with each other (like billiard balls, subject to causation), and/or by the will of some additional entity (a person, a who) placed adjacent to the cupboard.

Also, we might ask: what makes an informative idea cognized, an intentional idea willed or an emotional idea valued? Where is the self in this account? These peculiar qualities are left unexplained. This currently popular model of the mind (in origin partly Cartesian, partly Freudian[51]) is obviously simplistic. It fragments and reifies excessively. It fails to explain mental events convincingly, and indeed considerably obstructs explanation, being essentially *mechanistic*.

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[51] The historical question deserves extensive study, of course. The Freudian model is perhaps more abstract, fragmenting the 'psychic structure' into ego, id and superego, or again into conscious, subconscious and unconscious, and referring to 'energy charged elements'; but it comes to the same mechanistic portrayal of the psyche, which is aetiologically misleading and sterile.

Additionally, it leaves the relation of the mind to the brain (and thence body) as a mystery, since it suggests a duplication of functions between mind and brain – an inexplicable redundancy (called 'parallelism'). Substituting for it a purely materialistic equivalent (a 100% 'neurological' model), as many try today, is no solution – for though the substance is changed, the structural and causal problems remain.

My own analysis of the psyche, in the present work and elsewhere, acknowledges no such scenarios. I refer to a material body including a nervous system, a mental 'matrix' on which cognitive items are *temporarily* displayed (memories, imaginations, mental feelings), and a soul in which *events of* cognition, volition and valuation properly occur. This means that *there is no storage of mental items as such, either in the mental matrix or in the soul*. Whatever occurs in our 'mental life' that requires storage can only be stored on a material plane, supposedly in the brain.

In the latter perspective, mental disease cannot be located in the mental matrix, since everything occurring there is a mere fleeting projection of images or sounds or other phenomenal chimera. It might be located in the brain, as stored data items of questionable accuracy or value, and/or as neurological or physiological dysfunctions. Or it might be located in the soul, but not as something stored or structural or mechanical, only as repeated personal choices of a certain kind in the face of certain recurring influences and terms and conditions.

The 'conscious' and the 'subconscious' are both volitional, i.e. actions or states of the soul – some of which have mental and/or physical outcomes, but not all of them. The subconscious differs from the conscious only in degree:

‘involuntary will’ involves minimal, ad hoc awareness, while ‘voluntary will’ involves broader, more comprehensive attention. The psyche is thus essentially *not a mechanical system*, though some mechanical forces (physical and mental conditions) may affect it, and though the soul may be influenced by mental and physical objects of consciousness.

The ‘unconscious’ is not part of the mind, but in its *material* infrastructure, the nervous system. Strictly unconscious actions or states are not volitional, but mindless; they are generated by the nervous system, like the autonomic motor system functions (automatic breathing, heartbeat, etc.). The psyche is not occupied by ‘entities’ other than the soul and images flashing in the mind – the other components are not entities, but intentions, actions and states of the soul, as well as movements and changes caused by the soul or the brain of mental images.

It is wise, therefore, to avoid ontologically misleading terminology. Epistemologically, note well, conscious and subconscious thoughts, intentions, emotions or drives are ultimately *observable* by introspection – the former more easily and clearly so than the latter. On the other hand, ‘unconscious’ thoughts, intentions, emotions or drives are necessarily *inferred*, i.e. things we assume by implication from things observed, by adductive logic. For instance, if we speak of ‘a conflict’, we need not mean something actual and concretely expressed, but may refer to something abstractly known to potentially occur.

For example, if agent A at once believes (or wants) something X and its opposite notX (as often happens) – we can characterize this situation as a potential conflict, even though the agent A may not have become aware of it or yet

experienced any unpleasant consequences from it. There is an implicit, objective conflict that we can logically infer from the two beliefs (or wants), knowing that if A should ever try to realize them both together he would be bound to fail, since X and notX are incompatible.

In this view, then, the concept of mental disease proper, as something not chosen, should be referred to the brain – while what concerns the soul cannot strictly speaking be so characterized, being an issue of freewill, but should be regarded as the domain of morality, ethics or 'spiritual path'. Even so, as shown further on, the essentially free soul can still get entangled in some pretty confusing situations, like bad habits, obsessions and compulsions, so we may use the term 'mental disease' loosely with reference to such hard to untangle situations. As we shall explain further on, too, personality disorders are rooted in our ego construction.

With regard to 'curing' such mental diseases, the following generalities are worth adding. A cause is some behavior or character of the soul, which generates, sustains or amplifies that which we consider as a disease. A cure is something that will prevent, remove or attenuate the disease. The cure does not necessarily pass through knowledge of the cause, though such knowledge is often useful and sometimes essential[52]. Once the cause has produced its undesirable effect, the cause may no longer be the issue, except insofar as it may be

[52] However, excessive 'psychologizing' throws doubts gratuitously and feeds baseless conjectures, producing identity problems. The ensuing mental destabilization provides intellectual pretext for what are essentially (futile if not harmful) ego-building activities.

repeated[53]. If the cause keeps recurring, the effect may recur successively with about the same intensity, or it may snowball. The cure may sometimes be aimed at neutralizing the cause, and thence indirectly the effect. Or it may be aimed at neutralizing the effect, directly. It is in any case wise to look out for eventual unforeseen side effects.

To take some examples of mental dysfunction: suppose a person has abnormally strong, unwanted, disturbing or uncomfortable, recurrent or persistent, thoughts, dreams, inner images or sounds, hallucinations, feelings or emotions. As exposed in the present work, such events may have volitional roots or be more or less involuntary products of the brain. The precise diagnosis will vary from case to case, and guide treatment efforts.

To the extent that the brain is considered the issue, chemical, surgical or other physiological remedies might be sought. However, these can only be stopgap measures, to the extent that malfunctions of the will are involved. That is, in such cases, medicines can only mask the problem, not solve it. Moreover, they may in the long run be damaging, or at least become an obstruction to proper treatment.

For if the problem is at root volitional, 'psychoanalysis'[54] may be needed. That is, an effort to logically sort out errors

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[53] Although reviewing a person's history, including interrelations with other people, can help clarify and modify current behavior and emotions, the causal relations are far from determining, since humans are essentially volitional beings. The patient is thus made to vainly cling to certain ideas, instead of being freed of them.

[54] N.B. by using this term, I do not mean to endorse any particular doctrine of psychoanalysis.

of thought and behavior – whether by the subject himself (who may need to engage in theoretical studies), or with the help of a professional or capable friend. This may, of course, in turn call on behavioral changes, personal or interpersonal, such as the practice of meditation or the performance of kindly acts.

# 9. CHAPTER NINE

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 9.

## WILL, VELLEITY AND WHIM

### 1. Cognition, Volition and Valuation

Our 'soul' is the core of our selfhood and of all our personal 'life'. From an ontological perspective, the soul has a variety of abilities of activity, or *functions*, which may be classified into three broad groups: cognition, volition and valuation.

Epistemologically, it may be that we become aware of soul as a distinct 'entity' by imagining it at the apparent common center of all cognitive, volitional and evaluative experiences (a process that might be called 'intrapolation')[55], and by conceptual suppositions. But we must also admit that our soul has direct self-awareness, as well as direct awareness of these most intimate experiences (viz. cognitions, volitions and valuations). For only the admission of such direct evidence of the self and its functions, which we have labeled 'intuition',

[55] For examples, we seem to look out and see from behind our eyes or to enjoy touch sensations from within our body.

can explain our ability to discern *particular* acts of cognition, volition or valuation, even when such acts have no manifest phenomenal outcomes.

The soul, in this view, is a distinctive entity, having per se no phenomenal aspects, unlike mental and material entities; whence we may suppose it to consist of a special substance (say, 'spirit'). This intuited inner self is, as we have seen, to be distinguished from its surrounds, namely: the mental phenomena it perceives, the physical phenomena it perceives in its own body and beyond it (the latter including, as well as the apparent physical world, some supposed perceivable effects of other souls).

Thus, we have *four theaters of experience* to consider: the innermost (in the sense of 'in the soul itself'), the mental (for that soul), the bodily (for that soul) and the external (beyond one's own body)[56]. The different 'distances' implied by these terms are of course relative to the soul, and are based on the varying powers of cognition, volition and valuation the soul has in them.

The basic functions of *cognition, volition and valuation are operative in each of these four regions* (the inner, mental, bodily and external). Their *primary* theater is, however, the soul.

***Cognition*** refers primarily to an event in the soul, the event of *being conscious of some specific thing*, whether that object be within the soul itself, or a mental or physical phenomenon

[56] Although the latter three regions are all 'outer' relative to the soul, the mental and bodily domains may be considered relatively internal with reference to matter beyond the body, with the mental being regarded as closer to the soul than the bodily.

beyond it. Cognition is what happens on the soul's side of the consciousness relation between subject and object. It is the 'business end' of all cognitive processes – where things 'click'. Sensation, imagination and reasoning are not *per se* acts of cognition, but processes that present some concrete or abstract data to the soul for cognition. The physical organs and signals of sensation do not in themselves constitute perception, but at best make it possible. When memories or inventions are displayed in the mind, it is not the mind that perceives them, but the soul. When a concept is built, or a relation is proposed or an inference is drawn, it is the soul alone that understands.

In like manner, *volition* refers primarily to an event in the soul, when it directly wills something specific *within itself*, for all apparent volitions beyond the soul are only direct or indirect consequences of such inner action. Similarly, *valuation* is something spiritual (i.e. in the soul) before anything else. Only within the soul can the three functions be sometimes clearly distinguished, because in most cases they are very tightly intertwined. This is evident when we consider in some detail their interrelations in the four theaters of experience.[57]

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[57] One of the relations between volition and consciousness is well brought out by José Ortega y Gasset in an essay entitled 'Aspects and the Entirety'. Volition is needed by a limited consciousness to focus on different aspects of the object. Every appearance of the object is its response to the subject's questioning regard: the eyes move about the object (as we approach or distance ourselves from or circle past it), 'viewing' different 'aspects' of it. *An 'integral' consciousness would have no need of volition, but a limited one cannot do without it*.

a. *Cognition* (in a large sense, including all cognitive pursuits) uses volition as a tool in various ways.

- This is true often even within the soul. For instances: the intentions of words and other symbols are acts of will; it takes will to direct and intensify attention, whether directed inward or outward.
- At the mental level, the projection of mental images is often volitional. Cognition uses such projection for the fundamental acts of intelligence and reason, namely: mentally pointing at something, delimiting and segregating percepts, negating experience, as well as in abstraction and classification, formulation of hypotheses and alternative scenarios, making logical inferences, and of course use of language.
- At the bodily physical level, we use volition to prepare for and pursue cognitive objects. For instances: opening one's eyes and looking out, or turning one's head to face something, or pointing with one's finger, or reaching out with our hand to touch something, or moving one's whole body in space to change perspective.
- At the external physical level, we use volition to set up experiments, manipulating objects and moving them about, placing them in certain relations to each other, controlling their precise relative conditions.

b. *Volition* (in a large sense, including all outer consequences of volition) involves and requires cognition in various ways.

- Within the soul, although some volitions may be goal-less, volition is usually preceded by cognitions that identify ends and means for some larger volition, and so

set the intention of the punctual volition concerned. Even in the case of whims, some exploratory cognition of inner and outer conditions may be involved.

- At the mental and physical levels, volition uses cognition not only to identify general goals and means, but also to reconnoiter the current environment and thus obtain the feedback from it that allows particular volitions to be tested and if need be corrected or more precisely pinpointed, which increases chances of ultimate success.

c. *Valuation* involves and is involved in cognition and volition in various ways.

- Valuation within the soul is itself, as a particular event, both a cognitive act and an act of volition. To evaluate something is to purport to identify its value in relation some norm, i.e. within a comparative scale – this is a cognitive act. Valuation then assigns a corresponding positive or negative intention to subsequent volition – this is a volitional act.

- Clearly, valuation does not occur in a vacuum, but in relation to a particular subject and environment – which have to be cognized, whether they are so rightly or wrongly. The subject may be the soul proper (e.g. in religious pursuits), or an erroneous identification of mental and bodily phenomena as the self (an ego), or the mind or body (e.g. in secular pursuit of psychological or physiological health), or supposed external souls or egos, or their supposed minds and bodies. The environment concerned in valuation is the apparent or assumed sphere of action and reaction of that particular subject.

- Valuation also occurs relative to cognitive acts – considering whether such act leads to truth or falsehood. In its primitive form, such evaluation of cognitions as such occurs ad hoc, with varying degrees of clarity and validity (or 'truth-value'). In more advanced form, this is what the sciences of logic and methodology purport to do: to find out exactly under what conditions in general, items of knowledge and processes of inferences may be judged valid or invalid.
- Valuation is involved in all, or most, volitional acts, since the latter are generally (except apparently for whims) oriented towards things seemingly of value and away from things judged non-valuable.

Note that all three functions of soul may involve verbal commentary, but do not have to. *Words* obtain their meanings by the soul's intention; they are also produced by volition, as mental projections of sights or sounds, or as physically spoken or written symbols. Words are sometimes useful; but sometimes they can be confusing.

- In cognitive contexts, words help us to record, order and communicate a lot of information, to an extent impossible without words. But words become counter-productive when they stop us from referring to fresh experience, and when we become locked into their symbolic patterns.
- In volitional contexts, words may be useful as learning or teaching tools, to transmit information or instructions from one person to the next. But they can also preoccupy

our attention and hinder concentration on the job at hand[58].

- In valuation, one may occasionally use adjectives like good or bad to express one's intentions, but these words can become misleading if one forgets the essentially intuitive nature of valuation.

In particular, we should analyze the processes of *reading and writing*, consisting of complex series of both physical and mental acts of cognition and volition.

- Reading a text[59], one observes[60] letter after letter and then mentally compares these to shapes and sounds (which, incidentally, one may express mentally or orally) one has learned, and groups them into words one has previously encountered, whose meanings one has memorized (if such correspondences are lacking in one, one must of course research them).
- Writing implies first drawing from one's memory banks the shapes of the letters that form the words one wants put down (which one may, again, simultaneously utter

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[58] This is for instance evident in Tai Chi practice. As a novice, one uses verbal instructions as guides to movement ("turn left, advance foot, throw punch, etc."). But eventually, the movements become automatic, and any verbal remark becomes a hindrance to their performance.

[59] Preliminaries to reading a text may include movements of one's body (bringing it to the bookcase or desk), movements of one's arms and hands (opening the book, turning pages), movements of one's head and eyes (opening, orientating and focusing them).

[60] This visual act if for a blind person replaced by an act of touch.

mentally or orally), then moving one's arms, hands and fingers in the appropriate ways to draw (or simply type out) those shapes.

We can observe the intertwining of cognition, volition and valuation even *in meditation*, which may from the outside seem much more static than it is to the practitioner.

- The cognitive aspects are of course central to meditation: looking at some external object, or watching one's body breathing, or an emotional charge, or mental images and conversations, or inner reactions and attitudes – and ultimately, experiencing effects such as inner silence and stillness, and hopefully ultimately 'enlightenment'.
- The volitional aspects are numerous, too: physically sitting down and adopting an appropriate posture, keeping the pose and correcting it as and when necessary; attempting to suppress or reduce mental sights, sounds and thoughts, or at least to observe them with some inner distance; making an effort to have the right attitudes; focusing one's attention on some object, whether it be external (e.g. a candle), or bodily (e.g. one's spine or breathing), or mental (e.g. when reciting a *mantra* or visualizing a *mandala*, although these objects may appear automatically after a while), or non-phenomenal (i.e. intuited self or some function thereof).
- Valuation is also involved. Although it is ultimately incorrect to have a goal in meditation, people get into meditation with goals in mind, whether the grand goal of enlightenment-liberation or fusion with God, or more prosaic goals like reducing stress or finding inner peace and such. Moreover, as meditation proceeds, many

valuations occur, helping to prepare, direct, generate and regulate one's cognitive and volitional faculties.

Evidently, then, cognition, volition and valuation are tightly knit together in most situations, although we can distinguish them in very simple situations within the soul. In view of that, it is worth noting that *influences* may impinge on all three. Although the concept of influence primarily relates to volition, it also concerns cognition and valuation.

- As regards cognition, although it per se is free of influence, we may well be influenced as to what we look out for, what we allow ourselves to see or not see, the directions of our research, and so forth. This affects the scope, though not the content, of our experience. We may also be recipients of conceptual information and methodology (which may be right or wrong), from our teachers or other sources. Naturally, all that will tailor our database in some respects, i.e. the knowledge context we refer to in our judgments will be affected; additionally, our manner of interpreting such data may be affected.

- As for valuation, being essentially an act of will, it can be directly influenced. Our valuations do noticeably vary across time, and according to our situation. If we are attentive, we can spot the influences that cause their variations. Consider for instance a new car model: at first sight one may find it ugly, and then in time – possibly because of the 'lifestyle' advertising one is subjected to – one may find it on the contrary very attractive!

The innermost 'thoughts' and 'actions' of the soul are primarily wordless intentions, beyond all mental images or sounds. The latter are mere accessories of the thoughts of the

soul, and all the more so are the physical productions that accompany mental events (speech, writing, symbolic gestures, facial and bodily expressions). Our study of causality appears finally as one of phenomenology, when we consider where it is thought and action originate, and distinguish that from their more superficial displays.

For this reason, in meditation we try to look into ourselves, more and more inwardly, contemplating *the roots* of our thoughts and actions. By sitting immobile and quiet, we gradually still all mental and physical noise, and can thus hope to apperceive the more subtle aspects of our inner life. That is, when the environment becomes less loud and the body becomes less manifest, and the mental matrix becomes sufficiently blank and calm, the arising of wordless intentions in our non-phenomenal soul may begin to be discerned. The 'still, small voice' inside us might be heard.

## 2. Velleity

A 'velleity' is an incipient act of volition. In a larger sense, velleity refers to a small but insufficient act of volition – i.e. one that was not brought to completion. Thus, velleity may suggest hesitation, to which we would contrast determination ('getting the job done', or resolve, resoluteness). But sometimes, velleity is intentional, in the sense that the volition is intentionally incomplete; we intend our will to be no more than inchoate, tentative. We may thereafter further develop it or interrupt it, or slightly shift its direction.

Thus, postures like willingness (a general openness) or readiness (a more immediate preparedness) to do something,

are velleities that for the moment we do not necessarily wish to develop into full-blown volitions. However, note, such velleity is more than mere ability; it does imply a minimal movement of the will.[61]

Velleity can be detected by the agent through introspection (intuitive self-knowledge). If the act of volition concerned has already progressed beyond the confines of the soul, into the physical and/or mental domains, it may be detected by perception of some its phenomenal outcomes. In such case, the agent, or occasionally other observers, may then infer a velleity from outer events.

*Many psychological concepts can only be defined and explained with reference to velleity.* For example, the presentation of an ordinarily desirable object can only properly be called 'interesting' or 'tempting' to that agent at that time, if he manifests some velleity (if not a full volition) to go for it; otherwise, neither he nor we would know he desires it. A distinction is worth making in this context between a velleity *to do* something and one *not to do* something. For example, 'laziness' sometimes refers to a mere velleity not to work (thusly, if it is overridden by a more determinate act of will to work – else, it becomes a volition).

The concept of velleity is also important because it helps us to understand the co-existence of conflicting values. Although one cannot simultaneously fully will one value and will its negation, one can indeed have a double velleity – i.e.

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[61] 'Eagerness' is another velleity. This brings to mind a dog pulling on its leash. The will is more than just willing or ready; it is held back from springing forth, till an appropriate opportunity appears.

velleities for contradictory items. One may also have a mix of velleity for something and volition for its opposite: the latter dominates, of course, but that does not erase the fact of velleity. All this is also true for not-willing, of course. Thus, if one wants to introspect with great precision, one should remain aware of velleities as well as of outright volitions.

*Velleities are an important tool for inner communications with oneself.* It is mostly through velleity rather than volition that we register our intentions, the directions of our attention. We speak to ourselves through velleities, before we ever do so through words. Thus, I may verbally ask myself "shall I do so and so?" – and the term 'doing so and so' has meaning for me, not because I actually will so and so now, but because I just slightly lean in the direction of such a will (velleity). To intend "not-doing so and so", I would generate a velleity of so and so, followed by a willful arrest of further such volition. Thus, velleities provide the soul with a *wordless language* concerning inner volitions. This is occasionally extended out by symbolic artifices.

An important case in point, which is fundamental epistemologically, is the so-called "mental" act of ***negation***. That act is only partly mental, in the sense of referring to projection of a mental image. It is in large part a spiritual (i.e. in-the-soul) act, an act of intention – an act of velleity. When we speak of having *observed* the "absence" of some phenomenal object (say, a visual detail in the physical or mental domain), we are only partly referring to perception. We of course never in perception see absences; we only see presences. We can report that something is absent only by *comparing* the visual field tested to an imagination (wherein the object sought for is visualized). Only if we find *nothing*

*resembling* the object imagined in the tested visual field, do we say: "it is absent". To "negate" something thus involves mental projection, but also a velleity of "putting" that mentally projected object in the visual field under scrutiny and then a velleity of "removing" it to signal the failure of the test. Only thus do we get an inner understanding of what negation means.

Another important case in point is the act of ***abstraction***, through which concepts are formed. This consists in focusing on some common aspect(s) of two or more experiences or concepts, while disregarding their differences. A selective 'blanking out' of contents of consciousness is involved, a negative intention achieved by velleity; we pretend some of what we observe is not there, so as to emphasize the observed similarities.

Another interesting example, also requiring careful awareness to observe, of such use of velleity is the following. When we think of other people or animals, we usually imagine them in action to some extent, often in relation to ourselves. The imagination of their physical actions is simply done by mental projection of their image going through certain motions, as in a movie. To imagine them imagining, we need only ourselves imagine what we would them to imagine, and intend or say "ditto in their case". But how do we 'imagine' their subjective dispositions or actions? Since these are not phenomenal, they cannot be mentally projected. Thus, we must enact them to some extent within our own soul. However, we usually would not want to enact them fully: for example, we would not ourselves actually hate Mr. Y just so as to imagine Mr. X hating Mr. Y. Instead, we would generate a velleity, just enough to point our cognition

in the intended direction. And then we would of course add (verbally or tacitly): "ditto for Mr. X towards Mr. Y".

## 3. Whim

We have analyzed volition as generally involving cognition of surrounding terms and conditions, and possible alternative courses of action, followed by evaluation, through which one selects one's preferred goals and means. But it may be argued that such a description of volition is circular, since the cognition and valuation involved seem to imply prior acts of volition. Moreover, the imagination of goals and means implies the projection of mental images, which is itself often an act of will. Thus, the concept of volition may seem logically incoherent, unless we preempt such objections.

We have just to acknowledge that *some* volitional acts are primary, so that they do not themselves require prior cognitive research, mental projection of goals and means, evaluation or deliberate choice. Such volitions may be classified as *whims* or caprices (without pejorative connotation); for theoretical coherence, we have to admit such 'causeless acts' or 'initial impulses'. They bubble forth from within us, *ex nihilo*[62]. What is spontaneous about them

[62] A whim or random act of will is in practice difficult to conjure. One may lack a useful end, but one's end may be said to be the implicit will to whim. In some cases, one's secret end may be the desire to seem whimsical to other people; i.e. one role-plays a whim. Still, supposing one clears our mind of such motives, the way a whim would work would be by attaching one's will to some passing event, e.g. opting right (or left) without regard for

is that they are *uninfluenced*, they are not explicable with reference to any motive; but they still have a 'cause' in a larger sense: it is the acting soul. When we say "act of will" or speak about "freedom of the will", we should always remember that we mean more precisely: "soul's act of will", "freedom of the soul to will".

Whim is, in particular, required take action when one is in a quandary – when one values (or disvalues) a thing and its negation equally, or one is indifferent or uncertain either way. If whim did not exist, we would be paralyzed in such situations of even influence or non-influence in both directions. This specific case may be regarded as an additional argument in favor of the existence of whim, granting volition: if volition could not exist without some purpose in mind, it would often be blocked from proceeding. *A fortiori*, if freewill can go against the current of prevailing influences, one can will even more freely when influences are balanced, absent or unclear; the same power is involved in any case.

Some degree of consciousness is a *sine qua non* of volition. If no consciousness is involved in an act, it is not truly voluntary. So, whim should not be considered a blind, unconscious act. It suffices to define it as an irreducible primary. The first impulse to look into oneself or out at the world may thus be described as a dawning cognitive volition;

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consequences. But then, has one not told oneself "I will opt to the right"? It could be therefore be objected that such decision of principle sets an end, becoming the motive. But we may reply that the decision itself *is* the sought after whim. So real whim is conceivable – at least with reference to the decision as to which way to whim!

it does not refer to prior research, though cognition accompanies it. The call-up of existing memories (information obtained in the past) may be similarly classed. Some imagination is involuntary, contributed by the brain without voluntary creativity: this can serve volition, without being volition. The act of valuation per se does not necessarily need to be influenced, although it may be.

Valuations must here clearly be distinguished from emotions; the former are voluntary positions or postures of the soul, the latter are reactions in the mind or body. Emotions do not necessarily or fully determine valuations. Emotions may cause later valuations to some extent, in the sense of influencing them. Indeed, they often do, insofar as most people consider their emotions as powerful arguments; they identify with them and are guided by them. But such emotions are themselves effects of earlier valuations; they are mental and/or bodily consequences of volitions influenced by such valuations[63]. Valuations are not necessarily rational, either. They may indeed be influenced by rational considerations; but however strong, such influence is never determining.

Thus, ultimately, all valuation is purely voluntary. Valuation gives or grants value. Things have value because the agent concerned has assigned value to them, period. Even when such act has objectives or objective justifications, claiming to be impartial evaluation, it is essentially arbitrary. This does not prove such valuations "false" – it just means they are

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[63] For this reason, incidentally, the attempts by some philosophers to build moral systems on hedonistic or aesthetic standards have little credibility. Such doctrines cannot guide valuation, because they refer to a consequence of it as the guide!

intimate expressions of the self. Although one ought not identify with one's emotions, one can well identify with one's inmost valuations. So much for the issue of circularity in the concept of volition.

## 4. Inner Divisions

How is it our right hand may not know what our left hand is doing, as the saying goes? What does it mean to say that we are often in conflict with our own self?

The self or soul is essentially one, but may partition itself in various ways. As we have seen, the soul is not an object of perception, but an object of apperception or self-intuition. Since it has none of the phenomenal qualities we associate with space (shape, size, location, etc.), but is a non-phenomenal appearance, it cannot strictly speaking, from an epistemological point of view, be regarded as spatially extended or as having an exact place. From an ontological point of view, however, we may either adhere to the same restriction (out of positivism) – or we may hypothetically project a spatial extension and position, if only as a convenient image (by convention).

It may be more accurate to regard the partitions of soul as occurring in time rather than in space. For the soul seems extended in time, which is an abstract concept even in relation to matter and mind, anyway. We presume that, although the soul is renewed every moment, it retains some unity and continuity across time throughout its life[64] – on the

[64] See discussion of this in chapter 16.2 of *Volition*.

basis of which, we may acknowledge our personal responsibility for our past, present and future thoughts and actions. This thesis may be upheld, without going so far as to deny our ability to morally break with the past and change course in the present and future.

Although some instances of partitioning of self can be explained by pointing out that the conflicting volitions involved actually occurred successively in time, it remains true that some conflicting volitions seem to be simultaneous[65]. It is the latter that we commonly map out as separate in space; although, strictly speaking, there is no reason to do so, i.e. we could equally well assume them as emerging from the same point of self.

The self or soul may be divided in a positive or negative manner. Such self-division is sometimes useful for purposes of self-regulation or self-control – as when we set up a 'moral conscience' to oversee our own compliance with certain higher standards, to ensure we are not swept away by the passions of the moment. Sometimes, the division is involuntary and unhealthy, causing self-damaging conflicts, reducing our ability to cope with life. Thus, division of the self is an issue of management – the manager in us must decide how much is needed and how much is too much.

We must distinguish in-soul conflicts (which occur in the self proper) and soul/mind-matter conflicts (which pit the self against its mental and material environment). One may *pressure* oneself to think or act in a certain way; this may be either in the sense of a will within the soul, or in the sense of a will pushing the mind and body in the direction concerned.

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65 See discussion of 'double velleities', higher up.

Thoughts and deeds may be willfully *suppressed* for a variety of reasons: because they are sterile or foolish or painful or sickening, and so on.

*Repression* refers to an unhealthy situation, where segments of current or memorized apperception, perception, and conceptual thought are blocked from awareness, to a degree sufficient to ensure their (rightly or wrongly supposed) implications from being considered. *Oppression* refers to an uncomfortable situation, where the self at some level rejects an ideology – self-imposed under the influence of parents, society, religion, state, or other authorities – that is currently operative at another level. In the latter case, one's autonomy is at stake – an issue of self-rule or self-determination – because one does not (or no longer does) identify with the ideology, yet one is (or continues to be) guided by it in thought and action.

More will be said on such psychological conflicts in the coming pages.

# 10. CHAPTER TEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 10.

## AFFECTIONS AND APPETITES

### 1. Valuation

Let us now look more closely at the main affections or appetites, which are among the *major influences on volition*. Our increased understanding of volition and influence can help us clarify concepts such as: liking and disliking (affections), desire and aversion (appetites), hope and despair, confidence and fear, certainty and doubt, and esthetic responses to beauty and ugliness. These can all be referred to as 'values' or 'disvalues', things one chooses to pursue or avoid. They are all causal concepts, in that they motivate and explain volitional action; they are 'allied' to volition.

Values are at least expressed through velleities, if not through full volitions.

Note first that each of these pairs of terms refers to opposite sides in a continuum, the middle point of which is labeled indifference. Thus, for instance, 'desire' refers to *a range* of

positive responses, and 'aversion' (or desire-not) to the corresponding *range* of negative responses. Special terms may be used for the extremes. Thus, the more intense expressions of liking are called love; and those of disliking, hate. Indifference, as the word suggests, means 'the object makes no difference to the subject' – i.e. the latter is uninfluenced one way or the other by the former.

Note that *sometimes pleasure and pain are mixed*; i.e. the same object may arouse pleasure in some respects and pain in other respects. No contradiction is involved; it is a real possibility. *Sometimes, too, we are not sure whether what we feel is pleasant or painful*. This is different from mixed feelings or indifference, but refers to confusion; it is not an ontological position, but an epistemological one.

Although the term 'affection' refers primarily to likes and dislikes, and 'appetite' refers primarily to desires and aversions, they are also used more broadly for all valuations; presumably, because we are affected by them in our responses, and like hunger and thirst they involve some drive to certain actions by the agent concerned.

A drive may be said to have positive or negative polarity, or to be attractive or repulsive, according as its inclination is toward or away from the object; and the degree of the drive signifies its power to influence, how easy or hard it makes pursuit or avoidance of the object, how likely or unlikely it is for the agent to go that way. The same agent may at the same time have "contrary drives", i.e. drives with incompatible objects.

One may at once desire X and desire notX; one may even also desire not to desire X and desire not to desire notX. That

is all logically acceptable. But it remains true that if one desires X, one does not *not*-desire X: the law of non-contradiction applies if the presence and absence of one and the same drive is under discussion. Furthermore, one cannot hope to eventually realize both the incompatible objects at once: if the desire for X comes true, the desire for notX will not. Moreover, one is not forced to desire any one thing or its opposite: one may remain indifferent. That is, I do not desire X and do not desire notX may both be true.

What we value today, we may disvalue or be indifferent to tomorrow. New cognitions, volitions or valuations can change our values. Our values are therefore often hypothetical, rather than categorical. We have more or less conscious *hierarchies* of values. Some values take precedence over others, come what may; others do so conditionally. Some values are basic and broadly influential, informing many of our actions over the long-term; others are ad hoc short-term responses to current opportunities. A drive may be strong, until its object is shown up to be incompatible with the object of some more important drive; in that event, the initial drive is considerably deflated and may even disappear completely. One drive may therefore be consciously used to resist or overcome another. Our values are thus in a sort of dynamic equilibrium, rather than statically set.

Emotions, of course, suggest valuations. The simplest emotions are physical pleasures and pains, sensations caused directly by external physical stimuli (e.g. a caress or a flame) or purely by physiological processes (e.g. satiety or hunger). More complex are psychosomatic emotions (sentiments), which are physical feelings with ‘mental’ causes; they are

visceral, yet we know them to be due to events in the mind or evaluations in the soul. Bodily emotions are often a mixed bag of sensations and sentiments. More subtle are mental emotions, which seem to occur in the mental matrix rather than in the physical domain. Possibly, all bodily emotions are mental projections; possibly, apparently mental emotions are really physical – it is hard to say for sure.

In any case, note well, such classifications of emotions (as pleasures, pains; and as sensations, sentiments, mental emotions) should not cloud the fact that they vary greatly in quality and intensity. For instance, a pinprick is hardly comparable to a pang of hunger.

> It is interesting to note that even physical pain may be variously experienced and influential, according to our perception and judgment of it. This is made evident in experiments using the 'placebo effect', where a patient's pain is attenuated by fake pain reliever. Not only does the patient feel less pain, but also the fact is measurable through instruments attached to his brain. Note also the opposite, 'nocebo effect' – by which a misplaced belief gives rise to a physical, mental or emotional problem. Such 'effects' were cunningly used even in ancient times, by physicians and religious healers (to heal) and by witch doctors and the like (to heal or harm).

In any case, to repeat, all such concrete emotions are relatively superficial percepts and must not be confused with valuations, which occur and are intuited in the soul and are volitional acts. Their being willed does not mean such most inner values are artificial, affectations; quite the contrary, they come from the depths of self. Our knowledge of our

valuations is self-knowledge. Concrete emotions and expressions of will give rise to various equivalent *abstract* notions of value, like good or bad. Valuations, note well, need not be verbal or even very conscious; indeed, they are usually wordlessly and subconsciously intended. We do not have to say, mentally or out loud, "this is good" or "this is bad" or "this is neutral", to mean it.

Something valuated is called a *value*. Positive values (values) are pleasures or pleasant (if emotion generating), or beneficial to one's self-interest, or good (using more abstract norms, eventually moral principles). Negative values (disvalues) are pains or painful, or harmful or bad. Indifferent things are neither valuable nor the opposite. 'Self-interest' here may be understood variously, as real or imaginary, probable or improbable, of interest to one's soul, mind, body, loved ones, possessions, or more abstract concerns.

The terms 'good' or 'bad' are here intended indefinitely, to mean 'valuable' or 'not valuable'; we use them because people do so. We acknowledge that people assign various contents to such general terms; we need not at this stage give them any objective status. Note that something may be neither good nor bad (indifferent); also, something may be good in some respects and bad in other respects (of mixed value). Therefore, though good and bad are ultimately meant as opposites, they are not logical contradictories.

## 2. The Main Valuations

There are many sorts of value concepts; below we try to define some of the more commonplace and so significant.

Notice what they have in common: *they essentially are or involve cognition (some belief or consideration), and for this reason are able to influence our volitions*. Their repeated or constant influence on us explains our attachment to them, our immersion in pursuing or avoiding them. A value may be more or less long lasting. Our consistent valuations become our personal *attitudes* or dispositions.

One ***likes*** what one considers positive in some sense, in some way; one *dislikes* what one considers negative in some sense, in some way. One may like or dislike something without doing anything about it, although normally one makes some effort to go towards or away from it. Various terms distinguish varieties of likes and dislikes. For instance, *love* is a liking response of some high degree to people or animals (or even sometimes, though perhaps inappropriately, to inanimate objects like a house or a country); and *hate* is the opposite pole. Love and hate usually imply certain bundles of emotions and actions. Some people think they love someone, but are in fact only infatuated or sexually aroused. Hate, on the other hand, is rarely more superficial than it claims.

***Desire*** signals an expectation of pleasure or some other benefit if some course is pursued; *aversion*, an expectation of pain or some other disservice if some course is pursued. The more feasible the required course to gain/keep or avoid/lose, the greater the impulse. If one realizes the object is unattainable, all the desire or aversion for it is lost. The desire or aversion for something usually includes the conation to have a certain kind of interrelation with it (e.g. desiring a woman, to make love to her or live with her).

Not all valuation is of the nature of desire or aversion, note well. What distinguishes them is that they usually lead to

some sort of appropriate action or inaction, although they may on occasion be consciously ignored or resisted. Desire is expressed as grasping if we do not yet possess its object, and as clinging, if we already have it. An aversion is on the contrary a desire to steer clear of or get rid of the object.[66] If one succeeds in attaining the desired good, the desire is said to be fulfilled; if one fails, it is frustrated.

We of course often use specific terms for *specific* desires (or aversions), usually with reference to their object. Thus, for examples, thirst is desire for water or other liquids, hunger is for food (gluttony for excessive food), lust is for sexual gratification, greed for more wealth (money, possessions), vanity for admiration (including fame), power-lust for social dominance, curiosity for learning, and so forth. But many desires (or aversions) have not been given specific terms; we just say "the desire to …".

*Satisfaction* or *dissatisfaction* refer to our reaction upon fulfillment, or admission of failure to fulfill, a given desire or aversion. *Contentment* or *discontent* refer to our no longer having any, or still having some, outstanding desires and

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[66] Some of these observations are gleaned from Buddhist psychology (see the twelve "*nidanas*"), which offers a very detailed dissection of desire or aversion: they begin with a sensory stimulus ("contact"); this gives rise to pleasure or pain (an experience or evaluation); we tend to adhere to the pleasant or to be repelled by the unpleasant ("grasping"); this in turn impels us to act accordingly i.e. do what is necessary to gain and/or keep or to avoid and/or lose that which gave rise to the initial sensation ("clinging"). I have personally found this analysis of great practical utility to tame unwanted passions. *The series can be interrupted at any stage*: one can preempt the initial contact; or stoically ignore the pleasure or pain; or dismiss the tendencies to grasp and cling. If one opportunity is lost, the next one can still be used.

aversions; or at least to not-attaching, or attaching, undue importance (degree of value) to them. Thus, these latter concepts concern not one object of desire, but one's relation to desire more generally (in life as a whole), or at least in some broad domain (e.g. at work or at home).

***Hope*** and *despair* also involve the thought that good or bad may come; but they are more passive than desire and aversion. Hope is the conviction of the possibility that something considered good will occur or something considered bad will not occur. The 'possibility' may be correctly or incorrectly assessed, with reference to solid data and tight reasoning, or as a mere consideration of 'conceivability' or 'possibility in principle', or as an act of faith or as a deliberate self-delusion. Despair is, strictly speaking, the lack of hope; though, in practice, the term is used more loosely, if there is almost no hope.

Despair may also be defined with reference to the possibility that bad occurs or that good not occur. If the good or bad event under consideration seems impossible, it gives rise to neither hope nor despair. In view of the ambiguity in the assessment of 'possibility', the proverbial cup may be considered half full or half empty. In hope, the good or not-bad seems probable; in despair, the bad or not-good seems probable. Even if one holds all the cards, one can only hope to fulfill one's desires, since one can never be sure to be alive a minute from now. Despair is rarely fully justified, because the unexpected may well happen.

In any case, note, hope and despair relate to future possibilities or probabilities that may be actualized either by one's own will or forbearance – or due to forces beyond one's control. One awaits the object of hope, but one does not

necessarily act to attain it or even have to consider that one can do something about it. Hope may be a *wish* rather than a will for some future good. People often hope in God, or in the promises of some politician or potential benefactor, or in next week's lottery draw. They may feel some present pleasure at the thought that they may one day be blessed with this or that. Much fantasy is generated in this manner, keeping them entertained and superficially happy.

*Trust* and *distrust* are concepts in the same continuum as hope and despair. Whereas the latter concern the possibility of good or bad or their negations, the former concern moreover their *probability*. An event is not only considered, but moreover expected. Thus, trust is belief that good is likely to occur, or bad is unlikely to occur; while distrust is belief that bad will come or good not come. One may trust or distrust a person, oneself or someone else, with reference to future responses to events, usually basing the judgment on the evidence of past conduct.

*Patience* and *impatience* refer to our conduct relative to an expected event, according as one awaits it without worrying over it, or one wishes or tries to accelerate it. In the latter case, one not only desires or is averse to the object, but additionally concerned with its timing. The attitude of patience is based on the belief (right or wrong) that the external events or volitions concerned will play out in time and favorably, or at least in a manner one can adequately respond to, so one remains passive; whereas, in the case of impatience, one is doubtful of the outcome or timeliness and so one thinks interference is called for.

***Confidence*** and *fear* both anticipate a more or less specific danger; they differ in the assessment of one's ability to deal

with the dangerous entity or event. Both, then, foresee the possibility of some negative event. But confidence suggests potential strength or efficacy, fear potential weakness or inefficacy, relative to the perceived or assumed threat.

The degree of confidence or fear varies, according to the size of the danger and of one's expected strength or weakness. The assessments may be justified or not. The danger may be real or imagined, explicit or implied; the estimate of strength or weakness may be objectively accurate or not, admitted or not. Excessive confidence can be rash; excessive fear is timidity[67]. Such excesses respectively underestimate or overestimate the danger, and/or overestimate or underestimate one's resources for dealing with it.

Confidence is sometimes due to foolishness and conceit, rather than to lucid assessments. The ego struts around, convinced of its adequacy on very superficial grounds. In some cases, this leads to success, because inner resistances are overcome or because other people are fooled by the show. But such egotism is ultimately brittle, and not true confidence. We may suspect secret fears to underlie it; these are best faced and dealt with, to secure genuine confidence.

Fear is compatible with hope, though often allied with despair. One may, note well, fear the inevitable – for instance, one's eventual death; or one may *resign* oneself to it. A fear may come and go, according to one's lingering on its object or one's estimates of the conditions and probabilities. Thus, one may for a moment fear the sudden

[67] Paranoia occurs when one unjustifiably regards oneself as personally persecuted, i.e. when one largely imagines that other volitional agents intend to obstruct or hurt one, and one feels inadequate to deal with such a threat.

approach of a black hole to our planet, and then forget all about it. Or one may fear an enemy, and then find him weaker or oneself stronger than previously assumed and regain confidence.

Fear tests one's will. *Courage* is overcoming the negative influence of fear, i.e. retaining the ability to act more or less effectively despite a perceived threat; *cowardice* is the opposite attitude. Having courage does not mean making a macho spectacle of oneself; it consists in keeping a cool head, and making a fair assessment of the danger and one's resources, then acting as conceived necessary, doing the best one can. Bravery implies not being shaken when taking risks, because one can handle victory or defeat with equanimity.

Fear may give rise to an urge to flight (avoid or evade the object feared) or one to fight (parry or strike back at it). In combat, the most efficient way to deal with a threat is sometimes simply to bypass it altogether; it is sometimes wiser take a defensive stand, rather than allow the threat to grow; in some cases, counter-offensive measures are called for, to neutralize an aggressor; and in others still, preemptive attack, to make sure one is not surprised. The choice of means depends on one's assessment of the danger and one's resources.

Fear in itself is not an emotion. But fear may in some cases produce an emotion of *fright*, involving a hollow feeling in one's solar plexus or tightness in one's throat, as well as other symptoms, mental ones like stress and physical ones like tense neck and shoulders, faster and louder heartbeat, or skin sensations and hair raising. The exact reaction depends on the degree of danger relative to one's self-assessment. Fright may be a healthy reaction, or it may be neurotic. In the

latter case, it gives rise to anxiety feelings, the object of which is not clearly known, i.e. only known at a subconscious level; false explanations may be proposed, so that the logic involved becomes tangled and confused.

Fear, especially in conjunction with fright, may also arouse *anger*, an impulse to incapacitate (violently harm or destroy) the dangerous person; anger also involves a vengeful motive, to punish the frightening person. 'Cold' anger is distinguished from 'hot', according to the degree of rational control outwardly maintained in performance. *Hatred* is an emotional response to a person or an animal that has hurt one in some way. If something feared has actualized, we may for that reason hate its assumed author. But one may also hate the latter for causing one fright or anger, insofar as these are also painful in themselves. Hatred may even turn on God, if He is regarded as the malicious controller of the events feared[68].

One may fear oneself. If for instance one has in the past repeatedly betrayed some promise one has made to oneself, displaying lack of will that has had disastrous effects on one's life or on loved ones, one may consider oneself untrustworthy. This may give rise to strong negative emotions, some of which may be chronic.

***Certainty*** and *doubt* are also important valuations – which have a more epistemological context, signaling the degree of

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[68] Needless to say, I am not suggesting or approving of such an attitude, but merely noting that it can and does occur. Fear of God need not make one rebellious, but may instead make one submissive. In Judaism, fear of God, in the sense of submissiveness and obedience, is regarded as the foundation of virtue.

reliability or unreliability, or the completeness or incompleteness, of certain relevant data, concepts, propositions or inferences. One may also have certainty or doubt regarding how oneself or another person will react in such or such a situation of interest to one. Such evaluations of data or people are of course often very significant to our actions, determining which way we will go, or influencing us in taking preemptive measures. Certainty can be encouraging and energizing, but it may occasionally give misleading confidence. Doubt can make one hesitate or be demoralizing, but it may also occasionally stimulate creativity.

There are many other possible value judgments, of course, but the above are probably the most influential in our lives. Some attitudes have rather personal relevance (e.g. self-respect, pride, shame, guilt feelings); others are more directed at other people (e.g. admiration and contempt), or more relational (e.g. kindness or cruelty); though all may be involved in motivation to some degree and have social implications. Some of these valuations have some rationale; but many can be absurd. For instance, envy of another's external possessions (e.g. house or wife) is understandable although not commendable, but envy of another's qualities (e.g. youth or courage) is logically incomprehensible though common.

The esthetic responses towards *beauty* and *ugliness* are also worth mentioning, though more difficult to define. These appreciations of course often relate to our emotions. For examples, some rock music or contemporary paintings arouse great irritation in me; whereas in some other concerts or museums, I have been moved to tears by the beauty offered. But hearing a beautiful piece of music or seeing a beautiful

painting does not always arouse a discernible response. Even so, the work of art somehow seems 'objectively' beautiful. Yet, we cannot honestly claim absolute objectivity, since different people have different responses; and even the same person may vary in his or her response over time. So, this field has much mystery. Which is perhaps its attractiveness.

Our various passions (desires, aversions, etc.) have hierarchies relative to each other. These hierarchies can in time become changed; so that, a value that was originally subsidiary to another, eventually becomes an end in itself, or at least a subsidiary of some other value. For example, a man may struggle to become a sports champion, or some other public figure, not primarily out of desire for fame or fortune, but as a way to attract the attentions of girls! Later, he may get to love his profession for quite different motives: for the spiritual lift it gives him, or because it keeps him healthy, say.

## 3. Ethology

The study of valuation may be called ethology. Ethology differs from ethics, in that it sets no standards, but merely studies the ways values arise, combine, conflict, and pass away in people, treating valuation as a neutral object of study.

Looking at the above descriptions, we see the many factors each concept of valuation involves. Memories, abstract beliefs, anticipations, imaginations, emotions, all come into play. Everything is weighed in the balance. Attitudes are formed; policies established. There are velleities, in the sense

of volitions about to happen. Obstructions and helpful aspects have their impact. Then action may burst forth and grind on. A series of consequences may follow, some of which may boomerang on the actor.

Many other concepts we commonly use in psychological discourse can similarly be clarified. We can thus gradually build up a more or less structured lexicon of psychological terms, with reference to the basic concepts of cognition, volition and valuation. The importance of all three functions should be stressed; many writers clumsily ignore or conceal the one or the other. Flowcharts can be drawn, highlighting relationships.

Values of various kinds with various objects are often intertwined in a complex *value system*. Values are in principle changeable; but some, being parts of such a system, have deep and lasting influence on a broad range of volitional acts.

The value system may include a bundle of attitudes that one possesses since as far back as one can remember, so that one may be deeply attached to them as the very expression of one's personal identity. Some values are pounded into us by parents or school. One may as a youth be influenced by the media (literature, movies) into thinking some attitude is valuable; and then discover when one meets certain people or faces certain challenges that the values transmitted to us were misrepresented. Some value systems, or parts of systems, are adopted by resolution, for ideological (ethical, religious, political) motives or to belong to some social group; these may remain firmly rooted once planted, or come and go. Many attitudes are acquired on the basis of life experience or

personal reflection. Some people learn little from life; some evolve as they age.

The acquisition, maintenance or loss of values is rarely arbitrary, but usually modulated by life experience. One could draw an analogy between the induction of values (for volition) and the induction of truths (for cognition). In cognition, something may be supposed to be true, but if it makes false predictions, we come to doubt and reject it. Similarly, in volition, something may be supposed to have value, but if it makes false promises, we come to doubt and reject it. However, I am not sure this is always a reliable yardstick; people are willing to suffer a lot, before admitting disillusionment.

Let us not have an overly arithmetical or mercantile approach to values. In practice, I have found true the adage: "virtue is its own reward, vice its own punishment". This may, of course, be considered as an ethical statement, a moral judgment, in view of the words virtue and vice. But on closer inspection, one sees that the words in question refer to certain behavior patterns, so that the principle does not set specific standards or criteria, but is axiologically neutral.

It is one commonly intended sense of what we call 'the law of causality' – a statement that, with regard to human volition, just as in the realm of causation, **actions have consequences** (more or less predictable ones, in the short or long term). If one behaves in psychologically or existentially destructive ways, one will indeed likely eventually be accordingly destroyed; and inversely, if one thinks, speaks and acts in a healthy manner, one will naturally have (gain, keep) self-confidence, self-respect, serenity and contentment,

and similar marks of mental health and spiritual dignity. Generally, we reap what we sow.

The ways of 'virtue' or 'vice' are known by experience, i.e. they are forms of conduct so classified because they have been found by lucid people over time to be conducive or antithetical to life. I would express virtue summarily as ***dignity and decency*** – acting out of self-respect and respect of others, in the best senses of those terms. Vice is the opposite behavior, causing shame and guilt (even if one feigns indifference or pride) – to be avoided.

Of course, dignity and decency must be real and not pretended, and it takes effort and sensitivity to intuit them correctly. They are interactive, each affecting the other; so that both must be worked on to ensure their enhancement and stability. Virtue is not the means to some other goal and not the end of some other practice, but both the means and the end. The term "virtue" intends "it is the means" and the phrase "its own reward" intends "it is an end in itself". Similarly, mutadis mutandis, for vice. These, then, are ways of being.

The virtuous stand straight; the vicious are twisted up inside. This is an ages-old ethological observation, which leaves the ethical choice to each one of us. It should be noted that it is only an approximation: it applies to the individual considered in abstraction from his social context. It refers to the inherent justice of our mental and spiritual makeup – but makes no claim to the existence of automatic social or natural justice, or of theodicy.

The reason why the principle applies to the human psyche, and not necessarily to human affairs, is due to the interaction

of individuals in society. If everyone were virtuous, then virtue would perhaps be its own reward even in a social context. But since every society is a mix of virtuous and vicious elements, consistency requires the principle to break down in the larger context. The same consideration is applicable to the natural environment.

Thus, to take an extreme case, a wise and kindly person (indeed, an innocent babe) may well be harmed or killed by the likes of Hitler; and some such fools and criminals do observably end their days in material comfort and social immunity[69]. A natural disaster may sweep away nice and nasty people in the same wave. Similarly in more common situations – virtue does not guarantee material or social rewards, and vice does not guarantee material or social punishment. Social and natural forces and upheavals often pay little heed to the inner status of individuals.

Nevertheless, the virtuous person has spiritual or psychological riches that cannot be stolen or destroyed, and the vicious one has inner deficiencies that no external wealth or welfare can compensate. The former is a winner, the latter a loser, come what may on the outside. That fact provides consolation.

*The Dhammapada*, a 3rd Cent. BCE Buddhist text, puts it very nicely (v. 105)[70]:

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69 To prevent which we have a judicial system.

70 I do not know who is historically the earliest proponent of this truism. However, I personally finally become convinced of it when reading the aphorisms of Marcus Aurelius (121-80 CE – Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher), and I remember that it greatly affected my behavior thereafter.

> "*...the greatest of victories is the victory over oneself; and neither the gods in heaven above nor the demons down below can turn into defeat the victory of such a man.*"

In practice, the condition of being at peace with oneself and having **self-esteem** depends on a number of factors. If any of these is lacking or insufficient, one is sooner or later bound to suffer proportionate degrees of inner conflict and self-contempt (or even, in extreme cases, self-hatred).

a. Self-esteem depends first on *integrity* or self-possession, i.e. doing what one values and abstaining from what one disvalues. This refers principally to one's present behavior, but past behavior may impinge on one's present self-evaluation (though such impact may diminish with time and appropriate efforts). Clearly, if one lacks self-control, if one's actions are not in agreement with one's thoughts, one is bound to feel one is failing or betraying oneself and develop inner tensions. For example: if one has a 'bad' habit, one should 'logically' give it up to ensure one has a 'good' conscience.

b. It follows that the stability of self-esteem depends on the *reasonableness* of the demands one makes on oneself. If one makes impossible demands, one is on a neurotic course that inevitably shatters inner peace. If one sets one's standards too high, if one lacks composure and pressures oneself (e.g. through anger or whining) to act in unwise ways – one is behaving disrespectfully towards oneself. One can only realistically demand what is naturally possible and currently within reach of one's actual capacities – no more. Of course, one can seek to surpass one's current limits to some extent; what is possible or impossible in a given

situation is open to some debate. For examples: it is reasonable (in most circumstances) to demand one go up to one's boss and ask for a raise; it is unreasonable (for most people) to demand one have the courage to climb Mt. Everest.

c. Self-esteem is primarily a function of *sincerely trying*; it does not ultimately depend on success. So long as one has in truth made all appropriate efforts in the direction of one's values, one is in reason free of blame for failure due to events beyond one's control. Of course, how much is truly one's best shot is open to debate. In the face of failure, one may try again, and again; perseverance is not excluded. But reality may still prevent ultimate success – and this should not in principle affect self-esteem. This is a corollary of the previous point. For example: a man tries to save someone from drowning and fails; if he tried his best, but the currents were too strong, his conscience is clear, and his self-esteem unaffected. If he feels dissatisfied with his performance, he may decide to train himself to swim better, for next time – but that is another story.

d. All the preceding points suggest that peace of mind and self-esteem are possible irrespective of the nature of one's values. But that is unrealistic; it is too relativistic a position. Balance is not a product of mere conventions, be they individual or collective. It is not just a function of one's belief system – it is also determined by objective circumstances. There is such a thing as 'human nature'; people are not infinitely pliable and adaptable. The psychology of self-esteem also depends to a considerable extent on the *constructiveness* of one's values – their healthiness, their life enhancing power.

One has to choose one's values intelligently. If one's values are contrary to human nature, they will sooner or later have a negative impact on one's inner harmony and self-esteem. Because the harmful effects of unnatural values may take time to come to fruition, one may in the short term be lulled into a false sense of serenity and efficacy, but later on – sometimes suddenly and with a vengeance – one will discover the full force of one's errors. Examples of this abound, and are worth reflecting on.

Someone living in a society where certain beliefs and practices intentionally causing harm to other people are common might on the surface seem perfectly at ease within this framework (e.g. black magic or racism). Nevertheless, such behavior may well affect his or her psyche adversely, and in the long term cause deep doubts and insecurities. The mere fact of acceptance of the framework does not necessarily exempt a person from eventual objective effects. Moreover, the person experiencing consequent disturbances may remain unable to identify their cause.

The same is true of certain beliefs and practices not thought by their proponents to cause psychological or social harm (e.g. homosexuality or masturbation). Psychological health and wellbeing is not merely an issue of adjustment to arbitrary personal or social standards. If this were the case, as some propose, standards could be varied at will and be as weird as we choose, and there would never be untoward consequences. But, to repeat, humans have a specific nature. No one is immune to reality check. Beliefs can be incorrect and values objectively destructive.

So much with regard to the virtue of 'dignity' – it is being worthy of self-respect and respect by others, through healthy-

minded behavior. As for the virtue of ‘decency’ – it consists in treating other people and living beings with due respect (at least). These are related conditions. Self-respecting people generally behave respectfully towards others, acknowledging their dignity, thus revealing and reinforcing their own worth. (Respect does not of course mean condoning or honoring vice; it is rather a matter of poise: remaining noble even in the presence of ugliness, not stooping down to its level.) People without self-respect tend to exhibit disrespect towards others, thus revealing and reinforcing their own deficiency. Decency may range from a courteous hello or smile, to giving charity or saving a life; indecency may range from behavioral or verbal insult, to rape or torture.

# 11. CHAPTER ELEVEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 11.

## COMPLICATIONS OF INFLUENCE

### 1. Habits

An apparent issue relative to freedom of the will is the force of habits, good or bad. If we have freewill, how come we have habits that are sometimes so very hard to break? Some habits once acquired remain with us all our life, becoming (what Aristotle has called) 'second nature' to us. Bad habits, like (for instance) smoking tobacco, are often seemingly more easily acquired and difficult to shake off than good habits, like (for instance) keeping one's home clean and in order.

We can define as a ***habit*** any volitional type of behavior (response to stimulus), which *due to its repeated performance in the past* has become easier to do or more difficult to abstain from doing. The force of habit is, then (in our view), that of *influence* on volition, but this influence is special in that it is acquired and strengthened by repetition. The more often and thoughtlessly we allow ourselves to do

something stupid (or not-do something intelligent), the more likely are we to do (or not-do) the same again. The more often and thoughtfully we encourage ourselves to do something intelligent (or not-do something stupid), the more likely are we to do (or not-do) the same again.

Habits appear to be due to the phenomenon of *reinforcement*. It seems to be a law of the psyche that *every volitional act increases the ease for a similar response in similar circumstances*. Thus, a prior volition influences a later volition, for good or bad. Underlying habit formation is a snowball effect.

Thus, Every time one takes up a challenge, it becomes easier to take it up again the next time it is presented; inversely, the more often one demurs, the less likely does taking up the challenge become. Every time one gives in to a temptation, it becomes easier to yield to it again the next time around; inversely, the more often one resists, the less likely is it to overwhelm us. Note that these two formulas are two sides of the same coin.

This law details more precisely how habits are formed: every strong act (taking up a challenge or resisting a temptation) produces an influence for the next opportunity, making it a bit easier; every weak act (failing to take up a challenge or giving in to a temptation) produces an counter-influence for the next opportunity, making it that much more difficult. The exact measure of influence is not specified here, but it is never infinite – i.e. it never makes freewill impossible thenceforth.

The process of habit forming or habituation consists in repeatedly responding in a certain way to a certain kind of

stimulus. Thus, the habitual or customary is a quasi-automatic reaction or routine that we have more or less voluntarily instituted over time, for good or bad. We acquire a 'default' behavior pattern, which can only be broken by a willful de-programming or a corrective program. Thus, for instance, repeated laziness can only be overcome by repeated energetic behavior.

We should mention, incidentally, the role of repetition in *learning*. Not all learning is based on repetition; most depends on trial and error and other methods. But once a decision is made (by or for the learner) to memorize certain ready-made information or skills, this is often achieved by repetition. One may, for instances, memorize a prayer or some martial arts movements. This form of learning applies to animals as well as humans; for example, a lion cub may repeatedly imitate its parents' hunting techniques.

We may distinguish between a habit of *activity* and a habit of *passivity*. In the former case, some positive will is involved in the behavior pattern concerned; for example, saying 'good morning' to people one meets. In the latter case, the habit consists in not-willing something that might have been willed in a given circumstance, so much so that the stimulus may be ignored; for example, one may get used to a noise and cease trying to smother it or escape it, and even stop noticing it.

Habits we approve of do not normally constitute a problem, though we may conceive situations where we desire to at least conceal them. It is habits we evaluate as self-destructive in some way that we wish to avoid. The best way to avoid bad habits is to steer clear of temptations, while the forces involved are still at a manageable level. Once habits are acquired, their influence may be so intense that punctual

effort may not suffice to free ourselves of them; a certain course may then be called for, involving effort great enough over time to overcome the undesirable tendencies. The additional effort required may be just to remember that one has a habit to resist, or much more conscious planning, resolve and perseverance may be called for. A new, counter-habit may have to be instituted.

## 2. Obsessions and Compulsions

If we advocate freewill, we have also to give a convincing account of the obsessions and compulsions that most people experience to some degree at some time in their lives. ***Obsession*** refers to any persistent or recurring thought or emotion, especially an unwanted one, which cannot be stopped at will. ***Compulsion*** refers to a seemingly irresistible impulse or urge to act in a certain way, especially an undesirable way[71].

> Common examples of obsession: a man may have the image of a woman he is infatuated with displayed in his mind for hours at a time; or a woman may for days mentally replay a painful conversation she had with her boss at work; or a man may spend his life trying to 'prove' himself to someone long since dead who

[71] We may include ***inhibition*** under this term, as a special case of compulsion, where the tendency involved is *abstain from* the exercise of will, as it were 'against one's will' or contrary to one's better judgment. In this perspective, not-willing is a sort of will.

made a wounding critical remark once that keeps echoing in his ears.

Common examples of compulsion: a student may periodically drop whatever he is doing and masturbate, although seeing the self-destructive effects of his impulses he keeps promising himself to take control; or a wife cannot stop herself chattering to her husband all the time, even while knowing he dislikes it and it drives him further and further away from her; or a manager cannot help it, but he just loves manipulating and torturing his employees.

Many psychological theories have been built around such apparently involuntary events in our inner and outer life. Some are optimistic, believing that humans can overcome their weaknesses and improve themselves. Others are pessimistic, considering people as mostly sorry puppets in a show they did not write but only at best watch. It is significant that the former theories tend to encourage us to rise to the challenge, whereas the latter tend to promote our resignation. The former facilitate virtue; the latter, vice. For this reason, the issues must be dealt with.

Even when one sits and meditates, one is often completely submerged by ongoing thoughts – significant or insignificant mental images, meaningful sounds (words) and meaningless ones (e.g. a musical tune) – and even sometimes by the perception of bodily sensations and emotions, which may cause voluntary motor responses (e.g. fidgeting, scratching or getting up). One may have recently had an exciting experience, positive or negative, which stirs one up, churning one's mind and body, in reminiscence or anticipation.

Now, one's self or soul may try and recover control of the situation, wishing to find peace of mind, serenity, equanimity. One tries and tries, without success. Sometimes, one is so caught up that one even forgets to try! One is drawn in, sucked into the maelstrom. Occasionally, one becomes momentarily conscious of the situation, and valiantly tries for a moment to apply some voluntary meditation technique like breath awareness or stopping thoughts, or even just making one's agitation itself the object of meditation. But one cannot sustain it; a moment later, one's attention is carried away by the strong currents of thought, like a leaf in a turbulent river.

Where is freewill in such cases, one may well wonder? Though the thoughts, emotions and movements involved are to some extent involuntary, in the sense of coming from the body, they are also surely to some degree produced by the self, with some measure of volition. Regarding the involuntary portion, we can compare the situation to that of a man tied to a chair and forced to hear an audio tape or see a video movie; even if this is against his will, he retains freewill but cannot exercise it. But, regarding the voluntary portion, *how can the self act against its own will*?

One might propose as an explanation of obsessions and compulsions that the soul is self-divisible, i.e. that it may split itself up into *conflicting parts*. What is voluntary to one fraction is involuntary to the other. One compartment may hide things from another. One part may make demands on the other, and be obeyed or ignored. And so forth. The splitting of soul would have to be regarded as an initially voluntary act or series of acts; these however could not be undone at will, but require a certain amount of voluntary inner work to reverse.

And I think that this proposition, that the soul may function at cross-purposes with itself, is largely assumed. It may sometimes be healthy. For instance, one's "moral conscience" may be considered as a reserved portion (of varying size!) of the soul, assigned by oneself with the permanent task of overseeing the remainder of one's soul, judging its actions and shouting foul when they deviate from certain norms. Often, it is pathological. Some people seem to have deep chasms in their inner personality, which may last a lifetime and severely damage all their behavior.

> This notion of compartmentalization could explain why meditators call the achievement of inner peace 'Samadhi', which I gather means 'integration' in Sanskrit, i.e. (in the present interpretation) unification of the soul. But, while I readily concede that the idea of soul division may be a useful metaphor, I would not grant it as literal truth that easily. We must first try to explain the data at hand in less assuming ways.

To understand the aetiology of obsessions and compulsions, in a manner consistent with freewill and without making any too radical additional assumptions, we have to examine such processes in more detail.

With regard to obsession, our above theory of freewill does not exclude that the brain may bombard the subject (cognizing soul) with manifold impressions. We have not suggested that all information used in volition has to be called forth voluntarily, but have at the outset recognized the mental domain as an intermediary between the physical and spiritual domains, such that the nervous system may provide the subject with uncalled-for data to consider (which may be relevant or irrelevant to will – it is up to the subject to judge).

That the soul does not always have the power *to stop* such involuntary input at will does not therefore put freewill in doubt.

The uncontrollable arrival of data for cognition is not per se the problem of obsession, since volition is not involved in it. What *is* obsessive, and needs explanation, is when the soul *to some extent voluntarily* invites or sustains thoughts or consequent emotions, *even while wishing to stop doing it or pretending not to be doing it willingly*. In such cases, volition is in fact involved in the apparition of cognitive data. In such cases, the problem of obsession is really a problem of compulsion. For this reason, we are justified in lumping both problems together as here, and treating them as one. The underlying cause of the one is the same as that of the other.

Let us therefore turn our attention to compulsive behavior: what is its nature, cause and cure? Consider for simplicity's sake some examples from my own meditations:

- One day, I notice I am very talkative, constantly commenting on everything around me, and verbally directing almost everything I do. Why such verbosity? In my case, it is perhaps due to being a writer of philosophy, who has to express things in words. This turns into a habit hard to shake off. Linguistic rehearsal is also involved, preparing phrases for writing. Or again, perhaps I am unconsciously trying to communicate with someone by telepathy.
- Another day, I notice I am planning a great deal. Not just planning ahead for something *about to* happen, which needs immediate choices and decisions; but planning *further ahead*, for things that will happen a few hours,

days, weeks, months or years from now, as if I will be unable to make the appropriate choices and decisions at that time (although I will in fact have more precise data at hand then). And worse still, not just planning for what is *programmed to* happen (for example, I must contractually leave my apartment in a few months); but even planning for what *might possibly* happen, even if improbably (for example, what I would do if I was on an airplane hijacked by terrorists, as in the TV movie I just saw). Why such orgy of planning, beyond all rational utility?

- On yet another day, I am fully absorbed by thoughts of petty conflicts I currently experience with people. This person said something that vexed me; the memory keeps returning and I consider the event from all possible angles: I wonder how I should respond, or debate if I should respond; I perhaps consider different scenarios, with responses and counter-responses. By association of ideas, I then move on to some other person, who I remember behaved in a similar fashion. I wonder what motivates such people, why they so lack ordinary decency or civility, where their moral or social education failed. Thus, my mind remains focused for long periods on events irrelevant to my present attempt to meditate – why?

Thankfully, my meditations are not always that troubled and confused[72]; and when they are, my mind does eventually calm down. Also, compulsions are not always undesirable; for example, the compulsion to solve an intellectual problem is

[72] Simple *tiredness* often plays a role in such effects; and that is significant, because it shows that they remain basically issues of influence rather than credible objections to freewill.

valuable at the right time and place. But the issue here is: what is the common character of such busyness, why is one unable to simply turn it off, how is compulsion of this sort compatible with claims to freedom of the will? The answer it seems to me is with reference to: ***wanting*** (here using the term in a specialized sense) – which implies lacking something, a negative condition, whether one positively wants something or instead wants to avoid or evade something.

I may want to remind myself to say or do something; so, I keep repeating it mentally until I can act it out physically. I may have missed an opportunity, which does not present itself again (soon enough, if ever). I may know I will never in fact (at least, not so long as I am sitting in meditation!) get the chance to respond to some past event; so I am condemned to react to it in imagination, again and again. I may be tortured by an unanswered question, or some forgotten item of memory; so, I keep searching for an answer.

In all such cases, there is a 'hole' needing to be 'filled', an issue to resolve, a problem to solve, a task to be performed, some unfinished business to attend to. The situation is so constructed as to keep one 'suspended', almost powerless to untie oneself in the present context. Thus, what drives volition in such cases, is not a positive force, but rather something negative, a lack – a want.

If we now turn our attention to compulsive behavior on a more physical plane, we can discern a similar pattern. Volition is here too driven indirectly by negatives, rather than directly by positives. It is sucked in, rather than driven. That is what makes compulsions particularly insidious: they are not due to the presence of some temptation or obstacle, but to

the absence of something. In ordinary desire or aversion, the object is relatively manifest and identifiable; in the 'wanting' involved in obsession or compulsion, the object is more concealed or deeply buried. Being absent, that thing is necessarily difficult to spot and be dealt with. There is a black hole, perceivable only by its effects. Thus, to overcome a compulsion, it is imperative we uncover the hidden term in the equation.

Consider, for instance, ***drug addiction***. A voluntary act is always involved, such as reaching out for a glass of liquor, or lighting a cigarette or joint, or using a needle, for instances[73]. Such an act is usually preceded by a mental rehearsing of the act: one imagines oneself doing the act and enjoying its sequels. Perhaps a foretaste of things to come is feasible, like getting a whiff of smoke. One first mentally toys with the idea – then physically executes it.

The drug addict thinks or claims the drug will provide relief from physical, mental or 'existential' suffering. The drug is not intended or expected to cure anything, but only as 'compensation'. The alleged suffering may take the form of insufficiency of pleasure or excessive pain. The relief the drug offers takes the form of an escape from suffering; the drug does not abolish the suffering, but only momentarily conceals it. For this reason, the drug is bound to be

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[73] The psychological processes involved apply equally well to more metaphoric 'drugs', of course. The 'drug' may be food or sex, for instances. In such neurotic situations, of course, eating has little to do with bodily hunger, and sexual intercourse is no more than using someone as an aid to masturbation or at best mutual masturbation. The 'drug' may also be more masochistic, something negative rather than positive. In a way, all use of drugs may be considered masochistic, since it is self-destructive behavior.

objectively harmful in some way over time; for if the suffering used as a pretext is objective, it remains untreated. The drug may additionally introduce its own physical, psychological or social damage in the equation; the addict may develop health, emotional and/or social difficulties. Because of its ineffectiveness or counter-effectiveness[74], the drug's use tends to excess. After some time, the drug's effects thus come to 'justify' its use: a vicious circle is created.

The compulsion to resort to the drug is thus more than a mere habit based on repetition. There is an initial argumentum, which gives the addict a pretext; this may be false and misleading. The addict considers himself or herself as being disadvantaged in some way (emotionally, socially, whatever), and proposes to make up for such deficiency by means of the drug. Real problems, existing before the drug-addiction, are ignored; and real problems, due to the drug or the addiction, are produced; the latter also remaining unsolved. To free himself or herself from the addiction, the addict cannot merely make an effort of will at the time of the compulsive urge, but must first intellectually unravel the convolutions involved and then stay aware of them. Then only can willpower ("just say no!") do its blessed work over time.

The existence of compulsive behavior need not therefore be considered as putting freewill in doubt. Volition is indeed influenced, here as in all cases; but that which is really doing the influencing is relatively concealed. For this reason, it is particularly difficult for simple volition to overcome

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[74] For example, cigarette smoking makes one more, not less, nervous.

compulsive influences; often, mere strength of will does not do the job: what is needed is awareness and cunning.

The agent must first realize and admit he is entangled in some knot, then make the effort to unravel it. This means identifying the unresolved issue, the quandary, the missing link, behind the compulsion; and neutralizing it, somehow. Mere revelation may well suffice in some instances – just seeing the absurdity or circularity of the compulsion dissolves it. In most cases, some priority must be set: i.e. *some illusory or lesser value must be abandoned in favor of some real or greater value*. If the dog lets go the bone, it can pick up the steak. Often, more long-term work on oneself is required, which may include theoretical studies, detailed observation, analysis and modification of one's patterns of thinking and doing, and (in my view, most important and effective) meditation.

> Another example we can give, that is relevant to current social mores, is the psychology of *sexual hedonism*; this is very similar to drug addiction.
>
> The facts of human nature, which everyone can verify by extrapolation from their own experience (though saying this is not an invitation to 'experiment' with such matters), are the following. Given free rein, the senses ultimately make no distinction regarding age, gender or species or any other issue of causation; all they care about is getting more pleasure and less pain. The senses devoid of rational guidance are only concerned with quality and intensity of sensations, without regard as to their sources or their consequences.

> People who imagine that happiness is to be found in sensual experience pursue the latter relentlessly. After a while, they become more and more blasé to such experiences, and start looking for new experiences. The sensitivity of their sense organs having been diminished by repetition and excessive friction, they desperately yearn for novelty that arouses other sensory receptors or the same receptors in other ways. They thus sink deeper and deeper into more and more depraved sexuality, in a sort of mad desperation.
>
> The result is not happiness, but self-contempt and self-defeat (not to mention damage caused to others, used as tools or accidentally affected).

Desire is not proof of need; people can and do desire things that cause them (and others) much harm. People often use their reason to find pretexts for their sensuality, to rationalize it – but in such case, reason is subservient to emotion. To be free of sensuality, one must admit the independence and supremacy of reason over it.

Note also, concerning sexual orientation: in general, spiritually pure people find impurity repulsive, whereas the impure feel at home in the midst of it. The impure find the pure attractive, but only as an opportunity to spread impurity, only in order to soil the pure. The impure are most attracted by the equally impure, to express their impurity; or by the more impure, to increase in impurity. As impurity spreads in a society, tolerance for it proportionately increases; by and by, impurity becomes more demanding and aggressive.

## 3. The Ego Abhors a Vacuum

It is interesting, finally, to compare our above conclusion concerning 'wanting' as the driver of obsessions and compulsions, and the Buddhist principle that 'desire' is at the root of all human action (creating karma and thence further 'desire', in a seemingly endless cycle). We have earlier seen that volition usually has some goal (perhaps always so, if we discount apparent whims, granting them to have ends of sorts). In the present context, we have noted that sometimes the purpose involved in volition is particularly perverse because misleadingly eclipsed.

A very perspicacious observation of Buddhist psychology[75], which explains a lot in the present context, is that *the ego is constantly seeking stimulating experiences so as to reassert its existence and identity*. This is the basic 'selfishness' or 'egoism', and 'vanity' or 'egotism', of the ego or false self.

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[75] The following account is inspired by Buddhist doctrine, but I have adapted its terms. Thus, most schools of Buddhism deny existence of a "real (individual) self" (here called soul), admitting only an illusory "conventional self" (here called ego) and a substratum for all existence called "Buddha nature" or "original ground" (what we might call a universal soul). In my view, granting the existence of such an undifferentiated substratum, we would be hard put to understand how or why it would give rise to egos (false selves), if we did not assume that the universal whole is first in the interim apparently broken into individual fractions (real selves). Although Buddhist theorists enjoy provocative paradoxes, we must remain critical and logical.

By the 'ego'[76], we may understand the (partly or even largely erroneous) self-image of the soul[77]. It is a mental projection, a set of notions and suppositions about itself, which the soul confuses with itself[78]. The self-as-ego always needs buttressing one way or another. We may put it as: 'the ego abhors a vacuum'.

As I have explained in my *Phenomenology*, the 'ego' consists of aspects of one's body, mind and soul – some correctly experienced or inferred, some wrongly assumed, some fancifully projected – to which one (i.e. one's soul – the cognizing, willing, evaluating self) attaches to as one's very 'self'. It is a partly true, partly false self-image, weaved

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[76] Note that our use of the term 'ego' here derives from its popular use, and is not to be confused with that in the psychology of Freud (which refers to a 'realistic, practical' segment of the psyche), though it may encompass aspects of the latter concept, as well as of the contrasting concepts of 'id' (an 'emotive, impulsive' segment) and 'superego' (an 'idealistic, regulatory' segment).

[77] It is interesting to notice how we converse with ourselves, sometimes in the first person singular (I, my), sometimes in the second (you, your), and more rarely in the third person (saying 'one' or 'we', as here). One may also wordlessly project a physical image of oneself doing or having something. All such discourse may, together with other events, be added to the basket that constitutes the 'ego'.

[78] For this reason, the ego may be referred to as the prison of the soul, or more poetically (to use a metaphor dear to Jews) as its place of exile. The ego usually involves an inflated vision of our importance in the scheme of things, due to the maximum proximity of our body and mind in our perspective on the world; but the ego is also in fact an artificial limitation on the natural grandeur of our soul.

selectively and with fictional embellishments[79], to which one clings tenaciously in the belief that its loss or damage would be unbearable.

Being a cognitive construct of the soul (and not itself a soul), the ego has *no will of its own* (even though we sometimes speak of it as if it did). It is not a separate entity competing with the self – although we often present it as such, because that is a convenient image, a useful figure of speech. Every supposed voluntary action of the 'ego' is an act of the soul or self, for which the latter remains fully responsible. Nevertheless, the ego-construct strongly *influences* most thoughts and deeds of the soul, sometimes for the good, often for the bad, acting like a veil to knowledge and an obstacle to volition, in the way of a filter.

Bodily sensations and sentiments are major constituents of the ego, which have a particularly powerful influence on identity and behavior, due to their enormous and insistent presence. But many other factors come into play, too, such as ongoing mental chatter.

A common affliction today (in men as well as women) is repeated gazing at one's image in the mirror. This is not just amusing narcissism, but an expression of the ego's deep insecurity and need for confirmation of existence and identity, as well as a preparation for social projection. A similar affliction is looking at photos or films of oneself, and showing them to other people.

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[79] This means, for instances, treating momentary appearances as established realities, or transient or occasional traits as lifelong characteristics.

Our ego is also 'relative' to other people, in that we project some of it (usually the more flattering aspects, though often also aspects that may excite pity and charity) to them as our social persona (partly as cunning construct and partly incidentally or accidentally). To the extent that one manages to convince others of the personality projected – through one's words and deeds, as well as physical appearance – one reinforces one's own conviction in the said self-image.[80]

Although ego building is possible in isolation from other people, it is (for good or bad) made easier in many respects in social contexts. The reason is that other people only know the individual through some phenomenal factors, whereas the individual also has intuitive (non-phenomenal) knowledge of self. With other people, we can selectively 'show and tell'; also, they linger on the past, instead of letting it stay in the past, since the image of us they memorize is accumulative and rather rigid.

The ego is essentially *restless and insecure*. It prefers pleasant experiences; but if such are unavailable, it will just as well seek painful ones rather than none at all. Fearing to face its own vacuity, it will seek sensations, thoughts, distractions and possibilities of self-identification (e.g. listen to heavy metal music on the radio or watch a scary movie on TV, or just go to sleep and dream, or play games with someone). It will invent artificial intellectual problems, so as to have something to think about and express itself through. It will create psychological, existential or social problems for itself, so as to have something to respond to and a role to

[80] The relativity of ego is also, by the way, an insight drawn from Buddhist psychology. Truly, the East is a rich mine of human understanding.

play. That is, our problems are often not accidental, or even incidental, to our pursuits, but their very purpose.

In particular, the ego's need for stimuli helps explain why man is such a social animal. Of course, humans do objectively need each other: for common survival, for procreation, to bring up children. People care for each other, support and help each other, work together for the common good, enrich each other culturally. But modern novelists, journalists and psychologists have come to promote a great emotional dependence in people (which paradoxically breaks down human relations in the long run, because it is misguiding). To correct this erroneous tendency, by showing up the subjectivity of many social bonds, is not 'cynicism', but lucidity and compassion.

Most people quickly feel lonely if they are alone. Although the said hunger for stimulation can be satisfied without resort to company (especially as one matures), the easiest way to satisfy it is through human exchanges. The advantage here is precisely the maximum give and take involved. One gets sensory input, and one has respondents in front of whom to project a social persona. One acts, one gets feedback, one reacts – one is almost never 'bored'. With a companion – a family member, a friend, a lover, a colleague, even an enemy if need be – one is always kept busy and entertained. One prefers a nice, loving relationship; but one might settle for an argument or a fight, or just a walk in a crowded shopping center. If a human companion is unavailable, a pet will do.[81]

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[81] Of course, some people are loners against their will, because they cannot handle the challenges of relations. Hermits, on the contrary, avoid human or other contacts, so as to reduce unnecessary stimulation, and the artificial problems that come with

The motivation behind our constant grasping and clinging after objects of desire may be nothing more than a frantic, desperate attempt by the non-existent ego (i.e. to be precise, the self confusing itself with this imagined entity) *to assert itself* through stimulants and 'ego games'. This would be (according to the said thesis) the mother of all compulsions, whether bad or good. Therefore, if we managed to abandon our delusive self-identification with this illusory self, we would be freed of all compulsions.

A further explanation given by Buddhism is that "existence is suffering". The ego necessarily gives rise to suffering – being finite, it is inevitably subject to repeated vexation, frustration, pain, fear, anger, hatred, despair, boredom, and so forth, whether due to the presence of objects of aversion or to the absence of objects of desire. This suffering is expressed emotionally, as a sort of background noise of negative feeling, underlying to some extent all one's experiences, even those that superficially appear positive. This negative substratum, of which we are sometimes acutely conscious and sometimes only vaguely aware, strongly *influences* our behavior, causing us to think and act non-stop, often in deviant ways (such as drug taking), in a blind and hopeless attempt to rid ourselves of the inexplicable unpleasant feeling.[82]

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it. They wish to simplify their life and experience to facilitate meditation. But some people manage to meditate in the midst of disturbances.

[82] This is the first of the "Four Noble Truths" at the core of Buddhism. Note that one does not experience the emotion the French call "*le mal d'être*" all the time; one may be very happy for a long time, unaware of this substratum. But this happiness is inevitably temporary, i.e. it is dependent on causes and conditions

The Buddhist principle of desire is thus very general[83]: it refers to a sort of gluing[84] of the self to all objects of cognition and volition, called attachment or variously desire, grasping, clinging. However, such attachment is not easily shaken off. The opposite acts – viz. detachment, indifference, renunciation, letting go – are equally forms of attachment, insofar as they are intentional acts. Escape from or avoidance of attachment is impossible, if it is itself a pursuit of sorts. The whole difficulty of 'liberation' is that the latter circle must somehow be squared. Thus, Buddhism teaches more radically that there is compulsiveness of sorts in all our actions, which can only be eliminated in the ultimate 'enlightenment'.

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like good health, a loving spouse, material plenty, etc. It is brittle, fragile; and at some level, we all know it and brace ourselves for the inevitable end.

[83] This is worth comparing to the concept of an "evil impulse or inclination" (*yetser haraa*), proposed in Judaism. According to the Rabbis, all men and women, naturally, by the mere fact of being physically constituted, have such an inherent negative tendency. This is not, however, all bad. When people work against such resistance (the matter weighing them down, as it were) to achieve good, they acquire credit. But moreover, it is sometimes a good thing when they fail to overcome it. For example, yielding occasionally to sexual desire makes reproduction possible; if everyone was too saintly, there would be no one left.

[84] See my essay *Ungluing the mind*, further on (chapter 16.1 of *Volition*).

# 12. CHAPTER TWELVE

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 12.

## URGES AND IMPULSES

### 1. Physical Urges and Impulses

We all have *natural bodily* ***urges***, which seemingly 'force' us to perform certain actions. But on closer analysis, they do not really leave us no choice at all, but present us with relatively little choice.

Our most manifest bodily urges relate to the **digestive** system. They are the urges to drink, to eat, to urinate and to defecate. Observing their course in detail, the following features are apparent in common to them all (at least in humans):

1. We experience a set of physical *sensations*[85], which *triggers* the whole process. This may be called the

[85] Sensations are of course impossible to describe in words, being primary phenomena. All we can do is allude to them through

*stimulus*. Thirst includes sensations of dry taste inside the mouth and throat. In hunger, the signal consists of distinctive pangs in the stomach (often with felt movements and audible sounds of the gastric juices). In urination, we have a recognizable feeling of liquid pressure in our sex organ. In defecation, feelings of bowel movement and overload inside the rectum are experienced. This sensation is normally a natural outcome of an objective state of affairs in the body: deficiency or excess of liquid or solid nourishment. However, it may also on occasion be aroused artificially, by mental images; for example, wondering whether one needs a pee before going to bed, one may begin to urgently feel like having one.

2. We may moreover discern, more subtly, a sensation of sorts, occurring somewhere in our motor system, consisting of *an impulse to act in a certain way*. This secondary physical sensation is probably not a reflex, but an unconscious first reaction of the central nervous system. It signals that the appropriate (or usually requisite) organs of action are prepared to act in response to the stimulus. The muscles of our legs and arms are poised to grab drink or food, and our mouth is already salivating; or we are ready to run to the toilet. The

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familiar expressions and analogies. Furthermore, my descriptions here are probably incomplete: thirst and hunger may include oral sensations I cannot pinpoint. Also, in some cases, sensations vary in detail: for example, more liquid feces give a different sensation than more solid ones. Sensations are also registered as distinctive: e.g. hunger differs from pain due to indigestion or intestinal grippe; or the sensations relating to urination differ from those in sexual desire.

impulse is thus a velleity to act (a natural reaction or one based on past behavior). However, in our present perspective, it serves as information rather than as action. It is perhaps what we may most closely identify with the 'sense of having an impulse'.[86]

3. When these sensations of stimulus and impulse come to our attention, they are *evaluated* by us in various respects:

   a. We assess a *discomfort* that needs to be gotten rid of. The more intense the discomfort felt, the stronger the urge.

   b. The degree of *urgency* involved is estimated, i.e. how quickly we must respond as urged to. The essence of 'urging' seems to be the *time limitation* it imposes on us; we are, as it were, under pressure of time. The stronger the urge, the less time it leaves us.

   c. We consider *expedients*, what might be done or not-done to deal with the matter at hand. Such evaluation depends not only on physiological considerations, but also on practical, psychological and social factors.

   The practical issue might e.g. be: how easily or soon can we find nourishment, and what/where is it? Or how close is the nearest toilet? The psychological issue might, for

[86] I extrapolate this assumption from a common experience in my meditations: as I approach the last few minutes of my regular period of meditation, I often feel a strong impulse to get up. Such "okay, time's up!" signal is worth resisting, by refusing to identify oneself with it, so as to get the full benefit of the sitting.

instances, be: are we on a diet or a fast for some reason? Or: are the toilets here too smelly or dirty? The social issue might be: can we do it in public, is it ridiculous, approved, allowed or forbidden?

4. Such various considerations in making a value judgment involve mental images – invoking memories, projecting possibilities, anticipating consequences. Finally, choices are sorted out and a decision is made by us. Our will is stirred into action, actualizing our present response.

    a. This may consist in *retarding* execution, by *resisting* our impulses – willfully not seeking nourishment or not going to the toilet.

    b. Or it may consist in *responding*, at the earliest or last possible opportunity, to obtain appropriate *relief* from the sensations, in a more or less convenient time, place and manner.

    c. Or we may hesitate or abdicate, letting nature eventually determine the course of events: progressively weakening us till we die of thirst or starve to death prematurely, or incontinently releasing our urine or feces in what may be the wrong time and place and eventually damaging some organ.

    In the case of imminent danger to life, limb or health, we are *instinctively extremely unlikely* to do nothing about it: this improbability being what we commonly call '**the will to live**'.

5. These different possibilities of response are, note well, all *volitional*. Whether we retard, preempt or

abandon things to nature, we have made a choice, though one involving different effort inputs. Whatever it is, this is *our* response. However, any of these choices, and the above mentioned thought process leading to it, may be made *with varying degrees of consciousness*. It may be effectively 'involuntary' (i.e. involve a very minimum of consciousness) or more and more voluntary. Also note, the relevant events that preceded our volition, i.e. both (a) the cognitions of sensations and (b) the value judgments and the other considerations that went into them, are all *influences* on our will.

6. An essential feature of these natural processes is that they are *inertial*, i.e. inevitable if not interfered with. If we do not respond appropriately to the signals our body sends us (thirst or hunger, or the urges to urinate or defecate), certain negative events eventually occur against our will: we may get sick and die, or soil ourselves. First, however, we may experience a *mounting pressure* of stimuli and impulses[87]. We may be able to prevent the natural event by application of will for quite a while. Then at some time, that choice is no longer given us, and we have to either promptly respond by an act of will that relieves the pressure, or face the inevitable natural event (whether weakness and death, or incontinence and sickness).

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[87] In truth, in the case of thirst and hunger, the feelings may abate after a while. This is evident when I fast for a day; I do not know what happens beyond that. In such cases, the initial signals from the body are only a temporary warning, whose memory must suffice to influence us to appropriate action.

7. It is the latter *prospect* of some untoward events that influences us to take preventive measures, at the first, or (at least) at the last, opportunity. That is, some *mental* images are the immediate cause of our eventual action, rather than the pure sensations that initially start the whole urge process. The closer the event feared gets, the more our mind is occupied by it, calling for relief. Although very physiologically centered, the essential theatre of such urge complexes is mental, and the action they result in is volitional. Moreover, note well, the categories of causality of causation, influence and volition are all involved.

8. Furthermore, note, whether we obtain relief volitionally or against our will, sooner or later the same process starts all over again. We get thirsty, hungry; we drink, eat; we digest and fell the urge to dispose of the waste; we go to the toilet; pretty soon, we get thirsty and hungry again, and so forth. At least these digestive tract processes are cyclical (more or less daily), and go on throughout our lives to provide our body with energy and matter.

One further remark: it should be noted that the initial physical sensation is in some cases aroused by a prior thought (which in turn may have been brought about by some other sensation, and so on). For example: if before going to bed I ask myself whether I need to urinate, my attention goes down to my organ and this usually suffices to initiate a sensation of need that would probably have not been present or intense enough otherwise. Or again, I may feel no thirst till I see an advertisement for a drink. We shall return to this issue further on, when we consider mental urges.

Another powerful physical urge is the **respiratory** urge. Breathing (muscles pumping air rhythmically in and out of our lungs) is most of the time automatic. Occasionally, it becomes a more or less voluntary act. If air is lacking in the surrounds or our throat is blocked, one becomes aware of the difficulty of breathing and to some extent volitionally intensifies it. If stalked or stalking, one may find one's breathing more marked and noisy, and perhaps try to control it so as to remain unheard by the enemy feared. In meditation, when one turns one's attention to one's breath, one's initial tendency is to take over the function, as if obliged to breathe consciously; although after a while it is possible to observe the breath without affecting it. Also, it seems[88], one cannot willfully *stop* oneself breathing indefinitely: if one persists, one loses consciousness and the breathing mechanism takes over again.

The **sex** drive has two facets. Its basic function is *reproductive*. This is a milder, long-term urge, part of the general will to live, a will to survive in one's descendants (as an individual[89], or a member of a certain family or race or species), perpetuating one's genetic makeup. Here, the 'discomfort' to be removed may be the metaphysical fear of nonexistence, or the more conscious desire to obey an assumed Divine commandment. The time frame to fulfill that purpose is anytime after puberty and before natural loss of

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88 See Curtis and Barnes. p. 408.

89 Here, I refer to the Jewish belief that one's children are continuations, extensions in time and space, of oneself. But we may also refer to the Buddhist teaching that sexual desire is the motor of cyclic existence, because through that desire one engages in all sorts of pursuits that increase karma and thus generate one's rebirth.

sexual potency or fertility, accidental organ damage or death – which is mostly understood to mean as soon as possible or convenient.

The sex drive also has a *hedonistic* component, which serves to promote the biologically primary reproductive function. This is a short-term urge, which can become very intense, not to say overwhelming. Here, the 'discomfort' to be removed is partly the pain of sexual tension, partly the hope of sexual pleasure. Sensations of physical lust arise in and around one's sex organ at the sight of a potential sex partner, and the urge and excitement become more intense as the relation approaches consummation. The potential of reproduction is momentarily largely eclipsed by the immediate urge to engage in actual intercourse. One may control one's timing (or even at the last minute for some reason disengage). Finally, one lets go and obtains relief in orgasm and ejaculation, until the next time around.

Among humans, the sex urge is strongest in adolescence and youth, and perhaps (apparently because of testosterone levels) more so in males than in females; these facts have biological utility. Of course, some older people and females seem considerably influenced by lustful feelings, but this may rather be a sign of emotional immaturity and gullibility towards media hype[90], than natural necessity.

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[90] The claim that sex, in whatever guise or form, is a necessity for mental hygiene and physical wellbeing has become widely accepted in our culture as fact. But, judging by its observable negative effects on personality and society, this claim should in my opinion be reviewed.

People can, by willpower, altogether abstain from sex for years or even all their life[91]; this occurs under the influence of some common belief (e.g. Christian or Buddhist spiritual practice) or some personal peculiarity (e.g. a childhood trauma). A man may nevertheless have wet dreams. Some people temporarily or permanently ignore the reproductive aspect of sex, but are committed to its hedonistic aspect. Today, people may thanks to contraceptive pills and condoms engage in normal sexual intercourse without risk of conception, as promiscuously as they like. Some people satisfy their lust by masturbation. Some people go so far as to engage in child abuse, homosexual acts or even bestiality.[92]

A third aspect of the sex drive worth noting is more conventional than physical, being due to *social* pressure. This occurs in traditional society, based on the family; but also in modern society, which glorifies the appearance of sexual prowess. If one fails to fulfill social expectations, one may considerably lose face or be variously stigmatized. Such penalties are real enough, as one's life-opportunities in society may be affected; so people generally comply. Exceptions may be granted, for instance to monks and nuns; indeed, in their case, the public regards any sexual interest as scandalous.

Any **feeling of sickness** urges us to identify the cause and find a cure, or at least to relieve the symptoms, or risk some untoward consequence(s). If we feel tired, our urge is to rest

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[91] Even animals do not all satisfy their sex urge (at least I assume so, observing that in many groups a dominant male monopolizes all the females).

[92] Needless to say, by listing such proclivities I do not mean to condone them.

or sleep, till our energy returns, or risk collapse (e.g. at the wheel of our car). If we feel hot or cold, we have an urge to adjust the temperature of our body (e.g. by taking clothes off or opening a window, or putting a blanket on or turning the heater up); else, we start sweating or shaking, and lose energy, etc. If our skin surface is itching, we have the urge to scratch it, as if to remove the irritant; in some cases, the irritant (e.g. a biting insect) is in fact thus neutralized. In each such situation, our tendency is to avoid discomfort and eventual illness, and return to comfort and ensure health.

We may of course systematically preempt problems, rather than wait for them to arise and solve them – for example, by earning a living, and thus making sure in advance that one has enough money for basic needs such as nourishment, shelter, procreation or medical insurance. Clearly, such functioning goes beyond immediate physical urges, preparing longer-term responses to them. This is all an expression of the will to live. Some people care too little for the future, some too much.

So much for our analysis of the common bodily urges. Of course, much more can be said about such processes from a biological or medical point of view – for examples: digestive and respiratory urges relate to metabolism, temperature control relates to homeostasis, and so forth. While such knowledge is truly fascinating, and worth acquiring to obtain a fuller understanding, our approach here is simply phenomenological – how the individual directly experiences things and responds to them. In particular, we have tried to clarify in some detail the involvement of volition and influence in them.

The processes above described, despite some differences of detail, have largely similar features, so that we can propose a general definition of the concept of urge, at least with regard to humans (we may have to make adjustments with regard to animals). Our interesting finding is *the extent to which what we call a bodily urge involves 'mental' components* (presumably, these diminish 'lower' down the scale of animal life[93]). We are less driven by a physical force than by the *prospect* of some negative eventuality and the *thought* that the temporal window of opportunity to prevent it may close.

Moreover, although such urges relate to physical processes with eventual automatic outcomes, *they allow for volitional interference, in the way of temporary resistance and some convenient preemptive measure*.

The preemption may be positive or negative. In the case of urination and defecation, the event (call it X) that is minimally bound to occur if we do not interfere is incontinence, and its preemption consists in going to the toilet before that happens (i.e. it is also X). Likewise in breathing: the automatic and volitional acts have the same effect (bringing oxygen into lungs). In the case of thirst or hunger, the minimal event (X) is insufficient energy or matter, and its preemption consists in providing energy or matter soon enough (i.e. it is notX, the opposite). Likewise in reproductive sex: the danger faced is generational discontinuity, while the remedy is to procreate.

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[93] However, there must be some mental component. Consider, for instance, why a housebroken dog holds back from doing its thing indoors – it must have some memory of its master's disapproval of soiling the home.

We might at this stage usefully distinguish between initial sensations emerging from *natural bodily* processes, like the digestive, respiratory and reproductive ones above described, and those due to some *external physical* stimulus. For instances: if a bright light flashes into our eyes, we blink, fearing damage to our retina; if someone is tortured, he may scream or cry, hoping to arouse pity in his torturer. It is useless to attempt an exhaustive list. Suffices to note that any sense organ(s) may be involved in the stimulus, and there are standard responses (though sometimes, creative responses may be called for).

A more radical distinction suggested by our above analysis is one between urges and mere ***impulses***. Impulses, like urges, tend us on a certain course of action, and they can be resisted or indulged. However, whereas impulses can be resisted indefinitely without risking some untoward natural consequence, as we have seen this is not true of urges. Examples of impulses will serve to illustrate this differentia. If we hear some unpleasant noise, we rush over to stop it if we can. If we are tickled, our tendency is to wiggle as if to escape our tormentor. In such cases, note, our volitional response (resistance or preemption) has no very significant effect on our health or life[94].

We may use the word drive to mean 'urges or mere impulses'. Often the distinction between urges and impulses is moot. Often, what appears as an urge can be construed as a mere impulse – for example, many of the above described hedonistic aspects of the sex drive. We may also classify habits or compulsions like smoking tobacco, the use of hard

[94] Though it could be argued that even an unpleasant noise or sensation is somewhat threatening.

drugs or alcoholism as impulses. The failure to soon procure the desired drug may produce withdrawal symptoms (irritability, insecurity), making it seem like the impulse is an urge. Thus it seems to the victim's befogged mind; but, biologically, the opposite is true – the drug is destructive. So in fact, if there is any urge, it is a natural urge to stop smoking or getting doped-up or drinking, or risk disease.

## 2. Mental Urges and Impulses

Mental impulses and urges have logical constructions similar to physical ones, except that usually the initial stimulus is a thought (or discontent) rather than a sensation (or discomfort). For example, the above mentioned social convention aspect of the human sex drive is clearly a mental urge, rather than a physical one.

The dividing line between them is admittedly sometimes arbitrary. Often, a physical urge or impulse occurs following a thought. We have seen, for example, how the mere thought of urination may give rise to the sensation that triggers the urination urge; similarly, for instance, the mere thought of a cigarette may make the habitual smoker 'feel like' having one. Conversely, a mental urge or impulse may be kick-started by a prior sensation or perception. For examples, one heard someone say something or saw an ad on TV.

A good illustration of mental urge would be my urge to write this here book. It starts with a spontaneous, persistent thought. It is an urge, in that a time constraint is consciously involved – I constantly tell myself to finish the book before I die (and pray to be granted life enough). This distinguishes it

from, for example, an impulse to buy a new car I saw tantalizingly advertised; although, having so hooked me, the salesman may try to induce in me an urge to buy it, by setting a deadline for a 'special offer' at reduced price or with extra features!

The production of mental impulses, and their upgrade to urges, are common practices of religious traditions; for example, a religion may teach that standard prayers or other rituals are necessary to salvation (impulse), and additionally institute set times for such rituals (urge). Similarly, the tax office sets a deadline for tax returns, and imposes a penalty if the task is not done on time. Such expedients are used by all secular ethical, social, legal or political systems, to promote duties and their timely exercise. In such cases, the terms 'to impel' or 'to urge' someone respectively mean '*to cause an* impulse or urge in' that person – the causality involved being that of influence.

A mental impulse or urge is triggered by some distinctive memory (perceptual or conceptual), or an imagination (visual or auditory), or an emotion (a mood or psychosomatic sentiment or purely physical sensation), or a verbal proposition. These initial 'thoughts' may arise spontaneously, or through some intellectual process, or by mere association of ideas; or they may be generated by bodily influences or by perceived external physical events or persons. Beyond that stimulus, everything is analogous[95]. Impulses differ from urges in lacking temporal pressure. The time factor involved in urges functions by creating psychological stress, which

[95] As we shall see further on, some mental drives have other differences from physical ones.

makes us double up our efforts so as to get rid of the annoyance as soon as possible[96].

It is interesting to compare *impatience* to mental urgency. They have some affinity, although they are logically opposite in the sense that urgency is due to (assumed) insufficiency of time, whereas impatience signals (assumed) excess of time. Impatience arises when one feels that some process (e.g. waiting for one's date) is taking more of our time than one is willing to devote to it. So one wishes to hurry it on, e.g. by being less careful or by inciting urgency in other people involved – and if it is out of one's power to do so, one suffers stress. The time one has mentally allotted to the task is artificially (by wishful thinking) shorter than the time it really takes. An impossible (and needlessly stressful) urge is therefore produced to fit a process of longer duration in a time restriction of one's own making.

A mental impulse or urge, like a physical one, involves a certain velleity to action, which may include specific muscular feelings; e.g. eagerness to play the piano may give rise to sensations in legs to go to the piano, and in hands to play it. An evaluation occurs, which determines our degree of desire or aversion, the urgency if any of its fulfillment, and the available ways and means. Choices are made and decisions taken, culminating in volitional acts – whether temporarily resisting the impulse or urge, or doing what it impels or urges us to do at an appropriate time and place, or letting things happen as they may.

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[96] Note that often two or more urgencies may be superimposed within a same time frame, increasing our stress tremendously, because we are forced to prioritize.

Note that what classifies an impulse or urge as 'mental' is its assumed starting point – the eventual action(s) it drives us to do may be physical as well as mental. Thus, for instances, lust is an impulse to grab and kiss the girl, anger is an impulse to punch the guy's face in – these are physical acts proceeding from a thought. Again, yearning for understanding is an impulse to study – the latter consisting mainly of mental acts.

Just as bodily urges are cyclical, their fulfillment bringing only momentary relief, soon after which they recur, so with many mental desires – they tend to be insatiable and unlimited. Thus, for instance, for most people, the more money they can get, the better; because even if they feel secure for today and tomorrow, there is always the day after and the one after that to worry about. Urges can thus become permanent prisons, if given free rein. The lover of wisdom would here suggest: If you *identify with* the urge, it dominates you; if you don't, you *can* dominate it.

The passive connotation of the word drive (driven) should not be overemphasized, however. We should rather keep in mind that 'drive' rhymes with 'strive'. One may actively drive oneself. Our mental urges and impulses are not just happenstance, or innate like most physical ones – they are generally acquired. They are furniture of our minds that we have often constructed and placed there[97] ourselves. Like the body, the mind is an instrument of the soul. An instrument is something that has some uses, though not infinite uses;

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[97] This is said in a common manner of speaking. Drives are of course 'stored' in the brain, as discussed earlier, in the section on therapeutic psychology (chapter 8.3).

something that can be useful, but also obstructive; something that has a nature, and is not infinitely pliable.

Thus, we may train ourselves – or be trained by others – to respond in certain ways to certain situations. This may occur consciously, in the way of 'working on oneself' – or it may be the natural effect of a long series of separate choices and acts, which together eventually constitute a habitual pattern of conduct. We may be fully aware of a drive, whether we approve or disapprove of it; or we may be subject to it while largely unaware of it as such, whether due to overall poverty of self-knowledge or because we have suppressed the specific knowledge to make room for some personal contradiction.

Indeed, we may be subject to conflicting drives, be they physical and/or mental. For example, one may have to risk one's life to save a loved one. Impulses or urges are in conflict when it is naturally impossible to follow/fulfill them both. Urges are, moreover, in conflict, when the time required for their performance and their time limits makes it impossible for us to satisfy them both. In such cases, we have to become aware of the potential conflict, or else fail in both cases; and then we have to prefer one to the other, and in urgent cases make our mind up quickly enough to avoid actual clash. Sometimes the dilemma is paralyzing; in which case, nature follows its course.

When a person deals with such conflicts in a systematically irrational manner, making little effort to bring them out into the open and resolve them one way or the other, keeping them in the dark through fear of admitting unflattering traits or wishing to indulge in drives he or she knows to be unsuitable and harmful, the person is eventually subject to mental pathologies. Such *repressive* behavior over time may,

for instances, give rise to chronic negative emotional states like anxiety, or to occasional 'inexplicable' outbursts of hatred and anger, or to excessive sleep and permanent fatigue, or to nervousness and hyperactivity, and so forth.

In all such cases, one can glimpse underlying conflicts that have to be faced, and resolved through appropriate thoughts and deeds. Mental drives are not permanent features once acquired. They can, more or less consciously, be attenuated and eventually eliminated, by making suitable choices over time – for instance, training oneself to respond differently to the same stimuli till such new response becomes 'second nature'. Such changes usually require sensitivity, cunning, effort and time – they rarely just happen or can be produced by immediate will.

## 3. Formal Analysis of Physical and Mental Urges

We analyzed in detail some basic bodily urges, and showed that similar features can be found in other physical urges and in mental urges, stating that these differ essentially only in the way our attention is drawn to them. Physical urges are triggered by certain sensations either originating in the body or caused by external objects, whereas mental urges spring from thoughts. We also noted that mere impulses differ from urges in lacking the factor of inevitability. Impulses involve stimulus and standard response, but no time limitation; there is tendency in them, but no urgency.

a. To begin with, let us review (with new numbering) some of the salient features of physical urges and their closest mental analogues, with particular emphasis on aetiology:

1. Some event is *bound to eventually occur*. This event, or at least its timing, is undesirable[98]. The time limit involved may not be known with any precision, but instead indicated by the increasing intensity of physical sensations. In the case of mental urges, the time frame is often emotionally highlighted, though it may have been intellectually estimated.

2. But fortunately, the untoward event can *voluntarily* be slowed down for some time, or preempted. However, it cannot be indefinitely retarded, and the time allowance for its preemption is limited. As we have explained, preemption may be positive or negative. The consciousness involved in the volition may range from minimal (so-called involuntary) to maximal (fully aware).

3. If the event or its time of automatic occurrence seems inopportune, the agent may be increasingly influenced by *the prospect* of such occurrence or mistiming to take some suitable voluntary steps to retard and/or preempt the event. Note the words inopportune, prospect, influence, voluntary and suitable – implying valuation, cognition and volition at various stages. Even in the case of physical urges, the central events are mental.

4. The initial sensations or thoughts, that made the agent aware of the event, do not force him to act in any way; he may choose not to intervene. If the agent intervenes inappropriately or too late, or does nothing about it, the

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[98] E.g. in hunger or thirst, lack of nourishment is undesirable, whereas is incontinence it is not the waste disposal that is undesirable but its timing.

undesirable event occurs anyway, at whatever time natural circumstances happen to make it occur.

5. Relieving an urge, whether by an act of will or by letting things happen by inertia, does not mean ridding oneself of it forever. After a while, it may reappear. This is particularly true of natural bodily urges, though it may even apply to mental urges.

This list suggests that urges can be formally defined through a series of statements, including modal categorical and conditional propositions. Thus, we might label the agent concerned A, and the event X, and so forth, and state concisely: "X will inevitably happen to A by time T, unless A retards such event (inertial X) by will for a while or until A preempts X by willing X (or notX, as the case may be) before X naturally occurs, etc." However, the above detailed description serves as definition just as well.

Our analysis makes clear that an urge may be viewed as a 'causal *nexus*' – a series of causal relations of various kinds together forming a common pattern. The same is true to a lesser extent of an impulse; it has some of the components of an urge, but not the more pressing ones. Both are more complex than the relation of influence, which they involve among others.

What should be examined next is what we mean here by the modality "*inevitable*" – for it is clear that this term has many nuances.

- In its strictest sense, we mean by it a *natural necessity*, something deterministically bound to occur eventually come what may. This sense would apply to the natural bodily urges earlier described; for instance, once we need

to pee, we are eventually bound to. A more conditional version of same would be *natural inertia*, meaning: within a certain existing framework, the event is inevitable, but if this larger context is changed, the inevitability might not hold. For example, the patient will 'surely' faint if not fed, but that won't happen if the patient dies.

It should be added that natural inevitabilities do not apply only to the body or its physical surrounds. The mental domain also has a 'nature' and so is subject to natural necessities and inertias. For example, if one behaves in certain foolish ways, one is bound to eventually suffer certain unpleasant consequences, like neurosis or madness.

- The concept of inevitability can be further broadened with reference to *artificial necessity*, and further still with reference to *artificial inertia*. For examples: in a legal system, a penalty may be obligatory once sentenced, or it may be open to review. Clearly, such artificial inevitabilities apply in situations organized by someone's volition (one's own or some other persons'). They may be physical as well as mental; for instances, the penalty may be capital punishment, or it may be social stigma.

The concept of urge can further be broadened, by acknowledging the fact that the inevitability and/or its timing need not be *real*, as so far implied, but may be merely *imagined*. The urge, be it physical or mental, is based essentially on the agent's assumption that there is inevitability (of whatever sort) and/or that the undesirable event will happen within a set amount of time. Such assumptions are sometimes justified, and sometimes

erroneous – but in either case, the urge has the same stimulating power. Error is perhaps more common in the case of mental urges; but even bodily sensations and physical perceptions may be wrongly interpreted.

It follows from the above analysis that we can emancipate ourselves from physical and mental drives that we find inappropriate, provided we remain lucid. We should try to always be aware of the forces impinging upon us, identifying their nature and sources, checking their underlying premises, evaluating the benefits and dangers inherent to them, and confronting them if they need to be rectified. It is preferable to be proactive than reactive – as the saying goes "a stitch in time saves nine".

As already stated, to insure personal freedom of action, it is necessary not to identify with the urges or impulses concerned, i.e. not to consider them as part of one's essential identity. The object is not, however, divorcing oneself from one's passions, or rigidly controlling them, out of fear of them. Internal harmony and peace, and 'spontaneity' and ease in action, are highly desirable. The most efficient way to find the right balance is through meditation: achieving inner calm, everything naturally falls into place.

Humans have free will – but that is a potential we have to daily actualize. Doing so, the self asserts its mastery of the house of matter and mind it inhabits.

## 4. Are There Drives *Within* the Soul?

We may ask the question: are there *spiritual* urges and impulses, by analogy to physical and mental ones? Is the term spiritual appropriate, or are all non-physical ones mental?

A common early experience of meditation is that thoughts of all kinds (e.g. focusing on a sensation or memory or emotion; projecting a mental picture or sound; verbal discourse, anticipating, planning; etc.) seem to have a 'momentum' of their own – seemingly **'***against our will***'**. They are not (or not always) entirely involuntary, but often (if not always) involve some voluntary mental activity – and yet we do not have instant and total control over them (at least not till we reach a certain level of mental calm through meditation).

This is a paradoxical experience, which needs to be explained. How come human will does not have immediate and full control over the mental if not material functions at its disposal? Why can I not *stop* mental turbulences at will, and get on with my meditation? What is it below the surface that *drives* thought, making it semi-automatic if not completely hectic? How do obsessions, and more broadly compulsions, work?

The mind, as well as the body, would seem to have its own mechanistic inertia. Our primitive response in the face of such impulses is to 'follow' them, doing what they impel us to do. The soul (through its free will) tries gradually to gain ascendancy over these naturally moving mechanisms, i.e. to

resist them and become more autonomous. At first, only some aspects may be immediately accessible to willful interference. As we become more calmly focused on the spiritual self, and cease to identify with mind and matter, we are able to more and more control them. Control is not a matter of greater force, but of finding the correct point of leverage.

If we grant the postulate of freewill, that the soul's modus operandi is always and exclusively volitional, it means we reject any notion that inertia or coercion are possible in the 'spiritual' domain, i.e. within the soul. It is therefore an assumption that *all* involuntary events occur outside the soul (in body or mind, or beyond them in the rest of the world), never in it. This implies that, although it is cognitively receptive, the soul in itself has no 'passions' of volition. Influences make a direction of will 'easier or more difficult' for the soul, but do not literally push or pull it in any direction.

This theory may make our inner life seem extremely bland and dispassionate, and some may well wonder if it is accurate. They will argue that we do seem to have drives, pressing on us or drawing us hither and thither. It does appear that there are influences that do not merely increase or decrease the effort requirement of our volitions, but which at least are programmed to occur *unless voluntarily stopped*. If that is true, then the soul might be said to have 'real' drives, at least in the way of internal 'inertial processes' (if not causative necessity).

But the issue is: are such (seemingly) 'spiritual inertias' really occurring in the soul, or in its physical and mental surrounds? I very much doubt that any such inner impulse or

urge could move the soul into acts akin to volitional acts even with the soul's acquiescence (let alone with determinism). The soul's typical 'acts' seem to me such that they can only be performed by the active will of the soul. I suspect the nature of these acts is such that only the soul can carry them through to completion.

> However, to be clear, we have to distinguish here between *the soul's willing (positive)* from its totally *not-willing (negative)*. Otherwise, we would have to assume the soul is always obliged to will, whether a positive or a negative goal. It would never be at rest, never uninvolved. This would not be a true picture of our inner life. When the soul positively 'acts' (either willing or deliberately not willing), it creates something new in and for itself. But obviously, when the soul 'does nothing', it still has some description – viz. the way it happens to be thus far. The latter situation is not to be counted as 'inertia' in the above sense.

If we carefully analyze situations involving drives, such as the 'hard to control' thoughts mentioned above, we find that the events that are 'inertial' are entirely in the realm of causation, in body and/or mind, i.e. outside the soul. For instances, speaking out or imagining something. In such cases, there is a natural process in the nervous system or in the rest of our body that, either in general or in certain specific circumstances, is bound to occur, unless the soul volitionally interferes and stops such a development. The soul's volition, or abstinence from volition, is entirely in the realm of the soul; whereas the precise inertial event, whether

it is allowed to proceed or prevented, is entirely outside the soul.

> In truth, even our most subtle feelings, such as the positive and negative moods or esthetic responses that poetically put seem to permeate our very soul, do not really occur in the soul proper but in the adjacent mind. Although very subtle, they are still internally perceived phenomena, and not intuited experiences. Therefore, they act on the soul like all other influences, making its volitions easier or harder, but are not essentially within it.

Though hard to prove with finality, this doctrine seems more probable. However, see the further reflections below, which give more consideration to the different ways consciousness is implicated in volition.

## 5. Formal Analysis of Spiritual Urges

We have just considered where in the psyche seemingly inertial events like obsessions and compulsions might be located, and concluded that they could not be assumed as spiritual (i.e. in the soul) consistently with will and its freedom, but must be regarded as mental. This, as we shall now show, suggests certain formal differences in some mental drives.

There is *a special class of mental urges*, which deserve particular attention. As we saw earlier, the volitions we call ‘unconscious’ or ‘inadvertent’ are so called, not because they lack *all* consciousness or deliberation, but because they have

a very *minimum* of it. The adjective 'involuntary' is paradoxically applied to certain of our volitions, only hyperbolically in the way of self-reproach for insufficient attention, not meaning literally to imply total non-volition.

We may on this basis construct a logical form of urge that, instead of opposing natural or artificial inevitability (necessary or inertial, real or imagined) to voluntary retardation or preemption, opposes an agent's so-called ***involuntary (i.e. minimally conscious) will*** to the same agent's ***voluntary (i.e. more conscious) will***. By this means, we are at last able to clearly formalize the 'spiritual inertias' most of us experience daily in our thoughts and actions. We can thus explain why obsessions and compulsions seem to occur by themselves although they obviously involve will; and even against our better judgment, although we are essentially beings with freewill.

> Our proposition is that *although such urges do involve consciousness and will,* ***more effort*** *of consciousness and will is needed to prevent or stop them than to start and continue them*.

A habitual routine involves consciousness and will, but it is *relatively* effortless compared to the investment called for by any attempt to overcome it, so we repeat it on and on and thus reinforce it. This explains the analogy between 'spiritual' inertias and natural inertia: an extra effort is required to transcend them. Just as in the realm of causation, the inertial goes on until if ever diverted by volition, so in the realm of the soul, there are situations where less demanding volitions proceed unless or until more effort is invested. We might thus refer to 'volitional inertia', or keep using the term

'spiritual inertia' to stress the agent's responsibility in the implied indulgence.

Thus, here, (1) instead of referring as above done to some event that is "bound to eventually occur", we refer to a relatively 'involuntary' volitional activity; and (2) whereas the former would be "voluntarily slowed down for some time, or preempted", the latter would be relatively more voluntary (i.e. require more effort of consciousness and volition). In both cases, (3) mental events determine the response. And, finally, (4) if the response is "letting things be", the event that occurs here is continuation of the 'involuntary' behavior; after which (5) the whole cycle may resume. The analogy is manifestly apposite, allowing us to use the term 'urge' in both cases.

These specific mental urges may be distinctively called 'spiritual urges', for the reason already stated. We can then (briefly) define such urge in formal terms, as follows.

> "**Agent A has an urge to will W**" means "**if A does not voluntarily will notW, then A involuntarily wills W**", where 'voluntary will' refers to conscious volition and 'involuntary will' refers to subconscious volition, i.e. volition with the minimum amount of awareness needed to perform it and no more. It is logically obvious (since W and notW cannot both occur at once) that "if A does voluntarily will notW, then A does not involuntarily will W", so this need not be added.

I would like to emphasize the importance of this finding. Having previously formalized physical and mental urges and impulses, and here spiritual ones, we can now safely assert

that *in all human drive contexts, the agent retains freewill and responsibility*. Until now, a doubt could subsist, because vagueness of conception allowed some theorists to give the impression that the agent could be essentially passive and therefore unaccountable. But our descriptions show that his personal involvement is quite conceivable, and thus serve to confirm it.

For example, Freudian theorists *subdivide the person into conflicting forces, segments or entities* – the ego, id and superego; or the conscious, subconscious and unconscious; and such like – in an effort to explain various behavior patterns and psychological effects. However, though such concepts may well serve a useful therapeutic purpose[99] out of context, from a broader philosophical point of view they are counterproductive, because they needlessly split up the self into impersonal heterogeneous fractions, and thus put in doubt the soul's fundamental liberty and accountability. Thus, such theories ultimately obstruct explanation, stopping us from asking how the unitary self may function in conflicting ways.

The scenario of spiritual urges is, to repeat, as follows: some involuntary will W is about to be or has been put in motion; but the opposite notW can still be voluntarily willed; the agent is increasingly influenced by the undesirable prospect of W, until he voluntarily wills notW. In other words: W seems desirable at first sight (due to the little effort of cognition and evaluation expended), and the agent naively pursues it (using minimum consciousness); then the agent

[99] Which I tend to doubt, since as far as I can tell such a disintegrated vision of the psyche is likely to produce psychological conflicts.

(suddenly investing more effort of consciousness and will) reviews the situation and revises his estimate of the desirability of W, preferring notW; this influences him to make the extra effort of consciousness and will to pursue notW, instead of W. Note that notW logically signifies anything that is contrary to W.

The direction of will W need not in itself be harder than notW; the opposite may in fact be the case. However, W may be initially preferred by default, in the way of an instinct, while notW requires intelligent reflection. That is, W may be the first choice because it is more manifest, so that one tends to attach to it unthinkingly, without comparing it to others; while notW has to be sought out to be noticed.

Notice that our brief definition does not mention the awareness of something influencing A to will W or notW. The involuntary will of W may have one set of influences (say, I) and the voluntary will of notW may have another set of influences (say, J). Among the latter (J) may be a dawning 'self-awareness' by A of his involuntarily willing or about to will W; the agent may then realize he does not want to proceed further in that direction, and voluntarily will notW instead. However, the influences labeled J may equally well exclude such self-awareness and the ensuing negative motive, and be concerned with some entirely other purpose and a more positive motive.

Therefore, although the involuntary or voluntary volitions involved in 'spiritual' urges, as all other acts of will, may be facilitated or made more difficult by various influences, the latter are not central to the logic of such urges. The essence of such urge is that an unconscious willing is incipient (a velleity) or ongoing (actual action has started), and that this

proceeds until and unless hindered (prevented or reversed) by an opposite and more mindful act of will. Therefore, these urges as such are not necessarily influences.

One may or may not notice what one is doing, before doing the opposite. The agent need not cognize his impulsive act (the unconscious willing) to awaken his counteraction (the mindful will). Although such extra awareness may on occasion make the latter easier, it may in some cases make it more difficult and in other cases have no influence at all.

A spiritual urge constitutes an 'objective' situation, in the sense that the agent, although essentially free, has somehow become locked into a certain course of action, from which he cannot extricate himself without a special effort of consciousness and will. This is more constraining than the situation of influence, which does not imply any prior commitment or engagement.

The velleity or actuality of the involuntary will involved in such urge of course does have causes. The main cause is the soul's initial choice or decision to will in the direction concerned; this may be referred to as self-programming. This initial posture or performance may well be – indeed is likely to be – influenced by mental or material considerations. The latter may be the natural alignment of phenomena (terms and conditions), or phenomena more or less intentionally set up by some other agents (for example, commercial advertisers or political propagandists or 'social engineers').

The resistance or counteraction to spiritual urge, i.e. the voluntary will in the opposite direction, similarly has causes. The main cause is the agent, asserting or reasserting his freedom, either losing interest in the initial will or gaining

interest in the new will. Each of these options may as usual involve various supportive or adverse influences, which may again be natural or social phenomena. Finally, the soul deliberately wills to dominate and deprogram its previous will.

Whereas rectifying improper physical and mental drives constitutes a struggle of the soul against forces relatively external to it, revising improper spiritual drives signifies a struggle between the soul and itself. By preferring consciousness to carelessness, we take responsibility for our actions and attain self-mastery.

# 13. CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 13.

## THE QUASI-PURPOSIVE IN NATURE

### 1. Purposiveness

The concept of ***purpose*** is initially and primarily one relating to human action. We mentally visualize, or conceptually and verbally project, a state of affairs that we would like to bring into existence or to ensure the continued existence of, and proceed to do what we consider necessary to achieve that aim. The goal may be something within us – a spiritual quality (such as strength of character) or a mental content or skill (such as knowledge of logic) or a bodily condition (such as not catching a cold) – or it may be an external acquisition (such as a meal or new clothes). The means is something we do to fulfill the desire concerned.

> Thus, propositions concerning purpose basically have the form "I am doing this *for* that", or more broadly "**agent A does X in order to achieve or obtain Y**". Such a proposition concerns volition, its subject (A) being a human agent, the means (X) being some act(s)

> of direct or indirect will by the agent in hopeful pursuit of the goal (Y), which has been projected by the consciousness of the agent.

Note that the agent may be right or wrong in thinking that Y is at all possible to him (let alone 'good' for him!), and he may be right or wrong in thinking that X specifically is something that can lead him to Y. Indeed, he may admit that his goal Y is uncertain and/or that his proposed means may be inadequate, and still be considered as doing X for Y.

In a second phase, the concept of purpose is passed on to higher animals (those assumed to have volition), and such propositions can be used for them too. And as we shall see further on, in a third phase, the concept is applied *by analogy* and in a diluted sense to the non-volitional functions of our and their organs, as well as to other living organisms (without volition) such as plants; we may refer to such 'as if' purposes as *quasi-purposive*.

Furthermore, we commonly apply the concept of purpose to inanimate objects. This does not mean that we consider such objects to choose purposes for themselves, or to have inherent natural purposes. They have the purpose *we* – i.e. any volitional being – *assign* to them. This refers, then, more precisely to the ***utility*** of the object or some part of it to the purposes of some agent. The useful object may be artificial or natural. For example, the utility of a chair is to be sat on by people; a chair is an object designed and manufactured with this use in mind. For example, a monkey uses a stone it picked up to break open a nut; although a natural object, the stone (by virtue of its original size and weight) has utility for this monkey.

Works of fine art are, of course, commonly considered as intentionally 'without utility'. But this is using a restricted sense of the term utility, without excluding the utility of aesthetic expression (for the artist) or pleasure (for the viewer or auditor), or of communication (between artist and admirer) or of offering (to God or other loved one). What we would prefer to exclude from artwork are vanity and mercantilism (the pursuit of fame and fortune), and other such more materialistic and less spiritual aspects of human endeavor.

## 2. Organic Functions

The definition of the concept of function in biological discourse is simple and clear:

> The 'function' of an organ (i.e. of any part of a volitional or non-volitional organism) and of its characteristics and activities refers to **the causative role that these play in *the preservation, development and furtherance of the life* of the organism as a whole** – or more broadly, in widening circles, in the furtherance of the life of its kind(s), or of life on earth.

This, note well, is a derivative of the concept of *causation*, not of volition. When we use the term function in volitional contexts, we intend the purpose or utility of the entity, character or action concerned in the achievement of some more or less conscious end, as already discussed. Here, the term function refers to something *unconscious*, i.e. it is intended as analogous to purpose or utility but *without implying an agent's goal*.

Nevertheless, the concept of organic function is somewhat analogous to that of willed function, in that the organ seems to tend to the survival, improvement or reproduction of the organism. It is quasi-purposive.

Many philosophers have struggled with this issue, trying to reconcile the idea of mere causation in nature with the impression that life tends to life, as if some mysterious inner force impels it in that specific direction. In particular, Aristotle proposed a concept of '*final cause*'[100] to cover such unconscious tendencies. Others have compared such apparent striving to conation, and named it '*conatus*'. Modern biology has explicitly eschewed such teleological explanation; although in practice, at least in elementary or popularizing texts, the discourse of biologists is implicitly full of quasi-purposive expressions[101]. (If the reticence is justified, it is necessary to analyze why such linguistic habits persist and what more consistent and accurate verbal formulae might practically replace them.)

Yet, as the definition of organic function proposed above shows, we can have our cake and eat it too! It is an observable fact that certain material entities differ in some significant manner from most others: for instance, if you plant a seed in the ground, it grows into a vegetable that eventually gives birth to new seeds; but if you plant a stone in the ground, it may suffer changes by erosion or by fusion

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[100] See Appendix 2 of *Volition* on Aristotle's doctrine of "the four causes".

[101] For example, when we say "Nature does so and so", or similarly reify a species making it seem like an agent, or tacitly imply the events – which it is a passive subject of – to be its activities. Such anthropomorphisms are often concealed in the use of equivocal verbs, like 'adaptation'.

with other stones, but it will never 'reproduce'. On the basis of such observations, we have over time distinguished between living beings and minerals (inanimate matter).

The peculiarity of living beings is that (although natural, and not man-made) *their parts are organized in systems, sustaining each other and the whole in various ways*. Of course, nowhere in an organ or organism is there a sign where it is written "I am doing this for that". Still, unlike non-living entities, all (or more precisely, most) the qualities and activities of life *demonstrably cause* (i.e. are natural or at least extensional *causatives* of, or in Aristotelian language: are efficient causes of) continuation of individual life (or more broadly, through procreation and social protection and support, the life of the species or of the genus, or life as such).

> The expression "**for**" (or similar ones, like "**so as to**" or "**in order that**") allows us to communicate briefly a lot of information, concerning organs and the direct and indirect outcomes of their features and movements. For example, teeth are organs "for" eating. The shapes of some of them are such as to enable them to cut food up; the shape of others, to crush it. As the upper and lower teeth are moved against each other, they begin the digestive process that results in nourishment of the blood with new matter, which keeps the body (including the teeth) strong and healthy.

It should be stressed that the epistemological basis for a claim to quasi-purposive events in living matter is not merely that *the isolated* event under scrutiny results (by mere causation) in longer and multiplied life, but that *all (or most)* events in

living matter have this same concrete and abstract result. The reason we have to admit an incomplete frequency – saying 'most' instead of 'all' – is that we do observe a minority of parts, traits or activities of organisms to be (or occasionally, become) useless to life or even antithetical to it. These situations we put aside as abnormal or diseased[102], considering them as effectively incidents or accidents in life processes.

The concept of organic function is thus not directly ontologically evident, but a product of adductive logic. There is no logical irregularity in its formulation or defense. It is an empirically based hypothesis, a tool of discourse through which we manage *to collect and order* our observations of certain entities, characters and movements in the natural world. It facilitates biological discourse, placing particular observations in a wider system of explanation. It is a causal concept entirely based on causation, and not on volition. It is not purposive, but merely quasi (*as if*) purposive.

All the concept of conatus asserts ontologically, then, is that ***the physical processes of life (mostly) take a certain direction (more life) rather than any other (less life)***, just as we might for instances propose that 'bodies continue in their state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless acted upon by a force' or 'like charges repel, opposites attract'. It simply refers to certain causative necessities or inertias for certain classes of natural objects (namely living organisms, not dead ones and not inorganic matter). We can simply say: 'things just happen to be so' or 'that is their nature'. The idea of inherent orientation is logically quite compatible with the ideas of natural law and physical mechanism.

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**102** For examples, an extra finger or a cancerous breast.

We can argue that just as, at a subatomic (quantum mechanical) level, events may appear naturally spontaneous, and yet, on a larger scale (of visible physical bodies), they seem ruled by natural laws – so may the directionless events of inanimate matter *collectively* (when brought together in the specific structures of life) result in the effectively directional events of animate matter. Here again (as we saw in the discussion on volition in relation to the laws of physics), what prevents some scientists from admitting conatus is their *reductionist* mentality, their dogmatic[103] refusal to consider that 'the whole may be more than the parts'.

No conscious purpose is intended by it, and there is nothing mystical or metaphysical about such an underlying force[104]. Indeed, although the concept of organic function may have originated by analogy to that of conscious target (keeping the idea of goal, while artificially dropping its implication of consciousness) – volitional function may ultimately be viewed as a subset or special case of organic function, in the sense that the volitional agent generally thinks he is serving his life by pursuing his goals.

We may on this basis envisage the development of a '***natural ethics***', one with simply 'life' as its standard of value, or *summum bonum*. However, the main difficulty facing such an undertaking would be precisely to arrive at a consensus as to

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[103] I say 'dogmatic' because it is a doctrine adhered to without specific proof (i.e. without experiments and mathematical formulae deriving the living from the non-living), but *by anticipation.*

[104] It is a secular concept, although theists remain logically free to assert that this state of affairs was instituted by the Creator or is regulated by Providence, i.e. that nature was or is so programmed. Similarly, animists may suppose an underlying 'will of Nature'.

the meaning of the term 'life' which can be variously understood, in a materialistic, psychological and/or spiritual sense, with reference to the individual or more universally, in one lifetime or many, and so forth. Everyone claims to be pro-life in one sense or another! For example, abortionists do. The question is: whose life? Or: what sort of life?[105] So, we come round full circle.

> Nevertheless, I think the logical problems are surmountable, probably by means of dialectical or dilemmatic arguments. Such arguments may have forms like: "**whether Y or notY is preferred, the requirement is still X rather than notX**" or "**whether X or notX is pursued, the result is still Y rather than notY**", where X, notX refer to alternative intermediaries and Y and notY to alternative consequences. Certain means are necessary, whatever the ends one pursues; and there are certain overarching outcomes, whatever our chosen course. We might by such teleological reasoning reach at least some common ground.

It follows that, *from a biological point of view, the soul and its faculties and functions (cognition, volition and valuation) should be regarded as no different from other organs of the living organism possessing them, whether physical or mental*. The spiritual 'organs' are equally functional, tending towards the maintenance and perpetuation of life. Their complexity compared to other organs gives them increased sensitivity,

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105 For example, in the case of abortion: "whose life?" – adult needs or desires are favored over those of the unborn; "what kind of life?" – the life of the aborting adult is thenceforth weighed down by the selfish choice made.

flexibility and power to fulfill that function; but also, this very advantage increases the possibilities and probabilities of error and breakdown.

The *natural* imperative to life inherent in all organisms, as a sort of conatus, is transformed into an *ethical* imperative to life in specifically conscious, volitional beings, in proportion to their cognitive powers and freedom of will. In lower animals, cognition and volition function instinctively, whereas in higher animals, there is progressively more mindful choice, reaching a peak in humans; and indeed, in the latter species, there is also a range of behavior, depending on the spiritual development of each individual.

Note lastly that our above definition of organic function is broad enough to include not only the functions of organs of individual organisms, but also *populations* of organisms. Reproduction minimally implies transmission of life; but in many species (even some plants), the parents continue to support (e.g. feed, protect, train) their offspring for some time. Individuals not directly related may help each other within a variety of social arrangements, in groups of various sizes (like a small tribe of ants or a large nation-state of humans).

Moreover, different species may behave symbiotically, effectively favoring each other's life. Sometimes, they are not merely of mutual use, but unilaterally or mutually dependent. One species may actively cultivate another in order to feed on it. Culling may be useful to the group culled, preventing depletion of environmental resources. Even when no benefit to the victim is manifest, one species feeding on another may be asserted to have as function the maintenance on earth of life as such or diversity of life or higher forms of life.

Although inanimate matter per se cannot be said to have functions, we may of course say that it is ***used*** in many unconscious life processes. For example, plants use nitrogen and sunlight for their growth. This enlarges the concept of utility that we introduced earlier with reference to conscious purposes.

In conclusion, we have here shown that it is possible to formalize 'functionalism', with reference only to causation and to the common character of certain natural entities called life. We have thus shown quasi-purposive events in an unconscious nature to be conceivable, and justified teleological discourse on this basis.

## 3. The Continuity of Life

As we have seen in the previous section, the great majority of the features and processes of the organs of living organisms have 'functions', meaning that they play some causative role in the support of life. This object of organic functioning, i.e. 'life', may be understood at many levels. In a first phase, we apply it to the physiological factors of the individual living being. Later, with respect to the increasing complexity of animal and human life, we apply it to the psychological factors, the mental and spiritual.

a. One of the great discoveries of modern biology is that, despite their many differences, all living organisms are composed of one or more tiny 'cells', which are visible to

everyone under the microscope[106]. Some cells are devoid of a nucleus (prokaryotes); others have one (eukaryotes). The former include bacteria and other unicellular organisms; the latter, both unicellular and multi-cellular organisms – plants, fungi, animals and humans composed of up to billions of cells. Thus, when we refer to a potato plant, a cat or a man or woman as 'an individual' organism, we are already really discussing a symbiotic grouping of smaller organisms (the cells that make up the organs that make up the whole organism).

Upon further reflection, it is becomes evident that life is not just an individual phenomenon, but applicable to populations. This is not mere metaphor – in many species, the individual has no chance of survival for any significant duration in isolation from the particular group (family unit or larger) it belongs to. In effect, the group is the organism and the individual is a mere organ of it, with a specific function in relation to the whole (for example, a bee in a hive). It is a prejudice of human conception to regard 'an organism' as necessarily something whose organs are all spatially contiguous and inseparable. We can also logically view as 'an organism' an entity whose parts can move around some distance apart from each other for some time, provided the interactions of the parts are sufficiently important to them all.

Moreover, since all living things reproduce, we may consider offspring as organs of their parents, and parents as organs of their offspring. Again, these are not mere words, but reflect material and temporal continuities. In some species, notably

[106] Viruses are not cellular; however, they are not independent organisms, but rather bundles of genetic material and protein that multiply parasitically.

among higher animals and humans, behavior, information and material possessions are also passed on from generation to generation. Such genetic and cultural inheritances are artificially ignored in conceptualizing discrete individuals. Furthermore, parents (plants or animals) may support the life of their offspring for some time – feeding them, warming them, protecting them from predators, and so forth. Sometimes, the offspring later in turn serve the parents in various ways, and may even serve each other (which refers us back to the groups above discussed). Thus, any line of living organisms may ultimately be viewed as a single organism changing form over time, splitting up and merging.

Thus, at least some groupings of two or more living organisms may be viewed as single organisms with detachable parts, the function of such parts being to ensure the subsistence and to enhance the life of the whole – as in the case of organs stuck together, only with greater flexibility. This concept is applicable to the continuity of generations in any family line, as well as to population groups that may include many families.

The causal relations involved in such spatial and temporal, as well as material, mental and spiritual, continuities are all basically of the form: "***without the organ, the organism could not live or would have much more difficulty doing so; with the organ, the organism's chances are made possible or increased***". This formula clearly applies to parts of individuals and to individuals within groups. Cut out our hearts, we die; cut off our left hand, our chances of survival decrease; without our parents, we would not be born or survive long after birth; without the younger generations, the

older ones are doomed as soon as they weaken; taken out of society, most of us would quickly die off.

All of this suggests *the continuity of life*. Moreover, life is truly uniform in a material sense, as suggested by another crucial finding of modern science, namely: *the universality of the genetic material of life (DNA)*. We can also point to numerous anatomical, metabolic, behavioral and other similarities between living beings to buttress and broaden the concept of continuity. For example, the observation that ontogeny retraces phylogeny (how a human fetus successively resembles a fish, then a reptile, and then a lower mammalian with a tail) is impressive.

b. We might go one step further in this widening perspective on life, and argue speculatively that ultimately *all life is one*, i.e. all living organisms on earth are apparently part and parcel of one and the same giant living organism. This is here conceived, not to 'prove' some pet thesis, but merely to put the continuity of life into perspective, taking the concept to an extreme for the sake of argument.

The ecological perspective is significant in this context. The single living organism inhabits a *mineral* environment that is always in flux due to physical causes (like the Sun's rays, ice forming or melting at the Earth's poles, wind, rain, floods, etc.). But additionally, this environment is constantly changed by that living organism, wittingly or unwittingly. Furthermore, within this theoretical overall creature, neighboring species and individuals constitute the *organic* environment for each other at any given time and place, together with the mineral surrounds. Plants compete with each other for space and mineral resources; sometimes, they effectively cooperate, as when one species provides the

chemicals needed by another; plant life provides a changing theater for animal life; animals destroy, cultivate and eat plants; animals hunt, raise and eat other animals. Thus, the vegetable and animal environment is also constantly in flux. Species in the same geographical region interact, and likewise individuals in the same group. All living beings in a given milieu very dynamically interact and affect each other to various degrees over time.

As earlier mentioned, there are sometimes symbioses between individuals or groups of different species or genera. For instance, one may feed and protect another, and feed on it or be protected by it – as in the relationships between humans and wheat, cattle or dogs. Going further, we could interpret the situation when one organism eats another, as the same larger living entity exchanging its parts, feeding one part of itself with another, moving matter and energy around itself. On this basis, we could argue that it is 'natural' for a lion to eat a gazelle, and that the gazelle does its job in the wider context by being eaten. One kind is made tributary to another.

If we consider in one dramatic sweep the history of life on earth[107], since its appearance some 3,700 million years ago, about 800 million years after the formation of the planet, the idea becomes quite *thinkable* that it is all one organism, which has over time split-up into a multitude of 'detached organs' (individuals) composed of a multitude of 'attached

[107] I make no attempt here to describe this history in detail, but every reader should make the effort to read about it, and get acquainted with current discoveries and scientific theories. There are many excellent books on the subject; and of course, there is lots of interesting material on the Internet.

organs' (components of individuals)[108]. Each such 'organ' of the whole organism comes, moves, reproduces with others, changes and goes, in reaction to changing conditions within the organism itself (the organic environment) and its mineral environment, always tending to the conservation of life as such, the life within it – life being nothing other than this very behavioral tendency.

Some such extrapolation might eventually be found useful for the development of a natural ethics. Some ecologists use this idea of *the unity of life* to encourage widespread protection of nature, in an age when mankind is destroying more and more of it. Some contend that this is excessive and utopian, though I doubt mankind will ever be guilty of self-destructive altruism! No doubt, a balanced model is conceivable – one that erects reasonable *hierarchies of value*, which give due consideration to human social needs while maintaining a broad focus on maximum protection of life on earth.

[108] I am here of course referring to the self-replication of the first unicellular organism(s) – the prokaryotes, followed some 1,800 million years ago by the eukaryotes; and then to the first multicellular organisms, aggregated algae appearing some 1,500 million years ago. Animals only made their appearance much later, less than 600 million ago.

# 14. CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 15 (sections 1 & 2).

## MORE ABOUT EVOLUTION

### 1. Social Darwinism

Darwinism has, since its inception in the latter half of the 19th Century, been influential beyond the field of biology proper, in ethical as well as economic, social and political theorizing and commentary, some of which has been pernicious. Under the heading of 'Social Darwinism', racism, exploitation and violence were given a boost, causing much suffering to many people. Although similar ideas existed before Darwin published his theories, they gained credence and prestige from their superficial association with such an important work of biological science. Using pseudo-scientific discourse extrapolated from Darwinism, ideologies like Hitler's could thenceforth pretend to justify conquest and domination.

Concepts like "the struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest" seemed charged with meaning, suggesting that biology condoned harsh, dog-eat-dog societal practices, pitting people against each other and judging whoever won

the contest to have naturally deserved to win. Alternatively, the necessity of "adaptation to the environment" could be interpreted as a biological call to fit-in socially and not make waves, to accept and not rebel, to be subservient to the powers-that-be. The doctrine served both to justify the oppressors and to keep their victims docile.

Here, we wish to ask the question – is such reasoning logically appropriate? Given that human society is from a biological viewpoint an ordinary population grouping, one might well infer that such concepts can legitimately be applied to it. But if there are conceptual errors concealed in such discourse, what are they – i.e. what are the limits of the Darwinian concepts of evolution?

To begin with, it should be admitted that the conceptual error is not entirely on the side of the Social Darwinists – they were dished out a *misleading terminology* by Darwin himself. Terms like 'struggle', 'fittest' and 'adaptation' were no doubt chosen as approximations illustrating certain aspects of evolution, but the ignorant and their manipulators could readily misconstrue them as confirming a 'law of the jungle' scenario for society. In principle, epistemologically, these choices were of course legitimate; as our knowledge develops, we frequently expand and contract the meanings of existing words to match new data. But they were unfortunate, in that they were easily misused.

Paradoxically, such terms are based in the human (and animal, or at least higher animal) experience, but applied by the biologist *by analogy* to the whole range of living beings (including bacteria and plants), who thereby gives them new and specialized connotations. The Social Darwinist then comes along and picks up these same terms, reapplying them

to human society, in view of their anthropomorphic flavor, glossing over the biologist's precise intentions, and concentrating exclusively on the images the terms superficially project by virtue of their original meanings. Although the terms have returned to their original domain, they have in the interim acquired subtle ethological significations.

Thus, the phrase 'struggle for existence' projects an image of fighting for one's life against difficult odds and powerful enemies; the phrase 'survival of the fittest' implies that in this life and death struggle whoever won is naturally the best man, who in fact deserved to succeed all along, as his victory proved ex post facto; the phrase 'adaptation to the environment' suggests a scenario of submission, which the losers if they at all survive must remain content with, serving their masters, keeping their tails well between their legs. These dramatic connotations were conveniently adopted by the Social Darwinists, under the pretense that they came from biology.

What such phrases have in common, in their original senses, before Darwinism used them as biological expressions, is the underlying human (or animal) *consciousness and will* they imply. When biology co-opted them, it applied them indiscriminately to organisms without these faculties, notably bacteria and plants. Moreover, the harsher aspects of the original words were simply abandoned in favor of wider and softer applications. For example, when a flower appeared in nature, with a brighter color than hitherto, one more attractive to pollinating insects – this was labeled by the biologists as an 'adaptation', a maneuver in the 'struggle' and an increased 'fitness'.

Apart from such terminological misappropriation, Social Darwinism involves serious misunderstandings of the *concepts* of biological Darwinism. Evidently, bacteria and plants cannot be said to have purposes, since they lack consciousness and will – their 'actions' can only at best be regarded as quasi-purposive, in the sense that they apparently de facto have a common direction, viz. the perpetuation of life. Thus, the flower in our example did not 'do' anything that could literally be characterized as adapting, struggling or becoming fitter; the flower can claim no credit for its evolution. According to Darwinism, there were just random genetic mutations, which happened to be physically compatible with surrounding conditions that happened to occur.

The concept of struggle for existence, as understood by biology, treats every possible behavior pattern under the same heading. It is not limited to situations of conflict or even of difficulty, but covers every aspect of the life of individuals and populations that happens to be 'good for' them. In this broad perspective, cooperation, sharing, mutual service and symbiosis are equally forms of 'struggle' – they are expedients adopted by the organisms concerned – consciously, or of course (by analogy) unconsciously, as the case may be – to further their own lives, by means of exchanges of goods and divisions of labor. Even true altruism (to the extent of self-sacrifice) may be assimilated under this concept, if separate individuals or groups are conceived as really parts of the same whole. Tolerance and peace are also expedients. Social Darwinism foolishly or cunningly ignores such nuances.

Furthermore, Social Darwinists misunderstand natural selection. Survival is not a product of conquest or at least compromise in some dramatic struggle of the organism with other organisms and with the environment. Survival, even for humans, is not proof of some sort innate fitness or personal credit; things are not that simple, orderly or satisfying[109]. As Darwin was careful to stress, survival is mostly a matter of plain *luck*. The law of averages makes some individuals or groups survive and some die off, with little or no regard for their genetic potential.

For example, a city tree has thousands of seeds; most of them fall on the pavement, with no chance of ever germinating; one or two may fall on the lawn under the tree and not get raked away by the gardener, each giving rise to a seedling; then comes the lawn-mower and puts an end to that attempt, though one seedling may be missed and grow on for awhile. In this example, the seeds all have genetic content of more or less equal value for the furtherance of life, though some may in fact be more robust and fertile than others; but it is generally mere chance and *not* their relative genetic potential that has determined which finally survived.

The same truism applies to all individual lives. Lightning may strike a tree, which falls and kills the dominant monkey in a group – supposedly, the best genetic specimen; it was not killed by any inherent unfitness, but by bad luck; there was no fault in its makeup that differentiated it from its mates, that earmarked it for genetic extinction (assuming it had no offspring before) – it was simply in the wrong place, at the wrong time. As, indeed, was the tree. The trees and monkeys

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109 If they were evidently so, everybody would believe in God and Job would never have written his book!

spared by that accident of nature may in fact be genetically much weaker and in the long term have less chances of survival, so that the world's genetic pool has in fact been impoverished by those two deaths.

Similarly, with regard to whole species: The existence of the human species today is just, according to biology, due to the mass extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago when a giant meteor struck planet Earth. The dinosaurs were eminently 'fit' for life here, more so than the mammals, since the former did much better than the latter for over 130 million years, keeping them small and insignificant. Only after these essentially fitter species were wiped out, could the mammals (those that happened to survive the cataclysm) emerge, diversify and grow, eventually giving rise to the human species.

It may be that if dinosaurs had survived, they would have in time given rise to species far superior to the human (i.e. more intelligent and more powerful, in the best senses of those terms). Maybe the genetic strains that did survive the catastrophe, and give rise to the human species, were by far inferior in every respect, except for a lucky break. One could of course argue that the mammals were proven fitter by the very fact of their survival; their fitness consisting presumably in being smaller (under 25 kg) and thus able to take shelter from the physical upheavals that destroyed the dinosaurs (though not all of them, note – since reptiles, birds, and other of their descendents persist). But this argument is rather circular, because it treats exceptional events as on a par with routine events.

Fitness, or adaptive capacity, should not be construed as implying a sort ability in principle to somehow preempt

eventual disasters. In our above example of the tree and monkey struck down by lightning, the natural event involved was such that it would have killed any other tree and monkey that happened to be there at the time. The trees and monkey that survived had nothing notably different in their makeup; nothing saved them other than coincidence. In particular, the surviving monkeys did not sense the lightning coming and scatter.

Some commentators, after similar reflections, have suggested the expression 'survival of the luckiest' would be more accurate. More precisely, we might say that, within the range of those biologically *fit enough* to survive in a give environment, the fittest are not always the luckiest. The specimens that do 'make it' are not necessarily the ideal candidates. I shudder to think of all the great genes destroyed in natural disasters, and due to human wars and environmental devastation. Ours is not 'the best of all possible worlds'.

The concept of fitness (as here described) is faulty not only because it ignores the important factor of luck, but also because it is applied in an undifferentiated manner to the whole organism or species, rather than to specific characteristics, and is then used for comparative purposes. It should be kept in mind that (a) each fitness is relative: what is fit in one respect may be unfit in other respects; and (b) overall fitness is an average: the same individual or group may have more characters that are usually more fit than characters that are usually less fit, and so be declared 'on the whole fit'; therefore (c) comparisons of fitness between individuals or species are not very meaningful, since different

circumstances are necessarily involved in their respective lives.

If a man is eaten by a tiger, it does not prove the tiger to belong to a higher species than the man. It just means that the tiger is physically stronger than the man. It remains true that, in other respects, the man is superior to the tiger, being able to invent a spear or gun that kills it at a distance, or simply by virtue of being able to write poetry. If the human species ends up eliminating the tiger species, it does not prove the tiger species to have been unfit for life on earth. It just shows how stupid and shortsighted mankind can be. Similarly, in human society: if a thug kills a gentleman, or a Nazi kills a Jew, it is only a demonstration that the former was more violent, and certainly not proof of greater moral or social worth. The victim is not shown genetically deficient or constitutionally less viable.

## 2. Spiritual Darwinism

Those who believe in Social Darwinism usually wish to flatter themselves that they belong to the class of the fittest; the superior, beautiful people; the dominant elite. I would say that a more logical impact from Darwinism would be to make us kinder, more sympathetic to other creatures. That is its impact on me, anyway. Once we realize that we are all really made of the same stuff, just genetic variations on the theme of living matter, we feel closer to other people, other peoples and other species.

Social Darwinism promoted a culture of racism, claiming a genetic basis for its collective evaluations of peoples. But the

'value' of a person is not in his or her genes, but in what he or she makes of them – in his or her 'virtue'. The dignity of a human being, as of an animal, is in how it responds to the challenges of life with the means at its disposal, the use it makes of its cognitive and volitional powers. In the case of humans, the possibility and necessity of decency towards others seems essential, since violence, hatred and fear are in the long run to the disadvantage of all, even if they may in the short run seem advantageous to some. Nothing in biological science justifies the reading that war, of some against others or of all against all, is natural. For creatures like us endowed with reason and freewill, wisdom, kindness and intelligence are obviously the best course.

It is interesting to note that the image of human society projected by Social Darwinists matches perfectly with the traditional portrayal of the egoist grasping and clinging, climbing over the bodies of all those that are in his way, taking whatever he wants whenever he can. It shows up the essence of Social Darwinism, as a narrow-minded doctrine designed to vindicate selfish pursuits and the social injustice resulting from them. Instead of such mindless behavior, spreading suffering, one may of course propose an enlightened self-interest that considers the broader and longer-term consequences of one's actions. In Darwinist terms, one could say that only justice, peace and love (excuse the clichés[110]) are over time likely to ensure survival of human life and life in general.

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[110] Most people would in principle agree with these "politically correct" generalities. However, some people treat "peace and love" as absolutes, which one must impose on oneself without regard as to whether the opposite party does so too. With that, I find it hard to agree – one has the right and duty to self-defense when

Finally, it is all an issue of quality of life. What kind of world do we want to live in – an obscure place of stupidity and conflict, death and destruction, or a shining place of wisdom and harmony, life and progress? Of course, utopian philosophies and religions can also cause much harm, but they should not for that reason be ignored, constituting as they do mankind's attempts to probe more deeply into such issues.

Can Darwinism, properly conceived (and not as some have historically misconstrued it), assist the humanities (i.e. ethical, social, economic and political discourse)? The time frame of biological evolution is very long, very much longer than the span of human history. The humanities mainly draw on the latter for their empirical data, to predict what forms of social behavior and organization are likely to bring good or bad to individual humans, human groups or humanity as a whole. The survival of the human (and other) species is a legitimate standard of judgment for the humanities, drawn from biology. But within that broad framework, many conjectures are possible, between which we can only judge with reference to history, if only approximately. Many questions faced by humanity remain unanswerable, whether we look to biology or to history, for the simple reason that they deal with novel issues that have no precedent in the past.

In any case, we have seen in the present work the *specificity* of human beings, in terms of their degree of consciousness and volition compared to other animals. These two differentia are radical enough to suggest that whatever conclusions biology may come to with respect to life in general, it has to

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necessary. That is why "justice" should also be mentioned; it ensures equilibrium.

reconsider them very carefully when trying to apply them specifically to *homo sapiens*. A species that displays such major distinctions is bound to be subject to some more specific, less mechanistic biological considerations. Our fate cannot be left to chance. If humans have the power of choice, then their nature is to refer to ethical discourse, to help them decide in a pondered manner what courses to follow.

It is important in this context to understand the term 'survival' in a large and deep sense. Ultimately, it does not just mean *physical* continuity at all costs; this is only minimal survival. There are greater degrees of survival, ranging from physical health up through psychological wellbeing to spiritual life. The human being, especially, is no mere body, but a largely mental and spiritual entity. Mankind is not just driven by matter, but has other, seemingly 'higher' considerations. Consequently, *the standards* of success or failure may be different for humans than for other species.

A person may succeed materially but woefully fail in other dimensions of his or her being. Another may fail in the material domain yet succeed in the intellectual or spiritual domain. Who is 'better off'? If we insist on applying 'genetic perpetuation' as the only conceivable biological norm, we will prefer the first. But if we allow that at the human level of existence other issues may be involved, we may prefer the second. The fact is, many people are no longer subject to the reproductive instinct, and choose to have sex lives without begetting children, or to become monks or nuns.

Physically, they are naturally selected out; but what does that prove? Perhaps some of the latter function on another evolutionary scale, wherein it is not the genes that matter most but the soul. Perhaps genes only exist to eventually give

rise to souls, or as vehicles for souls. The materialist interpretation of things is not necessarily the final word. I mean, from an ethical point of view, it is just a doctrine like any other.

It could be argued, in accord with the biological principle of evolution, that the soul 'evolved' in certain forms of living organism, as *an instrument* of the body, improving the body's chances of survival and reproduction. In a materialist perspective, 'spiritual philosophy' may then be considered as an aberration, whereby the tool (the soul) has forgotten its original function and acquired the pretension that it is life's goal and that the body must serve it. But it is equally conceivable that, once the soul appeared on the biological scene, it surpassed all other considerations in the material pursuits of the organisms that had one.

The latter perspective might be characterized as 'Spiritual Darwinism' – or as *the salvation of the morally fittest* – a doctrine diametrically opposed to that of historical 'Social Darwinism', which refers to the physical or political dominion of thugs. If we reflect, the spiritual principle of salvation of the morally fittest is nothing new; it has always been the basis of spiritual philosophies like Judaism or Buddhism. Some people advance on the spiritual path, and some are left behind or regress. Some people make the effort to evolve spiritually and are 'saved' or 'enlightened'; others refuse to use their life constructively, and remain in darkness or sink further down. So it goes – and few, very few, find their way to true 'survival' – i.e. 'eternal life'.

# 15. CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 17.

## SOME TOPICS IN DEONTOLOGY

*Deontology is a vast topic, which we can only touch upon in the present volume. I have already made scattered remarks on this subject in previous chapters, and in earlier works[111]; here some additional comments seem worth making.*

### 1. Founding Ethics

The term 'deontology' may be taken to refer to the theoretical study and foundation of ethics, without initial preference for any particular ethical system; another term for this is 'meta-ethics'. This philosophical discipline is concerned with the form, rather than the content of ethics – how ethical systems are structured, the logical forms and arguments used in them, how standards or norms might be first established

[111] See chapters 3.4, 10.3 and 13.2, here; also, chapter 13 in *Judaic Logic*.

('axiology'[112]), and indeed all ontological and epistemological issues relative to ethical judgment.

Deontology will, for instance, emphasize that ***the concepts of life, consciousness and volition are central to any ethical claim or system***.

- Ethical discourse can only concern living beings. Inanimate entities (e.g. a table or a molecule) have nothing to lose – for their defining boundaries are fluid and arbitrarily set. We may break a diamond or disintegrate it – but 'it' has lost nothing. Living beings, on the other hand, have things to lose – their limb and life, which may be harmed or destroyed. A microbe is not just a mix of matter; kill it, and the matter remains but it no longer behaves as a living cell.
- Ethical discourse is of no use to unconscious organisms, since they have no way to gain knowledge of it. We do consider that some things are conducive and others are detrimental to plants or microbes – but knowledge of such things concerns us, not the plants or microbes. Such knowledge tells us humans how to cultivate them, presumably so as to eat them or otherwise use them – so it is really a subset of human ethics. Animals can acquire knowledge of sorts, and so may conceivably learn facts or behavior (e.g. from their parents) that protects and furthers their life.

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[112] The term axiology is often used in the wide sense I here give to deontology. I prefer to use the term axiology more specifically with regard to the issue of norm setting, because of its similarity to the word axiom (they both have the same Greek root, 'worth').

- Ethical discourse presupposes volition. If the conscious organism has no volition, no ethical proposition concerning it is meaningful – since it can do nothing other than whatever it happens to be doing in the circumstances concerned anyway! Ethics is for organisms with freewill, meaning humans and higher animals.

Ultimately, of course, ethics is the prerogative of humans – who are not only alive and conscious and volitional, but moreover able to reason about ethics in general, to formulate and understand particular ethical propositions, and to monitor and manage their own behavior systematically. There is no point researching and writing an ethics, if the subject of it is unable to read it or follow it.

Imperatives, prohibitions, permissions and exemptions – all such statements, whatever their specific contents, logically presuppose an acceptance that the subject has some rationality and free will[113]. It is absurd (self-contradictory) to make or imply statements like: "don't refer to the concepts of consciousness or volition in your discourse" – since to say "do not" implies one has awareness and choice.

Of course, volition is (as we have seen) something very hard to fully define and prove, because it is – like consciousness

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[113] Immanuel Kant appears to consider that we know of our freedom indirectly from our 'sense of duty' and the logical consideration that duty is only meaningful to a free agent. This is of course nonsense. The sense of freewill is, in my view, far more radical than that of duty. Also, I am not at all sure we have an innate sense of duty – our intuitions of duty are derivatives, not primaries. Even logically, liberty without duty is not something inconceivable; in a sense, we consider God as being free even of duties.

and like feelings – a *primary* object of experience. It is not like something else, to which it might be compared and reduced; it is something *sui generis*, a basic building block of experience. There is no logical basis for excluding volition from the realm of existence, just because it cannot be entirely described in terms of material or mental phenomena. It suffices to point out that it is something we experience distinctively (through 'self-knowledge', 'introspective intuition' or 'apperception' – however we choose to call it). We do not, note well, merely conceive it as a generality – but distinctly experience particular acts of volition within us.

Most human propositions and reasoning about causality are really about volition and allied concepts. Although the world of nature, or causation, is of course of great daily concern to us – we are also all the time greatly involved in thinking about our place in that world and in society, as well as our inner world, and all such thought is essentially to do with volition and allied causal concepts, including ethical concepts.

As we have seen, the ethical modalities (i.e. imperatives, prohibitions, permissions, exemptions) have to do with the realm of the possible. What is impossible in any respect does not belong in the realm of ethics (except to deny responsibility). With reference to any domain we face (nature, society, our own psyche), the following truisms are worth keeping in mind:

- Some things are inevitable; some future events are naturally necessary, no matter what anyone (except perhaps God) does to avoid them. *A contrario*, some things cannot happen, no matter what anyone does in the attempt to make them happen.

- Some things are inevitable (or unfeasible) for some volitional agents, but not so for others. Or they are so at one time, but not another. Or under certain conditions, but not others.
- Some things are bound to happen, *unless* we make a determined effort to prevent them (e.g. a natural disaster, a war or a nervous breakdown). Some things are bound not to happen, *unless* we act in a timely and appropriate manner to make them happen (e.g. a building, a social system or a psychological development).
- To prevent dangers from actualizing, it is usually necessary to be aware that the things concerned are dangerous, preventable, and likely to occur if not acted upon. Similarly, to achieve some positive value, it is usually necessary to identify it as such and to believe in the possibility of achieving it, as well as to acknowledge the need to make an effort to achieve it.

With regard to "freedom of the will", this phrase – as already pointed out – refers more precisely to the freedom of the soul to will, whatever influences to the contrary accumulate. In a Buddhist perspective, where the 'soul' or 'self' is radically denied, we might identify the concept of freedom of the will with that of "the unconditioned" – i.e. it is one's "Buddha nature" that is free, and we only attain true freedom by getting to and abiding in that place within one's psyche.

Otherwise, according to Buddhist psychology, we are greatly moved by "desire". In this context, it would perhaps be well to draw a distinction between "general desire" and "particular desire". The former concept would refer to the emotional base of desire as such, a diffuse substratum without specific

object; while the latter concept would refer to the application of general desire to a particular object (e.g. a loved person), often merely on the basis of a random fantasy or other pretext.[114]

Many influences impact on any given act of volition; some facilitate it, others make it more difficult. As we have seen, influences may be outside factors, which condition the volitional act through having been perceived or conceived by the agent. Mental factors of various sorts are also of course often influential to varying degrees. Some influences are simple, short-lived, *ad hoc*; while some seem to be more complex and deeply ingrained. Habits, for instance, are produced and reinforced by repetition. Obsessions and compulsions involve complicated hidden factors, which produce inertias unless certain work is done to overcome them.

We have seen how impulses and urges – be they physical, mental or spiritual – can be reconciled with the fact and concept of freewill. We were particularly concerned to find out why and how some normally volitional aspects of mental life, such as some thought processes, might sometimes give the impression that they occur automatically, indeed against our will. We arrived at the conclusion that such thoughts, although products of consciousness and will, are hard to

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[114] If the felt emotions are sufficiently distinctive, we might subdivide general desire into broad (intermediate) categories such as “lust for sex”, “power lust”, “greed for food”, “greed for money”, “yearning for fame”, etc. This supposes that not only do we feel vague ‘desire’ before we desire something specific, but also there is an intermediate stage where general desire first takes shape as vague lust or greed etc. before it focuses on a particular object of lust or greed etc.

control instantaneously, just because a greater and more sustained effort of consciousness and will is required to rein them in than to let them loose.

Many actions we label as 'unconscious' or 'involuntary' are really *minimally* conscious or voluntary. Our linguistic habit in that regard should not be allowed to mislead us into erroneous doctrines. When we have an impulse to do something, we may immediately (more or less whimsically) 'follow that impulse' and do the thing concerned – or we may restrain ourselves momentarily, at least long enough to reflect and make a considered decision. The amount of effort put into that reflection determines how (i.e. to what degree) 'conscious' and 'voluntary' is our subsequent action or our further restraint from action. A policy may be instituted for future recurrences of similar choices, or a habit may be programmed by repeating the same decision.

Through such formal analyses of psychological factors, we have (I believe) greatly succeeded in buttressing the concept of volition.

The development of ethical propositions – and eventually an ethical system – constitutes an attempt *to prepare in advance* answers to questions that naturally and inevitably arise in the course of volition. It is a service the ethical philosopher seeks to render to fellow volitional agents[115], just as the logician seeks to facilitate human pursuit of knowledge or the physical scientist seeks to facilitate human interactions with nature.

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[115] Of course, such philosophers must be careful to remain modest, and not imagine they can tell everyone what to do in all circumstances.

It is a necessary endeavor, because judgments made in the heat of the moment, under the impact of all sorts of emotional and other influences, are not always as broad-based and accurate as those made 'in the ivory tower'. Sometimes, admittedly, the philosopher on his armchair cannot anticipate all the factors that the agent in the field actually faces. Sometimes, to be sure, it is better to act "intuitively" rather than in a "pondered" manner. But more often than not, it is wise to consider matters with a cool head, and with plenty of time to reflect and take a maximum number of issues into consideration.

But whatever ethics proposes, or whatever this or that ethical theory proposes – and whoever is behind the proposition, oneself or others – *such an ethical proposition is merely one influential factor among others in the act of will*. It does not remove the responsibility of the agent for his action. It is just an influence; the volition remains his own.

Even if one believes the ethics one is following to be of Divine origin (i.e. decreed or inspired by God, and transmitted by some religion) – one remains responsible. The act of faith in that religion is itself a volitional act, for which one is responsible. All subsequent acts performed under the influence of such faith remain acts of free will.

## 2. Ethics Concerns the Living, Thinking, Willing

Ayn Rand wrote somewhere[116], concerning values – "of value to whom and for what?" – implying that the term 'value' does not stand alone, but is relative to certain subjects and to certain standards. This is not a mere grammatical observation, but a logical insight too often ignored.

As we have said, ethics concerns the living, and in particular organisms with consciousness and freewill, who have and make choices – i.e. the thinking and willing. This fact signifies that, whatever content we give to ethics, it must be consistent with these three basic factors – life, cognition and volition. They are necessary conditions for any ethical system. That is, the "to whom" and "for what" aspects of valuing are ultimately one and the same, or they at least intersect considerably. By knowing whom we are concerned with, we know what their needs are.

The distinction between living and non-living matter is admittedly not easy to make with final precision, so that the materialist perspective on life continues to seem equally if not more credible to many people. They argue that life is a phenomenon essentially like any other in the material world; they define life as a natural outcome of certain combinations of atoms.

They may be right – but the issues remain: how come this complex phenomenon was potential in the building blocks of

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116 *Atlas Shrugged*, p. 939.

matter (quarks, or whatever); how come matter evolved after the Big Bang through elementary particles, atoms, molecules, organic molecules, till living cells emerged; and how come the latter in turn gave rise to consciousness and will?

These questions are difficult to formulate, for it is difficult to express the kind of answer that is sought through them. We seem to have descriptive answers (i.e. the process of evolution of matter and life is, let's say, adequately described) – but these answers do not answer those questions. The issue is not, either, epistemological – we do not seek more proof, we do not doubt the descriptive scenario given. Our questions are, rather, why did these potentials exist in the original substance of matter; why would matter take so many different forms, and evolve all the way to life, consciousness and volition? Why did quarks exist and why did they not remain quarks forever? Why are the 'laws of nature' that made them change (whatever these laws be) inherent in them?

Yes, there are questions of sorts – so no one, not even the convinced materialist, can claim to 'know it all'. We have seen how the concept of natural 'conatus', of distinctive quasi-purposiveness in living processes is a legitimate concept, which does not call for special epistemological dispensations, but is formed in regular ways. It implies a sort of striving without consciousness, life relentlessly pursuing more life. Perhaps this abstract observation is the best definition of life we can propose.

The prime standard of natural ethics is bound to be Life, since the phenomenon of life is the core thing that gives meaning to the concept of ethics. That is, of course, a very vague norm, which biology, physiology, psychology,

sociology and kindred sciences may clarify and enrich for us, telling us not only what furthers life, but also what gives it its fullest expression. This more precise account would need to refer not only to life – but also to consciousness and volition. *They too* are underlying standards that all ethical theories have to support, since ethics is meaningless without them.

With regard to life, I know that my own readings in biology have greatly affected my understanding of this standard, shifting its sense from a more self-oriented "my life" or "the life of my loved ones", over to a broader interest in "life as such" or "life in general" or "all life".

Beyond the struggle for survival of individuals, groups, species (which is undeniably fundamental), we may discern the struggle for survival of life per se, independent of any particular form or genetic content. In the latter perspective, the various forms of life are but means to the more basic end, that of life as a whole. The diverse forms may struggle against each other, competing for limited resources, using each other as well as minerals as natural resources[117], but ultimately their efforts can be considered as converging to a common goal, the continuation of life as such, in some form or other at least, but better still in as many forms as possible[118].

One might thus argue for the 'unity' of life, as if we speak of one organism that can split up into many smaller interacting entities, yet nevertheless remains one. We, and all animals

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[117] Except for the lowest creatures in the food chain, which feed on minerals only.

[118] It does not follow, of course, that genetic engineering is in the long-term favorable to life. Nor does this doctrine condone having sex with animals!

and all vegetables are not just cousins – we are the same entity. This "Gaia hypothesis" may have some validity and utility. Nonetheless, we can conceive of a hierarchy or pyramid of living organisms, from the simplest to the most complex, at the top of which (at least here on Earth) we seemingly happen to be in numerous or most respects.

Mankind is the species (or perhaps the only remaining species on Earth) with the maximum amount of consciousness and freewill. These powers are found to a lesser degree in other species, but most in us. Even within the human race, there are individual variations, some of which are perhaps inherent to a genetic makeup, while others can be improved on by personal effort. Considering all this as an outcrop of matter at the Big Bang, it is as if matter strove to see and know itself, and volitionally act upon itself, going way beyond the blindness and 'natural law' determinism (including, here, the mindless indeterminism of quantum mechanics) of the mineral realm.

These are speculations, of course; but I ramble on because they seem to have some impact on the idea of a universal ethical standard. We should also, in this context, keep in mind the last phases of the biological story – what we call 'history'. After eons of animal evolution, a weird species called humans emerged, and at times seemed the crowning achievement of nature, though now looks more and more like its nemesis. Is evolution collapsing onto itself in a final flurry of fickle frenzy?

And within that framework, we need to consider the history of ideas, and in particular the history of philosophy, to understand the thoughts and behavior of the individual humans we are today. Ideas and philosophies, from a

biological viewpoint, are just ways and means people have through history responded to changing environmental, social and psychological challenges. It is a long story of trial and error, in which those who wrote the most or became most famous were not necessarily those who understood the most. Looking back, one is at times amazed at the incompetents philosophy has attracted.

But what is wonderful about philosophy is that even stupid philosophies are useful to the development of philosophy, because they encourage other philosophers to distance themselves from their positions, and explain why. For this reason the history of philosophy is an integral part of philosophy, because each philosophy in it is somewhat delimited by all the others.

## 3. Conscience and Conformism

Most people, perhaps not all, have a functioning *conscience*. What is that? It seems to be a reserved 'part' of us, which we charge with the task of supervising the rest. Of course, granting that the soul has no spatial extension, this description is only a manner of speaking, a mere analogy. One's conscience is no other than one's self behaving in a certain way in time; it is a volitional function, although it may be habitual to various degrees, even obsessive-compulsive. Conscience may thus be 'big' or infinitesimally 'small'.

Conscience essentially means consciousness (in French, the two words are the same) – being aware. The role assigned to conscience by us is to critically oversee our thoughts and

actions, and judge whether they fit in with our deepest standards of what is humanly appropriate in given circumstances. This job may be performed consciously, or subconsciously; in the latter case, we can induce the implicit judgments by observing the subject's patterns of behavior. Conscience is thus revelatory of *effective* ethical standards.

> Note that the concept of conscience is also applicable in the more neutral realm of 'ethics of knowledge', where we monitor and regulate our cognitive processes (our intellectual honesty, our will to realism, our efforts of research, the logic of our inferences, and so forth).

We can, by observation of a person's consciousness and volition at work, infer that person's underlying ethical standards. Insofar as most people have common standards, such observations may give rise to a notion of ethics *based on* conscience. However, such a doctrine is hard to uphold, as it seems to involve circularity. Are the deep ethical standards that conscience bases its judgments on innate? That would seem doubtful, although some could be posited as instinctive, i.e. as genetically transmitted emotional influences.

For the most part, however, the norms implied by our conscience are acquired and changeable. For most people, this means mostly reference to the cultural norms of the social group around them, which are largely conventional, though often based on the accumulated wisdom of a society or mankind over time. Some people, to some extent, take a more active part in the formulation of their guiding norms. A person may start with one set of norms, acquired through education or by cultural osmosis, and later acquire a somewhat different set, whether by change of peer group and

adoption of a new convention, or through more conscious and rational efforts.

Most people function by *conformism*. In a modern, media-based society, like ours today, this occurs as conformity to stereotypes – for examples, the stereotype of the rebellious youth (who, however, wears the right type of clothing and uses the appropriate language), or the stereotypes of the crusading reporter, tough-guy lawyer or hotshot investment specialist. Conformism makes things easy: one does not have to think too much about what to do – and one is easily classified by others, gaining ready benefits from such identification.

Conformism is nothing new, but found in all societies, throughout history and geography. It is not just a matter of external appearance or behavioral patterns, but controls thought processes. The practice is especially evident in closed religious or political groups. People in such ideological circles are prone to thinking by means of clichés, rather than investigation. They tend to cognitively function by *subsuming people and events under preordained categories*, rather than by developing categorizations inductively. A person or event is forced into a limited number of given labels, with no room for conceptual adaptation.

Even if the natural sciences are essentially neutral with regard to setting ethical standards, in the sense that we do not observe ready-made ones in nature, they still have a constructive function, helping us to identify objective means to our ends. They also play an eliminative role, helping us to get rid of ideologies based on false presuppositions. But of course, granting that the body, in itself or as a vessel for the soul, is important to life, biology is also informative as to

what standards are natural. Science is therefore important to deontological efforts.

The Kantian view of 'duty', as something that must be done whatever the human cost[119], ought to be considered in this context; it appears as the notion of a stiff-minded extremist. I should add that, although Rabbis have a similar fundamentalist attitude with regard to certain *mitzvoth* (commandments), they do consider that the law has to be tempered occasionally, to save a person from unnecessary harm or pain. Such avoidance of doctrinal rigidity may be characterized as 'humanism'; it is remembering we are concerned with human beings, not robots.

Also worth noting here is the observation that people sometimes commit sins (according to their standards) almost deliberately, in order to rationalize – even if *ex post facto* – their sufferings as punishment for their sins, preferring this twisted option to the frightening idea that there might be unjustified suffering in the world! This is another instance of ideology, where one tries to force experience into preconceived ideas, instead of remaining cognitively flexible.

Although ethics is built up primarily around the individual, since individuals are the ultimate units of its injunctions and inhibitions, its social aspect should not be underrated. The individual soul has three powers – consciousness (the soul as subject), volition (the soul as agent) and valuation (which gives rise to the emotional life). But additionally, the soul has a social dimension, which is not entirely reducible to the said

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[119] For example, one should not lie to someone just to avoid hurting the person's feelings.

three powers. This fourth aspect of soul is fundamental to its nature, although hard to pinpoint.

We do not exist as isolated entities, but as part of a social fabric. Why else would people congregate in communities and nations? An unloved baby is as good as dead psychologically, losing intelligence, the ability to communicate, and so on[120]. People need each other, not merely as means but as ends. This is a complex issue that deontology must take pains to integrate.

## 4. Tai Chi, Karma Yoga and Faith

Doing Tai Chi some years ago, led me to an insight concerning "virtue".

> The Tai Chi form comprises a great number of incremental individual 'positions', which slowly flow into each other, forming whole 'moves', which in turn naturally succeed each other, resulting in a complete 'form'.
>
> No position in or portion of the form is justified by any others, although stringed together they form a consistent and powerful whole.

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[120] A few years ago, when the Rumanian dictator fell, orphanages were made public, where children were barely cared for at all. They were found to be horribly underdeveloped, mentally and physically. Interestingly, babies closer to the door of a dorm were slightly less affected than those farther away, because they experienced the rare passages of the nurses a bit more often!

> Each incremental Tai Chi position within a move must be experienced as important in itself, and not merely as a 'way station' en route towards the final position in that move. It is not instrumental, but to be enjoyed and appreciated as it is, without anticipation of its eventual destination or utility. Every 'intermediate' position is a 'value' or goal in itself, and not merely a 'virtue' in the sense of a means to an end.
>
> The movement from one such position (or one whole move) to the next is also a moment of which we should always be firmly aware. The instant of change, of shifting over into a new position, is also to be felt with great concentration.
>
> By so treasuring every point and transition in the trajectory of Tai Chi, we incidentally maintain its full potential towards an infinity of other moves. We also get a sense of the discontinuity and continuity of time.
>
> A move has little value if one is not intensely conscious of all the segments comprising it. For this reason, Tai Chi is considered a meditation and should be performed as slowly as possible.

Tai Chi illustrates the Stoic principle that "virtue is its own reward"[121]. It teaches us how each virtue is a value, and how the expression of many varied virtues is also a value.

Such a lesson in living may be valuable even at the time of our death.

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[121] See earlier discussion of this principle, in chapter 10.3 of *Volition*.

Rather than be afraid of that great unknown, no matter what form our death takes, we could regard it as a great opportunity! Just as we should go through life contemplating its course with equanimity, viewing the bad as well as the good as a great and interesting show – so, when death arrives, we should meditatively watch it come.

Just think: *your one and only chance* to experience this mysterious event first-hand! It is worthwhile training oneself throughout life to be conscious in all circumstances. Watching oneself die, if only for a moment, one may at last know what death is – or what life is.

Another Oriental discipline that teaches the same concept is "karma yoga". Karma yoga is going about your daily work activities without concern for the advantages they may bring you personally. This is practiced in yoga ashrams and the like; for example, a Zen monk may sweep the courtyard or do a bit of gardening every day.

Many people suffer much in their work life, wondering why they have to perform certain boring routines to earn their living. Karma yoga teaches: enjoy it! Do the job, without involving your ego – without 'selfish motive'. This is of course an idealization, not a call to or justification of amorality or immorality. It merely means: concentrate on the job you have undertaken to do; take one thing at a time, and all tasks eventually get done.

It is important to realize that faith is an essential building block of all ethical systems.

Religions, like Judaism or Buddhism, are ridiculed by some people because of their requirement of 'faith'. Such people argue that in an ethic based entirely on reason and

experience, nothing would be assumed worth doing until and unless we *first established* that our proposed actions were bound to or likely to have certain positive consequences considered worth pursuing – whereas in religious ethics, we *cannot* know the truth and value of the goal (God or Nirvana, as the case may be) in advance of ourselves attaining it, and we must also take it for granted that the alleged means (suggested to us by the tradition concerned) lead to that putative goal.

Thus, religious ethics would seem in principle contrary to reason, since their defining characteristic is faith – in both the goal and the means. They are made to appear as a sort of gigantic con game, whereby some future events *inaccessible to* experience or strict inference from experience are forecast (heaven or hell, or similar notions), and we are told (as a revelation or 'witnessing') that we must do this and that, and abstain from doing so and so, to achieve the positive consequences and avoid the negative ones.

But though such arguments have weight, they are not entirely fair and conclusive. In truth, all purposive action involves faith. For our knowledge of the empirical world through reason is essentially an inductive, tentative one. It consists mostly of generalizations and adductive arguments, based on past experience and dependent for confirmation on future experience – which means, ultimately, it is built by trial and error. Most propositions we believe are attempts at truth, which we hope will hold, but which we may need to correct further on.

One may still contend that, whereas secular ethics make relatively small or at least discrete demands, religious systems demand we invest our *whole life* in a purpose whose

validity and value may just be figments of someone's imagination, and the efficacy of the means to which is far from evident. But is that fair criticism? Surely, in common pursuits like raising a child or pursuing a career, we invest our whole life in purposes without guarantees of success. Human beings inevitably gamble, whatever their course of action, whatever the way of life they choose.

So, the demand of faith by religious ethics should not be viewed as a determining argument in favor of secular ethics. Concerning religion, Pascal's Wager comes into play; for those who totally reject religion, there are still great uncertainties to cope with. Thus, the deontologist must keep an open mind, neither rejecting religion offhand, nor (of course) naïvely accepting its claims.

I have elsewhere[122] attacked the principle of karma, dear to Indian philosophy, pointing out the epistemological difficulties involved (for us ordinary mortals) in establishing alleged karmic relations. Similar objections can be raised with regard to claims of Divine reward or punishment: how could such claims be proved? But here I wish to point out how even secular ethical principles are often based on mere suppositions, and do not for all that lose of their power.

If I claim, in accord with karmic law, that it is best for me not to do some deed harmful to others, because the same *will* surely happen to me if I do so – I am involved in a circular argument of sorts. I can claim this as a generalization from past bitter experience, but that generalization will not be tested in the particular case at hand if I believe in it and

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122 See *Buddhist Illogic*, chapter 9.

abstain from the deed, and so it will somewhat paradoxically remain forever unempirical!

On the other hand, it would suffice for me to claim more hypothetically that if a similar harmful deed were done to me, as it well might, I could not then consistently complain that I was a victim of some cruelty and injustice, having allowed myself to do the same. In this way, the benefits of karmic principle can be maintained – the consciousness of reciprocity – without having to prove actual causal connections.

Another example: I can pursue the Buddhist ideal of 'cessation of desire, so as to avoid rebirth', *just in case* there is such a thing as rebirth and *on the supposition that* it is caused by desire. Although these assumptions are unproved, and we cannot even imagine how they might ever be proved, they may still legitimately be used as working hypotheses. Similarly, one might argue: *in case* God exists and gave man the Torah, I had better act thus and thus. I have to do something, so it might as well be that.

In other words, behavior *need not be based on certainties*, which are anyway rarely if ever available, but can be based on frankly *conditional judgments*. The conditioning involved may have any mode – not only the natural mode, but also the extensional and the logical modes. Since human knowledge is inevitably limited, it is largely uncertain to some degree. Nevertheless, life cannot be blocked by this truth; volition still needs guidance. Therefore, action based on hypothetical reasoning has ethical validity.

# 16. CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Drawn from *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts* (2004), Chapter 18.

## MORE TOPICS IN DEONTOLOGY

### 1. Inducing Ethics

How is ethics actually built up in people's minds, and how is it to be justified epistemologically? My proposed answer to these questions is as follows.

We all have our own 'intuitions' of right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust, kind and unkind, etc. Some of these are primary – arbitrary valuations of the free agent. Others are basically emotional, sentimental or sensual. Others are derived from conceptual insights, based on accumulated ideas and values of which we may be more or less conscious, and which we may have more or less justified. At this stage, we need only consider them all as notions, as mere phenomena, at their face value – without regard as to their sources, structure, consistency or validity.

Taken one by one, in isolation from other such valuation experiences and from knowledge as a whole, these intuitions

may, of course, be real or illusory. They are not necessarily 'correct' or 'justified' just by virtue of their occurrence, nor of course automatically invalidated by the fact that they as yet have not been established as true and valid. This is analogous to my treatment[123] of appearances in general as neutral, before we start classifying them as realities or illusions.

Thus, initially, these intuitions of value or disvalue are acknowledged to have some small credibility just by virtue of appearing, but not enough of it to decide whether they are ultimately reliable or not. But, through an inductive procedure that treats these individual insights of right and wrong as *hypothetical raw data*, and then faces them off with all other data, *comparing and contrasting* these value-insights to each other, and with the wider context of non-evaluative knowledge, we manage to gradually build up a consistent structure that includes some of them and excludes others.

From this ordering process, emerge the modalities of ethical propositions (must, may and may not, cannot). Using syllogistic and factorial techniques similar to those used with non-ethical propositions[124], ethical insights are statistically ordered, collectively yielding ethical systems. By 'statistical', here, I mean 'for *all, most, some, few, no* other valuations (as the case may be), this one is compatible or incompatible, implied or not-implied'. Thus, I suggest, ethical logic is constructed in much the same way as logic in general is.

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123 See *Future Logic*, chapter 2.

124 Non-ethical propositions have been labeled 'alethic'. Regarding 'factorial' analysis, see *Future Logic*, Part VI.

Note that ethical propositions do not only have categorical form, like "X must do Y". Some have conditional form, like "if Z occurs, X must do Y – but if Z does not occur, X need not do Y". The former are applicable under general conditions, whereas the latter under particular conditions; but apart from that difference, their force of "imperativeness" is the same.

My theory is, therefore, similarly intuitionist. This is not, however, a relativistic position, at all. Some ethics are more reliable than others. What distinguishes the ethical systems of different people at different times is, simply, the clarity and amount of ethical and non-ethical intuitions that have been taken into account, and the logical rigor with which each of us orders this raw data into a consistent whole. People with confused minds are drawn hither and thither by their feelings and notions, and fail to evolve a trustworthy ethic. Others are more careful, and produce a sounder end product.

Thus, the right-wrong or good-bad experiences at the ground of ethics are technically akin to the true-false or correct-incorrect experiences at the ground of non-ethical knowledge. The procedure for judging them is the same: we grant them some *ab initio* credibility, but reserve our final judgment till further research has confirmed them in all respects (until and unless new evidence or arguments emerge to the contrary). Thus, in effect, value-intuitions are treated as empirical data; this gives them some weight, but does not in itself constitute full justification, which requires a longer and more holistic process of review.

As raw data, ethical intuitions are not only comparable to sensible qualities like colors or feelings, but also to logical insights. By this, I suggest that, *given the very same level of*

*intelligence and information, two people in similar circumstances would theoretically have the same ethical intuitions*. Granting this bold assumption, we acknowledge a certain 'objectivity' to ethical judgment. Of course, this assumption cannot be definitely proved by experiment, since in practice we cannot hope to make two people – or even the same person at different times – sufficiently the same.

This hypothesis allows us to develop ethical concepts from the ethical notions, in the same way as in general discourse the logical modalities are constructed from apparent logical insights of identity, contradiction, compatibility or implication – by recourse to factorial analysis and factor selection. We revert to adductive methods – trial and error, the elimination of doubtful data, till what we are left with seems reasonably well tested and confirmed.

The leftover ethical judgments are then logically ordered relative to each other, as goals and means, so that the list of *final ends* is reduced to a minimum, which implicitly contains all subsidiary values. This is the *teleological* stage of the proceedings. These final ends constitute the 'standards of value' for the particular subject (man or woman) who has concluded them.

Of course, these standards are to some extent in constant flux, changing with new life experiences, reflections, incoming information, and under the influence of other people. Some aspects of people's value systems remain firmly anchored in them, to the degree that they personally identify with them. Some values diminish or lose their importance in time; others acquire or increase in importance later on. Note well that we are speaking here of *seeming values*, i.e. of the appearance of value to some particular person at some particular time.

There may thus be divergences of opinion among people's values, even though they live in the same milieu. Inversely, many people in a community or historical period may have the same values, so that these *common values* appear to them immutable and objective.

Thus, ethical logic, like the logic of non-ethical knowledge, should be viewed as an inductive enterprise. It is not a deductive system, wherein we are at the outset given, in one way or another, a set of "top moral principles" from which all moral judgments are syllogistically inferred, as many moral philosophers propose. Ethics is not casuistry, based on more or less agreed, arbitrary "axioms" (so-called). Rather, we gradually evolve standards of value over time: they are our short list of most impressive and important looking moral insights.

These norms (or "highest goods") may, once arrived at, be used *in the way of* axioms, but they remain open to review and verification at all times, in recognition of the fact that they were originally products of induction. Although many of us tend to enshrine certain norms, and insist on their eternity, such rigidity is neither justified nor necessary. A norm carries more conviction if it is felt sufficiently confident to face and withstand challenges, than if we block all reconsideration.

Nevertheless, some norms are logically very secure, if not immovable. This refers to the norms that fit the general teleological argument: "*whatever your particular values, you must still refer to so and so (the secure norm) as a supreme value, because it is a precondition to the pursuit of any values whatsoever"*. We can in this way argue that life, body, cognitive faculties, awareness, volitional faculties, liberty,

health, sanity, and so forth, are all preconditions that any value system we propose has to accept.

Although, note well, such basic values do not by themselves make possible an answer to all ethical questions – they nevertheless provide a framework for all other values.

This is comparable to the role played by the laws of thought, and indeed by logic in general, within knowledge. These top principles or axioms are self-evident, because they are implied even by propositions that attempt to deny them. Nevertheless, it does not follow that logic by itself allows us to deduce the world without reliance on experience. We must still largely depend on experience. Logic just helps us to make sense of that experience.

> In the domain of values, some values act as *sine qua non* conditions for all other values. Since all values are to some extent relative to these values, they may be considered as effectively absolute values. If we can argue of some value Y that "**whether you value X or you value notX, you must still pursue or retain Y and/or avoid or remove notY**" – Y is established as such a precondition. Note that X and notX are presumed values, and not merely indifferent objects. This is essentially dilemmatic argument, similar to that used in general logic to establish necessary propositions.

It is an aspect of teleological reasoning, which (as already said) investigates ways and means to intuited values, in the light of natural and artificial tools and obstacles available. Teleological reasoning refers to the natural and extensional modes of modality, rather than to the logical mode. It makes

consistency checks between our different goals, and places them in hierarchies and priorities. It seeks out the most effective means to these goals, considering all surrounding conditions and time factors. The use of such reasoning should not be taken to imply an essentially utilitarian or epicurean view of value systems.

People often declare "happiness", or some particular version of it, as their ultimate goal. But most people would find it difficult to say just what they mean by happiness – is it fulfillment of one's major goals, a positive emotion or a maximum of pleasures? Paradoxically, Buddhism suggests, the active *pursuit* of happiness is not likely to result in happiness. In any case, such "eudemonism" is not a sine qua non of all values, and so not an absolute value. That is, we can in fact live without happiness, and most of us do. Nevertheless, we would naturally prefer to feel good than feel bad; and, within limits, this is often possible if one lives virtuously. Dignity and decency beget a measure of contentment.

Note lastly this important remark. Though we have value intuitions, and however these intuitions arise, we are *never forced* to act in accord with them. We (men and women) remain at all times free agents, who are responsible for their final choices. Even when we develop a complex ethical system, we remain free to act or not act in accord with our beliefs. We may ignore them or even act against them. Our beliefs have causal power as influences, but no more. This is freedom of the will, without which no ethic can be claimed.

## 2. Ethical Formulas

Ethics and law systems can, at least partially, be built on certain logical considerations.

People often say “don’t be so judgmental”, and “live and let live!” – or they may sneer , implying contempt for such idiocy. This is presented as an argument against ethical distinctions, an attempt to generally invalidate ethics by claiming all moral judgment to be relative and uncertain. However, the proponents of this thesis fail to realize that it is logically inconsistent, since it is itself composed of judgments.

To say: “*don’t* judge” or “*do* let live”, or otherwise imply it is wrong to judge, is to propose the paradoxical ethical proposition “one should not make ethical propositions” – which is *self-contradictory*. It logically follows that the opposite position is true, namely that “it is indeed permissible to make ethical propositions”.

In this way, we have definitely proved, as logically self-evident, the existence and demonstrability of some ethical propositions. We have established an axiom for deontology. Those who say “be tolerant” (towards just anything) are effectively making an uncompromising, intolerant statement – therefore, they cannot be right, by their own terms.

Such arguments are not rhetorical tricks – they clarify the way things are, by virtue of our having consciousness and volition, and being able to engage in discourse and argument. Concepts of ethical moment naturally evolve from our

experience of the world and interaction with it. They are not arbitrary constructs, which can be manipulated at will. Once evolved, they have a logic – of which we must be aware and which we must respect.

> Many moral judgments, and indeed many laws, are based on **the principle of reciprocity**: "do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you"[125]. This is an ethical formula most people would intuitively accept, even if they might disagree as to what they or others would or wouldn't want done to them.

When a murderer kills, or tries to kill, he tacitly, by the implication of his act, claims the right to kill. Since he is, in fact, no different from his human victim, he thereby grants to others the right to kill *him*, at least in self-defense, if not punitively. He cannot consistently argue that he has the right to kill others, but others do not have the right to kill him.

> ***Ethics takes every claim as a universal principle, unless good arguments can be adduced to***

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[125] In the Jewish tradition, this adage is first found in the Talmud (Shabbat 31a), in the form "what you hate, do not do to your friend", as an interpretation by the sage Hillel of the Torah commandment "love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Note that the form he gives it is negative; it is a minimalist call to forbear from causing harm, rather than an injunction to do good (which is covered more specifically through many other commandments). In the Buddhist tradition, it is similarly taught that we will act humanely towards others if we remember that all sentient beings have, like ourselves, a natural desire to be happy and not suffer. This, too, is an appeal to reciprocity.

> ***particularize it***[126]. One cannot exempt oneself from the imperatives one gives others, or permit oneself what one has prohibited to others, unless some very convincing distinction between self and others is offered (for example, that the others belong to a different species). It is reasonable to assume that particular moral claims derive from general principles.

This is one application of the reciprocity principle, on the basis of which we grant the state the right to execute murderers, to keep the peace. Some people argue that the death sentence is not necessary or useful, and many countries have abolished this extreme penalty, but that is not my concern here. I am not arguing that issue one way or the other, but am only trying to clarify our reasoning with regard to reciprocity.

Note, in any case, that society's killing of the murderer is very different from the murderer's killing of some innocent victim. The murderer has initiated violence; the state merely retaliates. When society avenges the victim and punishes the culprit, protecting society from further injury, there is no basis for further retaliation against the executioner or those who appointed him. All that, of course, is said on the theoretical assumption that there has been due process, under just laws, beyond a reasonable doubt, and so forth. In practice, these caveats are admittedly often inadequately respected.

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126 Note well the differences between this principle, and Kant's famous maxim. I am not stating that the mere possibility of generalization establishes ethical rules; and I am making allowance for the particularization of such rules.

A similar argument can be constructed with regard to theft. When a thief steals, he thereby ignores or denies the existence of private property, and therefore cannot be indignant if others (in practice through the state) impound his property or fine him. If he is indigent, he may be imprisoned on the argument that this deprives him of the liberty to enrich himself, and incidentally, prevents him from further theft. Here again, justice is served through the logic of reciprocation.

We often argue: "if everyone did this (or didn't do that), everything would be fantastic (or everything would be terrible)", but such general arguments are ***idealistic***, since in practice it is improbable if not impossible that literally *everyone* will do (or not do) some one thing in concert; there are always recalcitrants!

A person could well argue that he is willing to live in a world where everyone can do as they please: he is willing to take the risk involved. We cannot argue against such an anarchist that he too might get hurt, since he is gambling he won't. Our argument is circular and impractical.

It follows that such a person will not be convinced by any rational arguments not to kill or steal, but must be overpowered by society into compliance with the law. The reciprocity principle as here used is not abstract ethics, but a justification for concrete force.

It should be stressed, in this context, that many crimes have not only certain direct and obvious effects on a particular victim, but also much wider and more insidious consequences on society as a whole. ***Every crime – insofar as people are victims to it, witness it or hear about it –***

***causes people to lose some of their natural trust in other people.***

When a murderer kills, people begin to fear someone might kill them. When a thief steals, people have to hide their money and lock their doors. When a rapist rapes, women begin to fear men in general. When a schoolteacher abuses a pupil, all educators become suspect. And so forth, with every criminal act – and this principle is all the more true nowadays, when the media give wide and loud coverage to the more heinous crimes.

This, then, is the further crime of every criminal – he decreases people's trust in each other. Suspicion grows, and everyone's freedom is curtailed. 'Potential victims' (i.e. anyone in any way resembling past victims of the crime concerned) must take protective measures, and 'potential criminals' (i.e. anyone with any resemblance, however remote, to actual criminals) must limit their movements. Society thus loses its cohesion, and everyone becomes a little less happy. In some cases, relations between people become aggressive.

Some of the reasoning involved in this distancing between people is, of course, logically unjustified. If a news bulletin is about a husband killing his wife for her money, other rich wives may come to imagine that their own husband could well do the same. If the news is that a boss raped his secretary, many secretaries will the next day look at their bosses with a bit of concern. The categories 'husband' and 'rich wife', or 'boss' and 'secretary', are enough to generate some analogy, and sow a doubt, *even if the psychological and other conditions involved are totally different*.

Statistics are sometimes read, or misread, in ways that reinforce such reasoning. If a number thieves are foreigners, all foreign-looking people become 'probable' thieves in people's eyes, even if the proportion of thieves among foreigners is less than that among locals; the actual degree of probability involved becomes irrelevant in people's minds. (For example: suppose 20% of population are foreigners and 10% of population are thieves, it may be that only 5% of foreigners are thieves, in which case 11.25% of locals are thieves!)

People also wrongly convert propositions, thinking that "all X are Y" implies "all Y are X". For example, 'all rapists are men' becomes 'every man I meet could be a rapist' in some women's minds, and they behave as if he is so. Absurd it might be, but people are human.

Society is thus a *collective* victim of every crime, and it is proper for the state (as the instrument of society) to vigorously intervene, and prevent, repress and punish crime.

In all such negative situations, the principle of reciprocity is used to hinder, limit or repair the damage caused to other people or society as a whole by some individuals or groups. It should be stressed, however, that in most situations, the principle of reciprocity plays a much gentler role in people's minds, encouraging mutual respect and trust. This occurs when the persons concerned reflect *before* committing a wrongdoing, thinking: "I would not like that done to me, so I will not do it to others" or "I shall not behave in this way, so as not to spoil our world even more" or the like.

Some people do go one step further, and apply a positive version of the reciprocity principle, thinking: "if I was in this

difficult situation, I would hope or expect others to come to my aid, therefore I will offer my help". This is an admirable attitude. Of course, those to whom help is offered may not want help, or not that particular kind of help, or at least not the way it is offered. One cannot stuff it down their throat. For this reason, the positive version of the principle is less easy to formulate: *the recipient(s) of our attentions must be a willing party to the transaction*. Still, it often does come into play, promoting tolerance, friendship and even love. This, in turn, increases social bonds and makes everyone's life that much easier.

## 3. Philosophy of Law

Ethics naturally arises first of all within the individual, in the sense that he or she may have certain imperatives, inhibitions or liberties. Ethics as a social phenomenon presumably arose in the family, as the head of household (on the basis of his or her personal ethic) gave advice or orders and was obeyed (whether out of love or fear). More broadly, the surrounding community would have traditions and rules to be respected, as well as advice or orders from the leadership, whoever that included, to maintain social bonds. Eventually, the local shaman or other religious figure gave instructions, in the name of the deity or deities of the group. As these informal social ethics became more formal institutions, the concept of law emerged.

What I wish to discuss here is the distinction between ethical principle and legality, so as to stress that *making something*

*legal doesn't make it moral; making something illegal doesn't make it immoral.*

A distinction that people seem to often find confusing is that between ethical and political law. People generally do understand that the laws currently on a nation's statute books (here referred to as 'political' laws, meaning that they are enacted and enforced by the body politic, though they may concern any matter) are not necessarily moral in content; but they also generally consider that what such laws allow is ultimately permissible and what they forbid is best avoided.

For this reason, society may in some cases interdict practices that its proponents claim harmless, being "private acts between consenting adults" – on the basis that such acts nevertheless indirectly affect people who are not directly a party to them. For example, homosexuality can reasonably be made illegal on the grounds that making it legal gives some youths the impression that it is moral, causing such behavior to spread, to the consternation and against the will of a great many citizens (including very many parents), so that it is no longer a private affair but an issue of public policy.[127]

Let us briefly consider the concepts involved. Ideally, an absolute ethics would be derived from wise and informed consideration of human nature and of man's place in the world. Armed with such general moral guidelines, each well-meaning human being would in principle be able to know right from wrong in each particular situation facing him or

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[127] Even if the practitioners did nothing to promote their practice, their mere negative *influence* on society would be sufficient reason to prohibit it; how much more so, if they make efforts to propagate it.

her, and would exercise will accordingly. There would be no need for laws enforced by society.

Practically, such a utopian scenario can only lead to social havoc. Even in a society filled with good will, people have different ideas as to what is right or wrong, and absolute proofs are hard to find. All the more so, since humans have free will, and many of them – under various influences – often opt for what they (themselves) consider bad, rather than (as logic would dictate) do the good. Conflicts thus inevitably arise, which are ultimately to the disadvantage of all. For these reasons, it is generally agreed that some minimal common standards have to be conventionally imposed by the majority or an empowered minority.

We accordingly constitute states, governments, legislatures, judiciaries and police forces, which together make and enforce laws. A guiding principle in enacting and enforcing such laws would be that "the rights of one person end where those of other people begin". Another useful adage is "do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you". But clearly, such statements do not provide us with an exact science. It is not always easy to decide what needs legislating and what is best left alone. Political science is a changing, empirical discipline.

In this corrected perspective, ethical law covers all human action, while political law covers only some of it. The former is ideally universal; but only a fraction or subset of it is politically enacted and enforced, the rest being the responsibility of the individual to discover or at least practice.

The scope of such political law is vast, but not as vast as the scope of moral law. It includes criminal law (against murder,

theft, etc.), civil law (about marriage, inheritance, etc.), commercial law (concerning property, contracts, etc.), and indeed any legal issue that may arise in the interactions between human beings.

Theoretically, at least, the purpose of such laws is to ensure social peace, the common weal, personal security, justice, and so forth – although in practice, as everyone knows, they are often instruments of exploitation and unjust. In principle, what makes them stand out from the mass of ethical laws is the need to reduce frictions between people to a reasonable minimum. Historically, such minimalism has not always been accepted; some societies have been totalitarian, attempting to control almost everything.

In practice, for epistemological reasons already stated, the domains of ethics and political law are bound to somewhat drift apart, so that although the two domains intersect to some extent, the political domain is not wholly contained within the ethical domain, but partly falls outside it. Laws enacted by society, whether by democratic means or otherwise, may differ from the laws suggested by personal conscience or by reasoned study and debate by ethical philosophers.

Such divergence is in some cases reasonable; but it is often irrational. In a non-democratic system of government, the prejudices of the governing few are imposed on the majority, without room for argument. In a democracy, where in principle rational argument is the rule, *pressure groups* occasionally manage to format laws that accord with their aberrant views simply by virtue of the power of their numbers or through other considerations that force politicians to submit to their will. In recent decades, many activities

traditionally judged as immoral have been declared legal in Western countries.

Now, let me say that this is not a political tract[128]; I do not expect anything I say or do is likely to stem that unfortunate tide. My philosophy of history is very skeptical. *In each generation, some faulty belief held by large segments of the public comes to the fore and gains ascendancy, until it is brought to its natural absurd conclusion, like a sore spot bursting and releasing its pus, and disaster strikes, so that enough people learn to avoid that particular folly thenceforth.*

Nazism and Communism were typical examples: they arrived on the scene of history to the sound of popular cheers, and left in the midst of countless tears. People in Europe learned certain lessons, about the active use of brute force, about persecution of racial minorities, about national and class hatreds, and so forth; they changed their ways somewhat thereafter. They might have saved themselves the trouble and the pain, if they had resorted to reason, instead of yielding to their lowest emotions.

Remember that Hitler was democratically elected (more or less). Realistically, democracy is without doubt the best and fairest system of government available to us; but as we all know, it is not perfect. The fact that certain legislation is passed is not proof of popular support, let alone right[129]. Most

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[128] I generally avoid getting into political comment or debate in my writings, because my philosophical aims are at a deeper level of epistemology and ontology. Controversy is bound to alienate some readers, who might consider some of my views as either too 'liberal' or too 'conservative'.

[129] All the more, the support of major media means nothing.

laws are based on indirect democracy; the legislators and judges involved in the matter may well be cowardly, amoral or personally compromised. If referenda were used, the results might well have been very different. But even in the case of laws established by direct democracy, *numbers of votes do not determine what is right or wrong*.

From this reflection it follows that the fact that some laws on the statute books socially-politically prescribe, allow or forbid some behavior pattern, does not mean that the behavior pattern in question is ethically-morally prescribed, allowed or forbidden, respectively. What society happens to have favored (or forbidden) may nevertheless, from the point of view of ethics, be wrong (or right, respectively). The arguments involved may have been fallacious or based on inadequate information.

'Legal' and 'moral' must be understood to be distinct, separate categories, although conceptually they are partly related (as we have explicated). Making something legal doesn't make it moral; making something illegal doesn't make it immoral. Youths should especially be made aware of this important distinction.

The individual may not reasonably regard the existence of certain legal tendencies in the statute books as indicative of ethical truth, because legislation is not exclusively based on rational reflection, but depends on social *forces*. The legislator may be faulted for misguiding fellow citizens, but these remain responsible for their own acts.

The individual is still required to think for himself or herself, and to at least consider the ethical advice of the wise doctrines that humanity has produced. The existence of

political freedoms or limits does not exempt an individual from moral responsibility for his or her choices. Legislation is not a substitute for conscience, or a just alibi for moral abdication. Although a legal threat or protection can mitigate moral responsibility, it does not absolve.

From an ethical point of view, laws are just one influential factor among others in behavior, which in certain cases it may be wise to volitionally dismiss or oppose.

# 17. CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Drawn from *Ruminations* (2005),
Chapter 8 (sections 8 & 9).

## 1. Against Kant on Freewill

Various comments against Kant's view of freedom of the will.

As I explain elsewhere[130], freedom of the will should not be conceived as "doing what you want", in the sense "doing what you desire", for being moved by random desires is not freedom but slavery. It does not follow that, as Immanuel Kant suggests, freewill is "doing what your reason tells you to do".

The colloquial definition of freedom, "doing what you want", should be clarified to mean that our actions express *our personal will*. It is the "you" rather than the "want" which is at the center of that popular definition. "Want" is here not intended to refer to values, wishes or purposes (be they rational or irrational) that may have preceded the "doing", but is merely a *post factum* inference from such doing; i.e. it is an

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[130] Again, see *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts*, chapter 5-7.

interpretation of the will that did occur after it occurred. The doer or author is thereby held responsible for such "want".

***Freedom of the will refers to our willing irrespective of influences, such as desires or rational judgments or whatever***. The point in characterizing will as free is to stress *it is the agent* that wills, and the influences are not determining causes. In that case, *whether the agent wills in accord with or against some ethical injunction, he is indeed responsible for his action*.

Kant seems to claim that the will is only free when it is aligned with the dictates of reason, suggesting that the only alternative to that is slavishly following your passions. He argues: if you disobey reason, you are a puppet, therefore, obey it, and be free. *Non sequitur*!

Logically, if Kant's thesis on volition is true, people have no freedom or responsibility either way, and can neither be blamed nor praised for whatever happens to them. In this perspective, if reason is heard and obeyed, its ethical injunction (or whoever suggested it) becomes *the causative* of virtuous action, and the subject does not merit praise – just as, if reason is ignored or disobeyed, the subject's desires and impulses take control, and he is devoid of blame. Thus, Kant did not think his proposal through sufficiently.

Clearly, we must say that the choice to submit to reason implies an *anterior* act of freewill, which has to be spontaneous, otherwise reason would be controlling the agent against his will. Some people are unmoved by rational arguments, even if reason does influence many of us. Thus, the will is fundamentally as independent of reason as it is of passions. The agent has a choice between the two. If he fails

to follow reason, he is drawn by passions; if he follows passions, he ignores reason. But ultimately the choice is spontaneous: that is freedom of the will.

It is interesting to note that some post-Kantian philosophers have come to the contrary conclusion that we are 'free' only when we act *against* reason. This very postmodern posture is in a way a predictable outcome of Kant's rationalist-moralist stance. If one realizes that rigid adherence to principles like that proposed by Kant is just another form of slavery, the only space left for freewill seems to be moral anarchy.

But this "anything goes" position is just the hedonist side of the same coin; it is not a logical answer to Kant. It merely reverts to the idea that freedom is "doing whatever you wish". Kant's objection to that remains valid[131] – even if his proposed alternative, "doing what reason orders", is also objectionable.

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[131] Kant here is of course reaffirming an ancient wisdom, found in the major religious traditions. When 20th Century Western man rejected Judeo-Christian religion in favor of the 'pleasure principle', Kant's wise insight came to seem like old-fashioned, rigid 'moralism'. But now, perhaps thanks in part to the spread of Buddhist ideas in the West, many people are beginning to realize again that the unbridled pursuit of pleasure is ugly, weak, and destructive of self and others. The characterization of hedonism as slavery is increasingly perceived as accurate, once one reflects on the many ways commercial and political interests use this cunning means to exploit and control the populace. The "hippy" revolution of the late 1960's was not the liberation it claimed to be, but a thorough enslavement to drugs, sexual promiscuity (ending in depravity), and rock and roll music (i.e. omnipresent loud noise).

The dilemma can only be overcome through deeper understanding of the relation between agent and volition, and influences like desires or rational-moral insights.

It is important to distinguish one's self (or soul or spirit) from one's body and mind. The latter include all one's involuntary thoughts and emotions, i.e. all one's felt affections and appetites. It is a cognitive error to identify with any such *passive* body and mind event, i.e. to think: "this is me or an expression of me". The self may be dissociated from such events; they are essentially 'outside' it. (The self is "empty" of such relatively material and mental events, to use a Buddhist phrase.)

However, this does not mean that we may dissociate ourselves from our voluntary physical or mental *actions*. The latter must be viewed as extensions and expressions of the self that wills them; the self is responsible for them, however much influenced by passive body-mind factors. We cannot, in an attempt to act viciously without taking on blame, argue: "since this body-mind is not wholly me or mine, all its actions are not me or mine". This too – i.e. the failure to identify with active body and mind events – is an error of judgment.

The role of reason here is thus clear: it serves primarily to honestly distinguish the active from the passive, i.e. the areas of responsibility from those of non-responsibility in the life of the self. Such lucidity does not guarantee morality, though it is a precondition of it (and therefore in itself a moral act). Reason here acts as a counterweight to the influence of emotion. The self must still thereafter intuit the 'moral' choice and exercise freewill in that direction.

An act of will may be considered as most ‘free’ and ‘responsible’ when its Agent is maximally aware of all the positive and negative influences impinging on him, *and* of his having freedom of action and responsibility for his actions all the same.

By definition, influences are conditions of which one is more or less aware, and which thereby play a role in the volition concerned. Here, we note that the degree of such awareness affects the degree of freewill. A fully awake person has more freedom and responsibility than someone who functions half-asleep.

Note well the radical difference between freedom through awareness and freedom from awareness. People who affirm the existence and freedom of the will do so with the good intention to take control of their lives. Whereas, people who deny or doubt it generally do so in order to excuse themselves for past shameful or evil acts, or in order to facilitate such acts in the present and future. They reject freewill so as to liberate themselves from their conscience, by putting it to sleep. They cunningly use such philosophical denial as a bad influence on their will, making possible unbridled pursuit of unethical values.

## 2. Alleged Influences

An *alleged influence* on volition is not necessarily an influence in fact. The mere saying that something was an influence on one’s action does not imply it to have indeed been so; i.e. it does not make the alleged influence ex post facto become an influence. This may seem obvious – but the

issue is worth raising, because people confuse initial influence with later influence.

> For instance, a debtor may tell a creditor "I couldn't pay you off today because of my son's wedding", when in fact the wedding did not actually influence the decision not to pay, or take so much time that payment was impossible, but was used as a false excuse, a *pretext*. If neither the wedding itself *nor the thought of* the wedding in fact affected the non-payment in any way, the latter event cannot truthfully be said to have been caused *or influenced* by the former. However, this does not imply that the creditor cannot thereafter be influenced by the excuse given, if he has believed it or even if he has disbelieved it.

For X to 'influence' some volition Y, it is necessary that the thought of X *precede* the action Y, as well as make it easier or harder to some degree. If the thought of X only occurred after Y (e.g. as when X is falsely declared ex post facto as the reason for Y) – the reality of X *not* having influenced Y is not changed. However, X may well thereafter, after such false declaration has been made and mentally registered, begin to influence *other, subsequent* actions of the initial agent (the agent of Y) or of some other agent(s).

Saying something is so, doesn't make it so – even in the realm of the spirit. There is 'objective' truth, even with regard to 'subjective' relations. One may, for lack of attention or introspective skills, or due to weak memory, not be sure as to what one willed, or what influenced one's will. In such cases, one's witness concerning one's inner processes, even if sincere, may be erroneous. Additionally, in

some cases, even knowing the truth, one may deliberately lie, wishing to manipulate someone somehow with one's lies.

An external observer is of course very disadvantaged in assessing the will of someone else and the influences impinging upon it. In such contexts, we often rely on what could be construed as *post hoc ergo propter hoc* thinking, but more precisely (usually tacitly, of course) consists in eliminating all thought-of alternative explanations of perceived behavior but one, or opting for the most likely looking explanation in our present perspective.

(This is of course a whole field of logic by itself, which I cannot hope to cover in a few comments.)

> Incidentally, when we speak of someone having a certain '**spirit**', we originally mean that the person concerned functions with a certain *attitudinal pattern*, i.e. we refer to aspects of *his own* volition. For examples, a person may have 'a good spirit' (e.g. be hard working, enthusiastic) or 'a bad spirit' (e.g. be constantly complaining, resisting).
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> But some people have *reified* this sense of the word 'spirit', implying that some external non-material *entity* (something like a ghost) *invades and inhabits* people, forcing them to behave in this way or that. The actions of the person concerned are in that case no longer his own, but someone else's. The person's soul has lost its freewill, and been subjected to a spiritual takeover.
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> This mode of explanation is found in the Christian religion and among African shamanists, for examples. 'The holy spirit', 'the devil made me do it' – are cases in point. Another common belief is that wine or liquor instills a 'spirit of drunkenness' into the drinker.

The trouble with such explanations, logically, is that instead of explaining volition by the influence of non-determining conditions, they ipso facto annul volition and void responsibility.

# 18. CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapters 3 & 8.

## 1. The Goals of Meditation

Meditation is a means to enhanced consciousness. The ultimate goal of meditation is, accordingly, to attain *the highest level of consciousness* possible to one. This *summum bonum* (highest good) is generally understood as threefold, although the three aspects are ultimately one and the same event, which may be called '**realization**'.

The first aspect is '**enlightenment**', which may be defined as the overcoming of all personal ignorance, illusion or delusion, in the broadest sense. It is a maximal, all-inclusive consciousness; the widest and deepest potential for knowledge (including information and understanding).

The second aspect is '**liberation**', which may be defined as the overcoming of all personal weaknesses, difficulties or obstructions, in the broadest sense. Thus, *enlightenment relates to cognition, while liberation concerns volition*. Granting they are possible achievements, they necessarily come together and not apart, with liberation as a necessary adjunct of enlightenment. Knowledge is freedom.

> Note that the term 'enlightenment' (or 'illumination') is often construed as referring to some inner experience of light. But that mental analogy to physically 'seeing a light', though occasionally valuable, is not the essence intended by the term. One should rather have an image of a man walking tentatively in the dark, feeling his way slowly – when suddenly a bright light is turned on. Now, he can at last see everything around him and where he is going, and he can walk about freely, and find any object he seeks without knocking into things. This analogy is preferable, because it illustrates the conjunction of light and liberty. A man in the dark is like a man in chains, hardly able to move, uncertain and afraid, unable to travel directly to any destination and having to expend much too much effort to go any distance. When the light goes on, he is instantly freed from his invisible chains, and he can hop, skip and jump at will, and dance with joy.

The third presumed consequence of achieving the apex of consciousness is greatly enhanced ethical understanding – or '**wisdom**'[132]. *This relates to the third function of the soul,*

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[132] Some would contend that the attainment of enlightenment/liberation places one "beyond good and evil". But the sense of that phrase should not be misconstrued as implying that one then becomes independent of morality. Quite the contrary, it means that one becomes so wise that one cannot imagine any trace of value whatsoever in immoral or amoral practices. The proof of that is that realized teachers always preach morality to their followers. Not because the teacher needs to remind himself of such strictures, but so as to preempt the followers from losing their way on the way to realization.

*which is valuation.* It suggests a maximum of sagacity in one's value judgments and pursuits. It would not suffice to have knowledge and freedom, if one were ignorant of values and thus incapable of virtue.

Just as valuation in general involves the operation of both the functions of cognition and volition – so wisdom is the natural and necessary outcome of enlightenment and liberation. At every level of human experience, sagacious valuing is indicative of a harmonious intersection between knowing and willing. Wisdom, or extreme sagacity, occurs when these functions reach their peak of perfection.

It should be stressed that wisdom does not only signify *knowing* right from wrong in any given situation, but also implies naturally *doing* what is right and avoiding what is wrong in that situation. It is not a mere theoretical understanding of values, but additionally involves a practice of virtue that testifies to having fully internalized such understanding. The cognitive and volitional faculties of the sage are concordant.

While full enlightenment, liberation and wisdom may be identified as the ultimate goal(s) of meditation – we may of course still consider increased but less than complete degrees of knowledge, freedom and discernment (between good and bad, right and wrong) as valuable intermediate goals. The situation is not "either-or" – i.e. either total blindness, impotence and stupidity, or utter perfection. We may have to gradually work our way towards the ideal, going through partial improvements until we attain the desired result.

Our experiences are likely to be proportionate to our progress along that Path or Way. We may have momentary so-called

mystical experiences of lesser intensity than the ultimate experience of enlightenment, but find such reward encouraging and stimulating. If we practice meditation correctly and regularly over an extended period of time, our sense of freedom may increase noticeably. Things seem clearer and easier, and we exhibit more and more wisdom in our choices.

Traditions thus speak of a *via perfectionis* or *dhammapada* (way of perfection), implying a long spiritual road to be traveled, until the final step radically changes everything for us and we attain full realization.[133]

It should be noted that the term 'realization' has a double meaning, one relative and one absolute:

- It signifies, firstly, the actualization of one's personal full potential as a human being, i.e. the full maturing of our faculties of cognition, volition and valuation.
- Additionally, it suggests that this self-perfection coincides with the extreme achievement of cognition of absolute reality, maximum freedom and wisdom of choice.

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[133] I should add that I cannot, so far in my life, *personally vouch* for the feasibility of utter enlightenment, liberation and wisdom. I assume it to be possible, because many human traditions claim this to have been attained by some individuals: this is hearsay evidence in favor of the thesis. Moreover, it seems conceivable and reasonable to me that such heights of achievement should be possible. However, to be quite frank about it, I have not myself reached them. But even if I too were a live witness, the reader would still have to consider the information as second-hand, until if ever he or she in turn personally attained realization.

Logically, these two attainments are not necessarily identical: it could be argued that a given person's relative best is still not good enough in absolute terms. However, some spiritual philosophies overcome this possible objection by considering the possibility of stretching the pursuit of ultimate perfection over more than one lifetime.

Furthermore, there are two ways to view the meditative enterprise; these ways are referred to in Zen as pursuit of gradual vs. sudden realization.

- We can view ourselves as standing somewhere on a mountain, eager to climb up to its peak, by diligently "working on ourselves". We have to find the best way to do that, either feeling our way alone or using maps handed down to us by predecessors, or traveling with other seekers. Sometimes we may fall back, and have to climb again just to reach our previous position. Sometimes the mountaintop seems nearby; then, as we approach it, we discover the mountain is much bigger than it seemed from lower down. This mountain climb may take a lifetime of hard labor; some say many lifetimes.
- Another way to view the challenge is as a puzzle to be solved. If we could only find the key, it would open for us the door to realization. No need for one to climb or move mountains. One needs only constantly be alert for some clue, attentive for some hint – which may fleetingly come from anywhere[134]. If we spot it somehow, a veil

[134] This is the proactive spirit of *koan* meditation, advocated by the Rinzai Zen school, as opposed to the more "passive" looking *zazen* meditation, advocated by Soto school. The latter,

> will be lifted and all will become clear right where we stand. The mountain will instantly disappear, and we will suddenly find ourselves at its central axis (just like someone at the top). There is no climbing to do; the job requires detective work.

Of course, both perspectives are true and worth keeping in mind. The long-term climb seems to be our common lot; but it is our common hope to somehow immediately pierce through the mystery of existence. The latter is not so much a shortcut on the way up, as a cutting through and dissolving of the underlying illusions. Moreover, the theater of our search for insight is not so much "out there" as "in here".

Another distinction to note is that between temporary/partial and permanent/full realization. On the way to complete realization, one may momentarily experience glimpses of it. Such fortunate foretastes of heaven do not however count as realization in a strict sense. One is only truly realized when one is irreversibly installed in such experience.

With regard to terminology, note that the terms realization, enlightenment, liberation, and (the attainment of) wisdom, are in practice mostly used interchangeably, because one cannot attain any one aspect of this event without the others. Sometimes, realization (etc.) is written with a capital letter (Realization), to distinguish complete and definitive from partial or temporary realization. Usually, the context makes clear which variant is intended.

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which would be classified in the preceding paradigm of mountain climbing, is of course in fact not as passive as it would seem to the onlooker.

Another term commonly used for realization is '**awakening**'. This term suggests that our existence as ordinarily experienced is like a dream – a dream of problems that cannot be solved from within the dream, but only by getting completely out of the state of sleep. I have experienced such dreams occasionally: I was somehow cornered in a very difficult situation and could imagine no way out of it, no winning scenario; so (realizing I must be dreaming), I simply willed myself out of sleep[135], solving the problem in a radical manner.

To the person who has just awoken, the world within the dream, with all its seemingly inescapable difficulties, permanently loses all importance, instantly becoming nothing worth getting concerned with anymore. This metaphor illustrates how spiritual awakening is more than a set of ad hoc solutions to the problems of ordinary existence: it is a general solution that cuts through the illusions and takes us straight to the underlying reality. This image makes realization easier to conceive.

## 2. The Individual Self in Monism

Granting the Monist thesis briefly described (in the preceding chapters of *Meditations*), we can understand that our respective apparent individual selves, whether they are viewed as souls (entities with a spiritual substance distinct from mind and matter) or as something altogether non-

[135] The experience may be compared to being at some depth underwater, and deliberately swimming up to the surface.

substantial (as Buddhism suggests), have a relative mode of existence in comparison to the Soul of God (in Monotheistic religions), or to the underlying Original Ground of such being or the Tao (in competing doctrines).

If our selves are relative to some absolute Self (or a "Non-self", in Buddhism), they are *illusory*. In what sense, illusory? We might say that the illusion consists in artificially differentiating the particular out of the Universal – i.e. it consists in a para-cognitive somewhat arbitrary act of ***individuation***. Apparently, then, tiny fractions of the original Totality have given themselves the false impression of being cut off from their common Source. They (that is, we all) have lost touch with their true Identity, and become confused by their limited viewpoint into believing themselves to have a *separate identity*.[136]

To illustrate the illusoriness of individuation, we can point to waves in a body of water. A wave is evidently one with the body of water, yet we artificially mentally outline it and conventionally distinguish it, then we give it a name "the wave" and treat it as something else than the water. *There is indeed a bump in the water; but in reality, the boundaries we assign it are arbitrary.* Similarly, goes the argument, with all things material, mental or spiritual.

The **Buddhist** thesis on this topic is generally claimed to differ somewhat, considering that all empirical appearances

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[136] Rather than suggest like Bishop Berkeley that we are ideas in the mind of God, the viewpoint here advocated is that we are, as it were, ideas in our own minds. God invented us, yes, and allowed for our seeming individuation; but He has no illusions about our separateness. It is we, in our limited and therefore warped perspective, who misperceive ourselves as individuals.

of selfhood are phenomenal, and nothing but phenomenal. And since phenomena are impermanent like wisps of smoke – arising (we know not whence – thus, from nowhere), abiding only temporarily, all the while changing in many ways, and finally disappearing (we know not wither – thus, to nowhere) – we may not assume any constancy behind or beneath them. Our particular self is thus empty of any substance; and similarly, there is no universal Soul.

This thesis is of course sufficiently empirical with regard to the fact of impermanence of phenomena; but (in my view) there is a conceptual loophole in it. We can point out that it rejects any idea of underlying constancy without sufficient justification (i.e. by way of a *non-sequitur*); and we can advocate instead an underlying substance (material, mental or spiritual), with equally insufficient justification, or maybe more justification (namely, that this helps explain more things).[137]

Furthermore, we may, and I think logically must, admit that we are aware of our selves, not only through perception of outer and inner phenomena, but also through another direct kind of cognition, which we may call 'intuition', of *non-phenomenal* aspects. There is no reason to suppose offhand only phenomenal aspects exist and are directly cognizable. Indeed, we must admit intuition, to explain how we know what we have perceived, willed or valued *in particular cases*. Conceptual means *cannot* entirely explain such particulars; they can only yield generalities.

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[137] We shall further debate the issue of impermanence later on in *Meditations*.

Thus, while understanding and respecting the Buddhist non-self doctrine, I personally prefer to believe in the spirituality of the individual self and in God. I may additionally propose the following arguments. To start with, these ideas (of soul and God) do not logically exclude, but *include* the notion of "emptiness"; i.e. it remains true that particular souls and the universal Soul *cannot* be reduced to phenomenal experiences.

Moreover, Monotheism is logically more convincing, because the Buddhist thesis takes for granted without further ado something that the God thesis makes an effort to explain. The manifest facts of consciousness, volition and valuation in us, i.e. in seemingly finite individuals, remain unexplained in Buddhism, whereas in the Monotheistic thesis the personal powers of individuals are thought to stem from the like powers of God. That is, since finite souls are (ultimately illusory) fractions of God, their powers of cognition, freewill, and valuing (though proportionately finite) derive from the same powers (on an infinitely grander scale) in the overall Soul, i.e. God.

In truth, Buddhists could retort that though this argument *reduces* the three human powers to the corresponding (greater) powers of God, it leaves unexplained the existence of these same powers in Him. They are derivatives in humans, all right, but still primaries in God.

Yes, but a distinction remains. Monotheism views the ultimate Source as having a personality, whereas for Buddhism, the Original Ground is impersonal. For the former, there is a "Who", while for the latter, only a "What" if anything at all. It seems improbable (to me, at least) that a person would derive from a non-person. Rather, the particular

soul has to have this sense of personal identity in the way of a reflection of the universal soul's personality.

But in truth, we can still intellectually reconcile the two doctrines, if we admit that such arguments are finally just verbal differentiations and that we should rather stress their convergences and complementarities.[138]

In any case, the apparent meditative success of Buddhists does not logically exclude the logical possibility that their doctrine denying soul and God may well be an error of interpretation – since other religions also report meditative successes although they resorted to other interpretations. If we generously accept all or most such human claims at their face value, we logically have to conclude that ***correct interpretation is not necessary for meditative success***.

This suggests that meditation is ultimately independent of doctrinal quarrels. Competing, even conflicting, doctrines may be equally helpful – depending on cultural or personal context. Therefore, meditation is ultimately a pragmatic issue; it does not need particular dogmas to yield its results. Whatever your religious preference, or lack of it, just add one ingredient – meditation; this single measure will over time naturally perform wonders anyway.

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[138] Needless to say, I do not intend this statement as a blanket approval, condoning all beliefs and practices included in practice under the heading of Buddhism. I have in past works for instance voiced my reserves regarding the worship directed at statues (idolatry). Even from a Buddhist point of view, this is a weird and spiritually obstructive practice (since it involves mental projection of "selfhood" into purely physical bodies). Moreover, I do not see how this can be an improvement on the worship of God. If devotion is a good thing, surely the latter is its best expression.

The modern **Secularist** denial of spiritual substance (a soul in humans and God) can be depicted as follows. We are in this case dealing with a materialist philosophy, which grants solid reality only to the phenomenal (and conceptual inferences from it). The material phenomenon is regarded as exclusive of any other, although if pressed secularists will acknowledge some sort of additional, mental substance, imagined as a sort of cloud of "consciousness" hovering in the heads of certain material entities (i.e. at least humans and possibly higher animals).

This substance is conceived as a sort of epiphenomenon of specific combinations of matter (namely, those making up a live human body, and in particular its neurological system). They effectively consider mind as a rarified sort of matter. The proponents of this thesis make no clear distinction between the stuff of memories, dreams and imaginings, on the one hand, and the one experiencing these inner phenomena and indeed (via the senses) outer phenomena, on the other. And therefore, they reject all notion of an additional spiritual substance or soul as the essence of self.

This philosophy can thus be doubted on two grounds. Firstly, it fails to clearly and honestly analyze mental experience and draw the necessary conclusions from such analysis. Notably missing is the distinction between the intuited "cognizing, willing and valuing self" and his (or her) "perceived mental (and sensory) experiences", i.e. the distinction between soul and mind within the psyche. Secondly, while secularism does tend to monism in respect of matter, it refuses a similar monist extrapolation with respect to souls, and so denies God.

Today's Secularists of course pose as "scientists"[139], and by this means give their doctrine prestige among non-philosophers and superficial philosophers. But this stance is not scientific, in the strict sense of the term. *Physical science has to date not produced a single mathematical formula showing the reducibility of life, mind, consciousness, or spirit/soul to matter.* Materialists just *presume* that such a universal reductive formula will "someday" be shown possible. Maybe so; but until that day, they cannot logically rely on their presumption as if it were established fact.

They *think* their materialism is "sure" to be eventually proved all-inclusive – but this expectation and hope of theirs has for the moment, to repeat, no scientific justification whatsoever! It is just a figment of their imagination, an act of faith, a mere hypothetical postulate. Secularism is thus *just another religion*, not an exclusive inference from Science.

*"Science" is entirely defined by rigor in cognitive method, without prejudice. It demands all available data be taken into consideration by our theories, and duly explained by these theories*. Genuine philosophers are not intimidated by the intellectual thuggery of those who pretend that science is exclusively materialist.

In the case of the Materialist theory, the evident data of life, mind, consciousness and spirit or soul has hardly even been

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[139] Some are indeed scientists – in their specific field, such as Physics. But this does not entitle them to a free ride in the general field of Philosophy. I am thinking here of Hubert Reeves, who appears on TV claiming atheism as incontrovertible fact, as if any other view is simply unthinkable. Laypersons should not confuse his prestige and media-presence with logical confirmation of his view. The underlying fallacy is *ad hominem* argument.

acknowledged by its advocates, let alone taken into consideration. It has simply been ignored, swept under the carpet, by them. That is not science – it is sophistry. What is speculative must be admitted to be such. And two speculations that equally fit available data are on the same footing as regards the judgment of science.

# 19. CHAPTER NINETEEN

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapters 12-14.

## 1. Distinguishing the Ego

The self was above defined – from a philosophical perspective – as *the apparent Subject of cognition and Agent of volition and valuation*. But – in common parlance – most people identify themselves with much more than this minimal definition. To clarify things, it is therefore useful to distinguish two meanings of the term.

In its purest sense, the term self refers to what is usually called the soul or person. In a colloquial sense, the term is broader, including what intellectuals refer to as "the **ego**". The latter term – again from a philosopher's point of view – refers to the material and mental phenomena, which indeed seem rightly *associated with* our self, but which we wrongly tend to *identify with* it. Thus, by the term ego we shall mean all aspects of one's larger self *other than* one's soul; i.e. all extraneous aspects of experience, commonly misclassified as part of oneself.

This is just a way to recognize and emphasize that we commonly make errors of identification as to what constitutes

the self[140]. If we try to develop a coherent philosophical system, looking at the issues with a phenomenological eye, we must admit the self in the sense of soul (i.e. Subject/Agent) as the core sense of the term. The latter is a non-phenomenal entity, quite distinct from any of the material and mental phenomena people commonly regard as themselves.

We tend to regard our body, including its sensory and motor faculties, as our self, or at least as part of it. But many parts of our body can be incapacitated or detached, and we still remain present. And, conversely, our nervous system may be alive and well, but we are absent from it. So, it is inaccurate to identify our self with our body.

Nevertheless, we are justified in associating our self with our body, because we evidently have a special relationship to it: we have more input from it and more power over it than we do in relation to any other body. Our life takes shape within the context of this body. For this reason, we call it 'our' body, implying possession or delimitation.

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[140] The word 'ego' originally, in Latin, meant 'I'. Nowadays, in English, it is commonly understood in the pejorative sense used by me in the present essay. I do not subscribe to the sense used in psychoanalytic theory, which presents the ego as a segment of the psyche "mediating between the person and reality". Such a notion is to me conceptually incoherent, since it ascribes a separate personality (i.e. selfhood) to this alleged segment, since to "mediate" anything implies having cognitive, volitional and evaluative powers. The ego of psychoanalysts involves a circularity, since it raises the question: who or what is mediating between the person and reality, and on what basis? The common sense of 'ego' is, I would say, closer semantically to the 'id' of psychoanalysis.

With regard to the mind, a similar analysis leads to the same conclusion. By ‘mind’, note well, I mean only the apparent mental *phenomena* of memory and imagination (reshufflings of memories), which seem to resemble and emerge from the material phenomena apparently experienced through the body (including the body itself, of course). Mind is not a Subject, but a mere (non-physical) Object; a mind has no consciousness of its own, only a Subject has consciousness.

This limited sense of mind is not to be confused with a larger sense commonly intended by the term, which would include what we have here called soul. I consider this clarification of the word mind very important, because philosophies “of mind” in which this term is loosely and ambiguously used are bound to be incoherent[141].

The term I use for the conjunction of soul and mind is ‘psyche’. Of course, below the psyche, at an unconscious level, lies the brain or central nervous system, which plays a strong role in the production of mental events, although it is not classed as part of the psyche but as *part of the body*. Some of the items we refer to as ‘mind’ should properly be called brain.

> The term “unconscious mind”, note well, refers to *potential* (but not currently actual) *items of consciousness stored in the brain* (and possibly the wider nervous system); for example, potential memories. Such items are called mind, only insofar as they might eventually appear as mental objects of

[141] Equivocal use of the term mind leads some philosophers into syllogistic reasoning involving the Fallacy of Four Terms, in which the middle term has different senses in the major and minor premises, so that the conclusion is invalid.

> consciousness; but strictly speaking, they ought not be called mind. The term "unconscious mind" is moreover an imprecision of language in that the mind is never conscious of anything – it is we, the Subjects, who are conscious of mental items (mental equivalents of sensory phenomena, as well as ideas and emotions).

Thus, mind refers to a collection of evanescent phenomena, without direct connection between them, which succeed each other in our 'mind's eye' (and/or 'mind's ear') but which lack mental continuity, their only continuity being presumably their emergence from the same underlying material brain. The mind cannot be identified with the self, simply because mental events are experienced as mere objects of consciousness and will, and not as the Subject and Agent of such psychical events. Moreover, the mind may momentarily stop displaying sights or sounds without our sense of self disappearing.

Nevertheless, our mind is ours alone. Only we directly experience what goes on in it and only we have direct power over its fantasies. Even if someday scientists manage to look into other people's private minds and find ways to affect their contents, one person remains in a privileged relationship to each mind. It is therefore proper to call our minds 'ours', just as we call our bodies 'ours'.

Thus, the self, in the colloquial sense, is a collection of three things: soul, mind and body – i.e. spiritual, mental and material experiences. But upon reflection, only the soul counts as self proper – the ego, comprising mind and body, is indeed during our whole lifetime "associated with" our strict self (that is, soul), but it should not be "identified with" that

self. The ego is merely an appendage to the self or soul, something ‘accidental’ (or at best ‘incidental’) to it.

However, this should not be taken to mean that the soul has no share in the ego. Many of the physical and mental traits that comprise the ego are at least in part due to past choices and actions of the soul. The soul is thus somewhat responsible for much of the ego; the latter is in effect a cumulative expression of the former. Some people have big, mean egos, to their discredit; others have smaller, nicer egos, to their credit. Moreover, the soul tends to function in the context of the ego or what it perceives as the ego.

In more narrow psychological terms, the ego is a particular self-image one finds motives for constructing and clinging onto. It is a mental construct composed of images selectively drawn from one’s body and mind – some based on fact, some imaginary. Compared to the real state of affairs, this self-image might be inflationary (flattering, pretentious) or it might be depreciative (undemanding, self-pitying). Ideally, of course, one’s self-image ought to be realistic; i.e. one must at all times strive to be lucid.

## 2. Dismissing the Ego

On a practical level, such insights mean that what we regard as our “personal identity” has to be by and by clarified. We gradually, especially with the help of meditation, realize the disproportionate attention our material and mental experiences receive, and the manipulations we subject them to.

Because of the multiplicity and intensity of our sensory and mental impressions, we all from our birth onwards confuse ourselves with the phenomena impinging upon us. Because they shout so loudly, dance about us so flashily, weigh upon us so heavily, we think our experiences of body and mind are all there is, and we identify with them. To complicate matters further, such self-identification is selective and often self-delusive.

It takes an effort to step back, and realize that body and mind phenomena are just fleeting appearances, and that our self is not the phenomena but the one experiencing them. Even though this self is non-phenomenal (call it a soul, or what you will), it must be put back in the equation. *We may associate ourselves with our bodily and mental phenomena, but we must not identify with them*. There is no denying our identity happens to currently be intimately tied up with a certain body, mind, social milieu, etc. – but this does not make these things one and the same with us.

Gradually, it becomes clear that our personal confusion with these relatively external factors of our existence is a cause of many of the difficulties in our relation to life. We become attached to our corporeality or psychology, or to vain issues of social position, and become ignorant as to who (and more deeply, Who) we really are.

To combat such harmful illusions, and see things as they really are, one has to "work on oneself". One must try and diminish the influence of the ego.

Specifically, one has to overcome the tendencies of egotism and egoism. Egotism refers to the esthetic side of the ego, i.e. to our narcissistic concerns with appearance and position, our

yearning for admiration and superiority and our fear of contempt and inferiority. Egoism refers to the ethical side of the ego, i.e. to our material and intellectual acquisitiveness and protectionism.

The issue is one of degree. A minimum of self-love and selfishness may be biologically necessary and normal, but an excess of those traits are certainly quite poisonous to one's self and to others. Much daily suffering ensues from unchecked ego concerns. Egotism produces constant vexation and resentment, while egoism leads to all sorts of anxieties and sorrows.

On this point, all traditions agree: no great spiritual attainment is possible without conquest of egocentricity. Self-esteem and self-confidence are valuable traits, but one must replace conceit with modesty and arrogance with humility. Meditation can help us tremendously in this daunting task.

Of course, *it is none other than the self (i.e. soul) who is egocentric!* The ego is not some other entity in competition with the soul in a divided self, a "bad guy" to pour blame on. We have no one to blame for our psychological failings other than our soul, whose will is essentially free. ***The ego has no consciousness or will of its own: it has no selfhood.***

The ego indeed *seems to* be a competing self, because – and only so long as and to the extent that – we (our self or soul) identify with it. It is like an inanimate mask, which is given an illusion of life when we confuse our real face with it. But we should not be deluded: it is we who are alive, not the mask.

Rather, the body and mind (i.e. the factors making up the ego) are mechanistic domains that strongly *influence* the soul

is sometimes negative ways. They produce natural inclinations like hunger for food or the sex drive or yearning for social affiliation, which are sometimes contrary to the higher interests of the soul. For this reason, we commonly regard our spiritual life as a struggle against our ego inclinations.

Not all ego inclinations are natural. Many of the things we think we need are in fact quite easy to do without. As we commonly say: “It’s all in the mind”. In today’s world, we might often add: “It is just media hype” for ultimately commercial or political purposes. People make mountains out of molehills. For example, some think they cannot make it through the day without a smoke or a drink, when in fact it is not only easy to do without such drugs but one feels much better without them.

Often, natural inclinations are used as pretexts for unnatural inclinations. For example, if one distinguishes between natural sensations of hunger in the belly and the mental desire to titillate one’s taste buds, one can considerably reduce one’s intake of calories and avoid getting painfully fat. Similarly, the natural desire for sex for reproductive purposes and as an expression of love should not be confused with the physical lusts encouraged by the porno industry, which have devastating spiritual consequences.

Thus, the struggle against ego inclinations ought not be presented as a struggle against nature – it is rather mostly a fight against illusions of value, against foolishness. It is especially unnatural tendencies people adopt or are made to adopt that present a problem. It is this artificial aspect of ego that is most problematic. And the first victory in this battle is the realization: “this is not me or mine”.

Once one ceases to confuse oneself with the ego, once one ceases to regard its harmful inclinations as one's own, it becomes much easier to neutralize it. There is hardly any need to "fight" negative influences – one can simply ignore them as disturbances powerless to affect one's chosen course of action. The ego need not be suppressed – it is simply seen as irrelevant. It is defeated by the mere disclosure of its essential feebleness.

Meditation teaches this powerful attitude of *equanimity*. One sits (and eventually goes through life) watching disturbances come and go, unperturbed, free of all their push and pull. The soul remains detached, comfortable in its nobility, finding no value in impure forces and therefore thoroughly uninfluenced by them.

This should not, of course, be another "ego trip". It is not a role one is to play, self-deceitfully feeding one's vanity. On the contrary, one experiences such meditation as "self-effacement" or "self-abnegation", as if one has become transparent to the disturbances, as if one is no longer there to be affected by them.

This is, more precisely put, ego-dismissal, since one has ceased to identify with the forces inherent in the ego. Such dismissal should not, of course, be confused with evasion. It is abandonment of the foolish psychological antics – but this implies being very watchful, so as to detect and observe them when they occur.

There is no need for difficult ascetic practices. One has to just become more aware and sincerely committed; then one can nimbly dodge or gently deflect negative tendencies that may

appear. Being profoundly at peace, one is not impressed by them and has no personal interest in them.

Many people devote much time and effort to helping other people out materially or educationally. This is rightly considered as an efficient way to combat self-centeredness, although one should always remain alert to the opportunities for hidden egotism and egoism such pursuits offer.

Granting Monism as the true philosophy, it would seem logical to advocate 'altruism' as the ultimate ethical behavior. However, this moral standard is often misunderstood to mean looking out for the interests of others while ignoring one's own interests. Such a position would be simplistic if not dishonest. If we are all one, the all-one includes and does not exclude oneself.

Thus, I would say that whilst altruistic behavior is highly commendable and admirable, working on oneself first and foremost would seem a very necessary adjunct and precondition. Conceivably, when one reaches full realization, one can pretty well forget oneself altogether and devote oneself entirely to others – but until then one must pay some attention to one's legitimate needs, if only because one is best placed to do so.

## 3. Relief from Suffering

Many people look to meditation as a momentary oasis of peace, a refuge from the hustle and bustle of the world, a remedy against the stresses and strains of everyday living. They use it in order to get a bit of daily peace and calm, to

get 'centered' again and recover self-control, so as to better cope with their lives. Even so, if they practice it regularly, over a long enough period, for enough time daily, they are sure to discover anyway its larger, more radical spiritual benefits.

One general goal of meditation we have not so far mentioned is relief from suffering. We all to varying degrees, at various times of our lives, experience suffering – and nobody really likes it[142]. The wish to avoid or rid oneself of suffering is often the primary impulse or motive for meditation, before we develop a broader perspective (like "spiritual development", for instance) relating to this practice.

Thus, "liberation" is often taken to at first mean "liberation from suffering", before it is understood as "liberation from restraints on the will". These two interpretations are not as opposed as they might seem, because suffering is *a negative influence on volition*, so when we free ourselves of the former, we experience the latter's release. Contentment, the antithesis of suffering, implies a smoothly flowing life.

> The relation between meditation and relief from suffering is not always simple and direct. Although it is true that over time meditation renders one immune to many disturbances, it may first for awhile make us much more sensitive to them[143]. When we are more

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[142] Not even masochists, who use one kind of pain as a palliative against another kind of pain. For instance, they might pursue physical pain to avoid having to face some sense of guilt or to forget some unpleasant childhood experience.

[143] A meditator may barely notice a sudden loud noise like an explosion, yet find "music" like rock or techno (with very few mellow exceptions) utterly unbearable! In contrast to a non-meditator, who

> unconscious, our faculties function in coarser ways, so we feel less. As we refine our faculties, and become more conscious, we naturally feel more clearly. For this reason, a meditator may even on occasion find inner peace a bit scary and build a resistance to it, like someone who gingerly avoids a surface he suspects has a static electricity charge[144]. Peace, too, takes getting used to.

Suffering should not be confused with pain, but rather refers to our psychological response to feelings of pain. Some people cannot handle felt pain at all; whereas some, though they feel the same pain, do not take it to heart as much. Moreover, suffering refers not only to experienced pain, but may refer to lack of pleasure; i.e. to the frustration of not getting pleasure one wished for or expected, or of having lost pleasure one had for a while.

All this of course concerns mental as well as bodily pain or pleasure. Pain or pleasure may be felt as a purely physical sensation (e.g. a burnt finger or a pang of hunger); or as a visceral sentiment occurring in the body but having a mental cause (e.g. cold fear in the belly or warm love in the chest); or again, as a purely mental experience (e.g. a vague feeling of depression or elation).

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might jump up with fright at the explosion, yet find supermarket canned music relaxing.

[144] Such resistance has been called “the dread of enlightenment”. In fact, most people who have heard of meditation but have never dared to try it have this dread. They think that they will somehow get lost and drowned in the sea of enlightenment. Indeed, they will do so – in the sense that they will lose their individuality. But what must be understood is that this prospect is not frightful but cause for elation.

Suffering primarily refers to actual pain; but it often refers to remembered or anticipated pains. For example, one may suffer for years over a bad childhood experience; or again, one may suffer much in anticipation of a big and difficult job one has to do soon. Suffering can also relate to abstract or conceptual things, whether past, present or future. For example, one might suffer at the general injustice of life. In all such cases, however, some present concrete negative feelings are felt, and the suffering may be taken to refer to them.

Buddhist teaching has the fact of human suffering at its center. This is made evident in the Four Noble Truths taught by the founder of this religion, viz.: (1) that life is suffering, i.e. that suffering of some kind or another is inevitable in the existence of sentient beings like ourselves; (2) that such suffering has a cause, namely our *attachments* to things of this world, our desire for pleasures and aversion to pains; (3) that we can be rid of suffering, if we rid ourselves of its cause (attachment); and finally, that the way to be rid of suffering is through the Eightfold Path.

The latter list of means includes meditation, as a very effective tool for discovering one's attachments and the ways to break away from our addiction to them. Just as soon as one begins to practice meditation, one discovers its power to make us relatively indifferent to pain or lack of pleasure – i.e. to make us suffer less readily and intensely.[145]

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[145] In yoga, they teach an attitude called *pratyahara*, which consists in focusing clearly on pain one is feeling, calmly assessing its exact extent and intensity; after awhile, a pain thus stared at tends to disappear or at least it feels less urgent. This is, then, a

Buddhists argue, additionally, that the ultimate obstacle to freedom from suffering is belief in a self – for to have a self is to have *particular interests*, and therefore to experience pain when these interests are frustrated (as is inevitable sooner or later) and pleasure when they are (momentarily) satisfied. It follows, in their view, that liberation from suffering (the third Noble Truth) would not be conceivable, if the "emptiness" of the self were not advocated. For only a 'non-self' can be free from the blows inherent to an impermanent world like ours.

However, I beg to differ from this doctrine, not to categorically reject it, but to point out that an alternative doctrine is equally possible. We could equally argue, from a Monotheistic point of view, that when the individual soul dissolves back in the universal Soul, which is God, it is conceivably free from all subjection to the vagaries of this material-mental world. The illusion of individuation, rather than the alleged illusion of selfhood, may be considered a sufficient cause of liability to suffering; and the removal of this cause may suffice to remove suffering.

Again I emphasize: the debate about the self is theoretical and does not (in my view) affect the effectiveness of meditation.

The practical lesson to draw from the Buddhist teaching is the importance of 'attachment' in human psychology. This realization, that the root of suffering is the pursuit of supposed pleasures, or avoidance of pains, is central. Anxiety, frustration, vexation, anger, disappointment,

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sort of detachment from or transcendence of pain – not through avoiding it, but by facing it.

depression – such emotions are inevitable under the regime of attachment, in view of the impermanence of all mundane values.

If worldly pleasure of any sort is pursued, pain is sure to eventually ensue. If the pursuit of pleasure is successful, such success is necessarily short-lived, and one is condemned to protect existing pleasure or pursue pleasure again, or one will feel pain at one's loss. If the pursuit of pleasure is unsuccessful, one experiences the pain of not having gotten what one wanted, and one is condemned to keep trying again and again till successful. Similarly, the avoidance of pain is a full time job with no end in sight – a pain in itself.[146]

It is therefore wise to steer clear of attachment, and develop a more aloof approach to the lower aspects of life. This not only saves one from eventual suffering, but releases one's energies for the pursuit of lasting spiritual values.

Meditation helps us (the self, the soul) to objectify and thus transcend the feelings experienced in body and mind. This can be understood by contrasting two propositional forms:

(a) "I feel [this or that feeling]", and

(b) "I am experiencing [having a certain body-mind feeling]".

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[146] Suffering takes many intricate or convoluted forms. Consider for instance the frustration of a rich man, who already has everything he could possibly need or want, and so finds nothing new to spend his money on. He is not free of material attachments, he has the necessary material means, but the world has nothing more or new to offer him. This is a danger of riches – because the tendency in such situations is to turn to new, more and more perverse, sensations.

These two sentences might be considered superficially equivalent – but their different structure is intended to highlight important semantic differences. In (a), the subject "I" is a vague term, and the verb and its complement are taken at face value. In (b), the subject "I" is a more specific term, and the verb and complement are intended with more discrimination.

In (a), the subject considers the act of feeling a feeling as its own act, an extension of itself. In (b), the subject lays claim only to the cognitive fact of experiencing, considering all else as mere object relative to this exclusively cognitive act. The sense of "I" is therefore clearly different in the two sentences: in (a), the ego is meant, whereas in (b) it is the self or soul that is meant.

This is to illustrate that to transcend feelings, we have to objectify them, and more precisely identify our "I" or self with our spiritual dimension (or soul) rather than with our body and mind.

# 20. CHAPTER TWENTY

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapters 15 & 16.

## 1. Taking Up the Challenge

People without a spiritual life are comparable to walking dead; they are like busy empty shells. They have a body and mind, for which they work in many ways; but it is as if they have no soul, since they devote almost no energy to it. It is only when one lives a spiritual life, a life filled with more and more spiritual concerns, that one can be truly said to be alive. Try it, and you will understand.

Once one has desired and resolved to attain one's fullest potential realization[147], one should go about doing whatever is necessary or useful to that end, and not dither or indulge in conflicting or useless pursuits. One should strive with determination, intelligence and discipline.

The seeker has to take personal responsibility for his or her enlightenment and liberation. Do be open to and indeed look for spiritual guidance, but fundamentally be your own "guru" (wise teacher).

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147 A posture Buddhists call "*boddhicitta*".

It is important to realize that life is short and the work to be done is long. When one is young, one generally has the impression that there is plenty of time left to one to do what has to be done, and one thinks one has time to indulge a little (or a lot). As one passes middle age, and looks back, one realizes how quickly time flies and how much time one wasted for nothing worth anything. And as one reaches an older age, one is very sorry one did not make the required effort when one was younger and much stronger.

And of course, none of us knows how quickly he or she will die. It could be today, tomorrow, this week, this month, this year, within a few years… no one knows. We are all like a flower: first a bud, then a fresh, tender unfolding of beauty, then we wither away, never to be seen again.

A good image of the spiritualizing process is that of a baby in the womb. The womb symbolizes 'this world' (i.e. the material world), and outside the womb is 'the next world' (i.e. the spiritual world). Just as a baby in the womb gradually forms and grows, in preparation for its exit into a more independent existence, so does our spiritual work prepare us for 'death' from this world and 'birth' in the next one. Spirituality facilitates our transition.

With regard to the quality of volitional response required, a general recommendation I would make is: rather use "smooth will" than "rough will". Our will is rough when we try to use "force" to effect change, i.e. when we act in a relatively unconscious manner, without accurate aim, wasting energy. Smooth will is the opposite approach – it is "thoughtful", quiet strength, masterfully applied how, where and when appropriate, for as long as necessary.

> We can illustrate the difference with reference to fighting. The less experienced fighter throws punches wildly, blindly, hoping one will perchance land successfully. The winning fighter calmly waits for an actual opening, and aims his blows precisely; he sticks to his opponent and shoves him off with just the required amount of power, following up on his advance till the job is fully done.

I do not propose to write a guidebook for spiritual seekers. I do not consider myself sufficiently qualified. I would just be repeating what many other people have said or written in all the traditions. Moreover, there is so much to say, so many details to mention, that the task is in truth infinite.

Nevertheless, I would like to make some remarks relevant to the current cultural situation. Present-day society, under the influence of educators, media and politicians who pander to the lowest impulses of people, has swerved very visibly (in the space of my own lifetime) to the side of utter shallowness and moronic hedonism. I would like to here respond to some aspects of this onslaught, and offer readers some advice.

Whoever is sincerely interested in meditation, has to adopt a lifestyle favorable to it. This may not be found easy at first. There are many bad habits to break, but with sustained intelligent effort, it is quite feasible.

In fact, little effort is necessary other than continued, regular meditation practice – more and more daily. Because, as one advances in meditation, one's behavior tends to naturally align itself with the level of consciousness it produces. Things that seemed valuable before simply cease to impress us so much, and they fall by the wayside by themselves.

Still, some personal determination is needed – or one risks losing the treasure of meditation. One has to have character to move forward.

## 2. Face Facts with Equanimity

A first step in spiritual work is to look upon one's present "life situation" as a given – i.e. to accept it as stands, without whining and complaining as to how "the cards were dealt out". This is not an attitude of fatalism, because the intent is to improve on that situation. It is just a realization that any situation one finds oneself in at any time is mere landscape, mere theatrical *décor* around the play of one's life, which is essentially an *internal* play. Things and people around one are only stage sets and supporting cast – the inner drama is what counts.

In particular, one should not allow oneself to be distracted or distressed by people and events in the surrounding world one perceives as stupid or evil, to the extent that one's spiritual work is considerably hampered or blocked. Meditation requires and fosters equanimity and serenity; if this is indifference, it is born of perspective rather than narrow-mindedness. If we were in "nirvana" instead of "samsara", there would be no need for spiritual development.

It is silly to waste precious time and energy on resentment. We have to view the world we happen to find ourselves in as a given – *this world is by its very nature* (as a multiplex, with changing and interacting particulars) *an imperfect world with imperfect people*. It is useless to get sad or angry at situations or people; things and people are what they are. Once these

facts are acknowledged and accepted, rather than evaded or rejected, one can begin to act (mostly on oneself) to change things for the better.

Whatever one's situation – whether one is healthy or sick, surrounded or alone, free or enslaved, rich or poor, employed or jobless, married or single, etc., etc. – one will always be called upon by life to exercise certain virtues, like courage, effort, perseverance, purity, strength, kindness, integrity, and so on. A rich person seems to have it easier than a poor one – but poverty may in fact facilitate certain virtues whereas riches make them more remote; similarly, in all other cases.

Life makes the same *moral demands* on all of us, and changing the surrounding scenery makes no difference to the basic challenge involved. It is useless to shake one's fist at God, or to envy or blame other people, for one's present condition. One should regard one's current situation (whatever it be) as *the best possible context and framework* for the virtues one spiritually needs to exercise right now.

One must see that the situation one happens to be in provides the ideal opportunity for the currently needed virtues. One can view it as "God's will" or as "one's karma"; but in any case, as the best place to be for one's spiritual progress. With this realization, one can face one's situation with gratitude and optimism, and deal with its difficulties with energy and even relish.

> I recently had a very strong direct experience of detachment. It was after a full day of fasting and prayer (Yom Kippur), including periods of meditation. I stood in my room in the half-light coming from the window, realizing that all things and

> events can be compared to furniture laid out in a room. All experiences, whether good or bad, pleasant or painful, can indeed be viewed as mere parts of the scenery, without attachment or self-identification. Whatever you come across, you can take in stride, just as you walk around furniture.

Face every situation in your life with equanimity. Face the facts – and put the emphasis on solutions, rather than on problems. There is never any justification for feeling overwhelmed by the tasks at hand: deal with one task at a time, and all the work gets done. Keep bouncing back no matter what difficulties arise; resilience is the mark of liveliness, the will to live.

There is no doubt that will is continuously called for in the course of meditation – at the physical, mental and spiritual levels. In sitting meditations, we have to sit down and stay put, controlling our posture, directing our attention. In moving meditations (such as yoga or tai chi), likewise, we have to make the appropriate moves, at the appropriate rates, with appropriate attention. We have to develop the right attitudes, direct and intensify our awareness, detach from our passions, be patiently mindful, and so on.

All this implies volition, although not always in the simple sense of "forcing oneself to do" something, but usually in a more refined and precise manner. Gradually, as one's discipline develops, one finds it easy to do the right things at the right time, seemingly without effort.

# 21. CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapters 17-19.

## 1. Stop Substance Addictions

Meditation is all about getting to "know yourself" – your body, mind and soul. Almost as soon as you start meditating, you realize that you want to know yourself as you basically are – and *not* yourself as modified by various substances.

In this matter, there is no difference between substance use and abuse. Any quantity that has a noticeable effect, whether it is harmful or indifferent to physical health, is too much for meditators.

If you take drugs, such as psychotropic chemicals[148], marijuana, tobacco or alcohol, or even coffee, occasionally or regularly, in small or large quantities, whatever your pretext or excuse – both your mind and your body are necessarily affected.

If you are having a meditative experience, and you have recently taken some substance, you will naturally wonder

[148] Heroin, Opium, LSD, Cocaine, Crack, Speed, Ecstasy, etc.

whether what you are currently experiencing is “for real” or just an effect of it.

If the experience is negative, you are clearly being shown the need to stop taking such substances. If the experience is positive, ask yourself whether you are satisfied with kidding yourself that you are on a spiritual level worthy of such experience or you will henceforth demand of yourself “the real thing”.

On a mental level, then, even if the effect of substances seems or feels good, it is bad. From the meditative point of view, there is no profit in it, only loss; it is not a shortcut to spiritual experience, but a constant hindrance.

On a physical level, too, whatever the substance you indulge in, it is sure to retard your progress in meditation. For instance, so long as you smoke grass, hash or tobacco, you cannot properly practice meditation on the breath. Or again, if you are drunk or stoned, and try to do yoga or tai chi, you will find your equilibrium and coordination inadequate.

Apart from their direct effects on mind and body, the substances we are discussing here all have nefarious spiritual implications. The very fact of resorting to some sort of substance – whether to palliate one’s life difficulties or out of sheer hedonism – constitutes a spiritual weakness and surrender. Whether such substances are harmful, or merely useless indulgences, with regard to body and mind, the very fact that one has not gotten the matter under control is indicative of a failing of the soul. One has either not reflected sufficiently on the issues involved, or not exercised willpower in accordance with reason.

Spiritual development requires one take full charge of one's life. It is imperative to completely purify oneself of artificial material inputs, as soon as possible. Of course, this cannot always be done in a flash – but it is much easier to do than it seems to be (as one realizes later, looking back). Use every means at your disposal.

There are social services ready to help drug addicts of all kinds. The medical establishment and alternative medicine offer all sorts of solutions to the problems of tobacco and alcohol dependence. Do whatever works for you, but do it! If you are serious about meditation, and refuse to only pretend to meditate, be an absolutist and get rid of all material impediments without delay and forevermore[149].

The practice of some sport(s) is very helpful in this struggle for physical health. When you walk, run, cycle, swim or play ball, you soon see for yourself the negative effects of the use of substances; and when you do stop using them, the love of exercise will remove from you any desire to return to your old ways. Keep meditating all the while, because that will motivate you and show you the way to go.

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[149] A policy of zero tolerance is most likely to succeed in the long run. For instance, an ex-smoker need only smoke one puff of one cigarette to return to his old ways; so, no compromise should be indulged in, not even in imagination, ever. When one is free of such dependence one has no regrets, only a sense of relief, and incredulity that one ever found such a thing at all attractive.

## 2. Don't Stuff Yourself Silly

The use of drugs is but one aspect of a larger vice – that of pursuing sensations. Our bodies and minds are constantly hungering for sensory inputs and outputs – that is their 'nature'. It is their way of self-assertion, their expression of existence. Such sensationalism, let loose unchecked, is bound to debilitate us. Fortunately, we have inner resources that enable us to judge and restrain such tendencies – our reason and willpower.

The main sensuous dependence of many people nowadays (in our rich Western societies) is simply food. Food is of course natural and necessary to our life and health, in reasonable quantities. But some people are munching for much of their waking hours; or, if they manage to limit their eating to regular meals, they eat far more than they need or is good for them.

A full stomach is not conducive to meditation. Energy that is required to focus consciousness is diverted for purposes of digestion. Food is soporific, or at least tiring. For this reason, meditators control their intake of food – not only its quantity and frequency, but also its quality. It is wise to abstain from heavy, difficult to digest foods, for instance. Many opt for vegetarian diets to various degrees.[150]

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[150] One should not of course eat too little, either. This too stresses the body and disturbs meditation.

Sports (if only a bit of daily exercise or walking) are helpful for digestion, as well as to develop resistance and recover fitness. Physical exercise is energizing, raising one's level of alertness during meditation, but one should not get overly excited by it to the point that one cannot calm down. To avoid getting drowsy during meditation, enough (but not too much) regular sleep is necessary.

A good way to reduce one's eating is, paradoxically, to take the time to enjoy it – growing it (if possible) or shopping for it, preparing and cooking it carefully, laying then clearing the table, washing the dishes. Eating then becomes more conscious, in the way of a ritual[151]. Eventually, one finds time to notice the difference between pleasing one's taste buds and satisfying natural hunger.

One gradually realizes the impossibility of ever satiating the hunger for oral sensations, and the need to resist such pseudo-hunger if only to relieve one's body of the stress of incessant digestion, not to mention the accumulation of fat.

All this is of course obvious and generally well known. But one has to actually take control. To do so, one must realize that one *can* indeed readily do so – by looking upon the stirring of desire as something external to oneself, a mere phenomenon that can and does influence one's freewill but cannot overwhelm it.

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[151] Some have called this "slow food", in contradistinction to "fast food".

## 3. Limit Input from the Media

It is nowadays nearly impossible for most of us to avoid influence in one form or another from the various media of communication among human beings. Whereas in times past many people could pass most of their lives in relative isolation and freedom from external influences, today this is very difficult.

Of course, in the past one's family relations and village neighbors could and usually did have overwhelming influence. In today's more individualistic setting, in a much more populous and technological world, the overwhelming influence comes from the media.

"The media" includes principally every press, cinematic and electronic medium of information, propaganda and entertainment. Novels and non-fiction books, newspapers and magazines, fiction movies and documentaries, radio and television, the Internet and mobile telephony – these are the major media we are subject to, at time of writing, in my part of the world.

On the surface, the media are free (of government controls) and competitive. But, in view of the spiritual and intellectual poverty of most producers and consumers, most of the media tend to develop, and for a time perpetuate, certain beliefs and values in common. We call this almost general tendency towards the lowest common denominator our "culture".

Thought is standardized and formatted in easily digested bits, and the flavor of the day is mass-fed. Although fashion

currents are getting more and more short-lived, the fact of homogeneity continues. This is of course a reflection of human nature – "man is a social animal", and imitation is the stuff of social cohesion.

Admittedly, not everything is spiritually debilitating in our culture, but many things are and it is important to be aware of such things. It is for instance very important to be aware of the devastating emotional influence of daily, and indeed hourly, news bulletins in the press, on the radio and on TV, and in the newer media. The emphasis being on dramatic bad news, we are bombarded with data that seems designed to arouse negative emotions in us[152].

All this is food for sensation and idle thought. One who is intent on developing the art of meditation has to overcome the strong temptations the media offer. It is important to reduce such sensory input to the minimum necessary, because it only serves to keep us in a certain excited state of mind. We cannot truly plunge into the depths of our nature, into true self-knowledge, if we allow such distractions to constantly rule over us.

Of course, as concerned and responsible citizens, we do need some information, on which to base our judgments and actions. But consider the massive input from the media, and ask yourself how much of that you actually need to fulfill your duties. Following such considerations, find ways and means to limit input as much as possible.

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[152] Pity at the victims of natural disasters, heinous civil crimes, wars and terrorism. Anger at criminals, at unjust officials, or even at lying and misleading journalism. Hatred towards people who seem to be destroying the world, or simply in response to other people's hatred. And so on.

Gradually, as one advances in meditation, one realizes most media inputs to be useless interference in our lives, which block rather than enhance contact with reality. The media pound images and sounds into one's mind, and it takes great effort and time to clear them out. It is easier to just stop them from entering it in the first place.

In this respect, one particularly poisonous input is pop music. This is like a mental virus, because it is sound that is easily memorized even against our will. It consists of some simple, usually repetitive, often loud, jingle – which seems designed to enter the mind of anyone within earshot and remain glued there as long as possible. This causes people to become habituated and attached to the sounds in question, and to buy the record (as the music publishers have well understood).

Such "music" differs considerably with regard to adhesive properties from more classical music. When such a virus enters one's mind, it is sometimes difficult to shake off. We may try to listen to or recall some other sound, to smother out the first. Or the virus may stay on for quite a while, disappearing from consciousness (though often remaining in memory, to reappear at some future time).

# 22. CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapters 20-22.

## 1. Forget Your Face

We live in an age of utter narcissism. Many multi-billion dollar enterprises, such as the clothing and cosmetic industries[153], depend on making egotists out of us and keeping us that way. Of course, one should look decent and smell nice; but there are reasonable limits to such external concerns. At some point, they cease to be expressions of hygiene, and self-respect and respect for others, and become ego obsessions and compulsions.

The confusion of self with one's face and body leads more and more men and women today to pass a lot of their time in front of a mirror. This culture of the body is materialism, in its most radical sense. It indicates a failure of spirituality.

Some people "speak to themselves" in the mirror. In my view, a person who does so suffers from a severe *alienation from self*. Looking into the reflection of one's eyes and

[153] I should also mention the photographic and home movie industry, which thrives on people's desire to linger on their own physical appearance.

speaking to one's image, as if it is another person, is indicative of confusion between self and factors of the ego. Why address oneself so indirectly, when one can do so directly within the mind (or out loud, but without a mirror)?

Many people gaze at their reflection for extended periods, fretting and worrying about the shape and size of each feature of their body, and in particular their face. They use artificial means to conceal uglier aspects and emphasize more beautiful aspects. Some spend hours in "fitness centers" to improve their physical shape (not meaning their health, but their contours). Some go so far as to resort to plastic surgery (of their face, their bosoms or their sex organ)[154].

Such behavior patterns are contrary to meditative pursuits. When meditating, we strive not to identify with face or body. At first, they seem very present – because we look upon the world through our face and some parts of our body are visible to us, and because of the weight of the touch sensations within the body and in the surfaces of contact between the body and its physical surrounds. But we strive to eventually become effectively 'transparent' to these and all other phenomenal impressions.

Such transparency is facilitated to the extent that one forgets one face and bodily form. Literally, forget! Beware of even accidental confrontations with a mirror. One may occasionally look into a mirror, e.g. to comb one's hair or to shave – but in such case one should not look at one's whole face, and especially not into one's eyes. Big mirrors are best

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[154] Sometimes, at the supermarket, I notice women who have had their face turned into something monstrous by plastic surgery. Can these women truly imagine they have been beautified, I wonder? I feel so sorry for them.

avoided – prefer smaller ones, or stick to the edges of larger mirrors[155].

It sounds silly at first, but the vain attraction to one's reflection in mirrors has to be resisted, if one wants to eventually free oneself from one's ego. Once one forgets exactly what one looks like (which can be done, as memories also fade), one can no longer bring up images of "oneself" during meditation, and the burden of ego is reduced. And incidentally, beauty (true beauty) naturally ensues from a healthy and spiritual lifestyle.

## 2. Give Up Sensuality

A certain level of spiritual realization is required to overcome another weakness common in this day and age – sensuality, by which we shall here mean *the yearning for and pursuit of sexual sensations*. Sensuality includes sexual fantasies, reminiscences and anticipations, since all such mental rehearsing of sex causes sexual sensations, almost as effectively as actual sexual acts do (and indeed, some people's sex lives are entirely imaginary).

Sexual activity is of course normal and necessary from a biological point of view[156], as is food. The problem with it is

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[155] I call hotel suites with a wall-to-wall mirror in the bathroom, which are common these days, "wanker's paradises".

[156] Human beings would not exist as such without reproduction. Moreover, sexual relations not specifically aimed at or resulting in reproduction are biologically justified, since they serve to maintain a family bond, which is useful to survival of the couple and their children. This biological perspective is also, by the

that it is a very strong force in our body and mind, capable of driving us on a mad search for gratification at any cost. This is especially true when we are young, and our reproductive instincts and powers are at their peak. But it can also be true during late middle age and early old age, when many people cling to their waning sexual abilities (to seduce and perform).

From the meditative point of view, one problem with sex is the energy it dilapidates, which would be better used for spiritual advancement. Without sufficient energy, one cannot meditate long or deeply. Loss of sperm for men (and I assume there is some equivalent incident for women), even if involuntary, is a spiritual retardant; all the more so, if voluntarily caused.

More broadly, sensuality diverts one's attention from the things in life that really matter, the deeper issues. It reinforces confusion of self with ego[157]. It narrows people's concerns to futilities, making them shallow. Their thoughts become frivolous and prurient, their language full of "dirty words". They cannot concentrate or think straight.

Once enslaved to sensuality, one becomes dependent on the receptiveness and complicity of others. When partners are

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way, the Jewish "middle way" regarding sex – a more moderate doctrine than that found in other religions, one based on the general idea that life on earth (if properly lived) is a good thing, intended by the Creator.

[157] Notice, as an indicator, the *chutzpa* that is eventually written on the face of people who engage in unnatural sex acts, for example. Such people confuse their brazenness, impudence and insolence with self-assurance. They boast of "gay pride", only to mask their profound sorrow and shame. But even straight sex (even based on "love") takes its toll, increasing narcissism and selfishness.

available, all seems well for a while. But when relationships become more tenuous or complicated, or they cease to be, much emotional and social difficulty ensues. Sometimes, sufficient anger is aroused to generate physical violence. Much time is wasted trying to "fix things" in the couple; and very often things get even more problematic. One's life becomes woefully entangled – for what has ultimately very little value: some mere sensations!

People regard "romantic love" as the ultimate justification of sex (apart from bonding and reproduction)[158]. But, honestly, most sexual relationships are not based on love, but on lust[159] mixed with possessiveness and dependence. The word love is brought up as sugar coating, as a seductive lie; the liar even lies to himself or herself, too, so as to make the lie more credible to the partner. The true love people may sincerely feel for each other has nothing to do with sex: it is a matter of mutual respect, trust and support.

Of course, sexual attraction for members of the opposite sex is normal and natural. When a man sees a pretty, well-shaped, fresh girl or young woman, he cannot but feel attraction; and similarly, a woman is attracted by a man. These are biological instincts, inscribed in our genes, for the perpetuation of our species. But for this, we would not be

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158 This is, historians tell us, a relatively recent argumentum.

159 Lust may either be selfish (in which case one pursues self-gratification, without concern for the partner's pleasure or even pain), or it may be cooperative (in which case, the sex acts involved are most accurately described as mutual masturbation). Cooperative lust is sometimes confused with love, note. As for sex with prostitutes (some of which, by the way are unwilling partners – effectively slaves), it is frankly based on lust – but its inherent cynical truthfulness does not justify it.

here. One has to accept the fact and take it into consideration as a factor, when trying to increase one's chastity. One does well to remember that "grace is delusive and beauty is passing"[160].

Look upon your sexual impulses and desires as mere visitors in your house – as temporary events that can never rule you, if you do not allow them to. Strength of character is possible, even easy, and very rewarding. Do not draw pleasure even from passing sensations, not even in your dreams. Keep your mind and hands clean. Purity of thoughts, words and deeds is essential to spiritual success. And it makes one happy, too.

## 3. On "Sexual Liberation"

Contrary to what popular psychology teaches, so-called sexual liberation is in fact enslavement to passions. Sexual indulgences of various sorts may give one a momentary feeling of relief from the pressure of sexual urges, but their longer term spiritual (and indeed physical and psychological) effects are mostly devastating.

**Masturbation** is not a solution to sexual urges, but a further problem. Masturbation diminishes sexual potency, and general energy and health levels; it reduces self-respect and self-confidence, and lowers attractiveness to the opposite sex; it produces inner conflicts, and makes one melancholic[161].

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160 Proverbs 31.

161 Moreover, I suggest, it draws many to homosexuality, or at least increases their tolerance towards it – for two reasons: firstly, masturbation is an intrinsically sexually ambiguous act, since the

However strong one's urges, they can be overcome. Never indulge in masturbation at all: it is not worth the trouble!

Nowadays, posing as "sexologists", psychologists, journalists and other opinion-makers, shamelessly tell youth that masturbation is harmless and even good for them. But in truth, such teachings and encouragements are spiritually destructive; their purposes are, in the last analysis, commercial and political. They serve only to enslave people to their baser impulses, and thus to weaken them physically, psychologically and socially.

The same popular opinion makers and "sexual liberators" have given modern society widespread **pornography** and **homosexuality**. Sexual activities, which less than a generation ago were commonly regarded as among the most ugly and depraved, have apparently become fashionable and are defended with "righteous" indignation[162].

The destructive effects of such ignoble behavior, on individuals and on the fabric of society, are willfully ignored. Do not be a "fashion victim"; do not believe in these media figures, those who pretend to liberate (from moral restrictions and rules) when they in fact enslave (to sensations). They are

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man or woman engaged in it is effectively playing both sex roles, the active and the receptive; secondly, the pornographic stimulants in use often involve images of people of one's own sex (in couples or groups), or worse still people of the same sex (one's own or the opposite sex) in homosexual situations. Such licentious behavior is antithetical to spiritual progress.

[162] This reversal of moral roles has to be noticed and understood, especially by inexperienced youths.

just seeking to justify their coarseness and perversity of spirit, by sullying everyone else.[163]

Next in line are **pedophilia** and **bestiality**, no doubt. Today these are frowned upon and illegal, but who knows for how long more? I just read on the Internet that efforts are being made to change that already[164]. From the spiritual point of view, this is just a logical development: once the floodgates of sensuality are sufficiently loosened within them, people lose all sanity and become slaves to increasingly weird passions. The abnormal then seems normal.

It is good and wise to have certain inhibitions. Anyone intent on spiritual progress has to learn to *master* their sexual impulses and behavior. This refers to all sensuality, whatever form it takes, from the normal to the deviant. Control your thoughts and words, as well as deeds; remember: first come tempting thoughts, then come encouraging words, and finally the deeds are done.

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[163] Don't let them tell you "it is okay, it is natural" (as they keep hammering, *ad nauseum*) – it certainly is neither okay nor natural. It all depends where an opinion is coming from. If a person is spiritually base, his or her opinions are accordingly muddy. Inversely, if a person is spiritually high, his or her thinking is accordingly clear. You do not have to first believe in any tradition to despise homosexuality – just live a pure life and you will be able to see for yourself the spiritual corruption it causes in the people concerned. Opposing it is not "just a religious prejudice", as its proponents contend, but a clear insight from spiritual purity.

[164] "Pedophiles in the Netherlands are registering a political party to press for lowering the legal age of sexual relations from 16 to 12 and to allow child porn and bestiality. The [party], which plans to register tomorrow, says it eventually wants to get rid of the age limit on sexual relations" (worldnetdaily.com news alert, 30.5.2006).

In this matter as in all others, the psychological sequence of events is as follows[165]: first, we perceive something (or someone, e.g. a beautiful girl); then we evaluate it, finding it likeable (or disliking it); then we desire to have greater or more permanent contact with it (or to avoid it); then comes imaginations (building up the desire by projecting its satisfaction) and rationalizations (so as to fit, however artificially, the idea of such action in one's belief system); finally, we take action (and eventually have to face the consequences).

To say we have free will is to admit that we can at any stage in this sequence of events intervene in our inner or outer behavior, and to stop or reverse things – although this is not meant to deny that such good will may get more difficult as things proceed. To realize this freedom of will, one has to understand that the perceptions, affections, appetites, imaginings and self-justifications that precede volitional action are just only *influences* (of varying intensity) on such actions, they can never *determine* it.

The simplest intervention is to avoid the initial perception, i.e. to deliberately steer clear of potential temptations or turn one's eyes away from them when they accidentally occur. Next, we can challenge the evaluation, and suggest that the object is not as likeable as it may seem. Or again, we can admit the object likeable in itself, but still avoid desire by pointing out its incidental disadvantages. If desire persists, we can still control ourselves by not indulging in imaginations or rationalizations that reinforce it and make it more likely.

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165 Based largely on descriptions in Buddhist psychology.

Finally, however weak we have been till now, we can still at the last moment opt out of the misdeed concerned; or having already put it in motion, we can still change course. It may be increasingly hard to do, but it is still in our power. This is why we are held morally (and legally) responsible for our actions – and this power of choice is also our great dignity as human beings. So never say "I can't stop myself" – you would only be lying so as to excuse yourself!

# 23. CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Drawn from *Meditations* (2006),
Chapter 23.

## PRACTICE NON-ATTACHMENT

### 1. Attachment

As previously implied, **suffering** is a negative personal response to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch sensations, or feelings or emotions of any sort, that have been, are now or are anticipated to be experienced (for whatever reason) as painful or as loss of pleasure. It is an *attitudinal or volitional response* of the soul to certain actual or potential information inputs – a response of rejection, of wishing or trying to avoid or get rid of certain psychologically unpalatable objects.

It should be noted that there is a positive equivalent of this response – it is **enjoyment**. This attitude or will, to sense or mental impressions perceived as positive (i.e. pleasant or as loss of pain), consists in wishing or trying to grab or cling on to certain objects. Enjoyment is not to be confused with pleasure. Enjoyment is to pleasure (and negation of pain) as suffering is to pain (and negation of pleasure).

Suffering and enjoyment are thus two sides of the same coin – which we can (like the Buddhists) call *attachment*[166]. These are not phenomena, but spiritual reactions to phenomena, note well. That is, whereas pleasure and pain are parts of the realm of body and mind, enjoyment and suffering are direct expressions of the soul.

In the case of suffering, we "draw pain" from pain or insufficiency of pleasure – we are sad, depressed, etc. *in view of* experiencing negative phenomena. In the case of enjoyment, we "draw pleasure" from pleasure or reduction of pain – we are joyful, euphoric, etc. *in view of* experiencing positive phenomena. This is said primarily of current pain or pleasure of any sort, but it also applies to remembered or anticipated pains or pleasures.

Suffering is adding pain on to pain (or to insufficiency of pleasure) – it compounds and prolongs pain by reinforcing our susceptibility. For example, say a motorist rudely drives into the parking place I got to first; there is a first reaction of pain at the experience of such an uncouth person, as well as at the loss of the parking place and at the prospect of having to seek another; but if I allow anger to rise in me – this is the extra pain of suffering.

Similarly, enjoyment is getting pleasure from the fact of increasing pleasure (or of decreasing pain). For example, say the said rude motorist feels pleasure at having gotten the parking place first; if he starts congratulating himself and

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166 This is, of course, but one facet of the connotation of 'attachment', which includes all affections and appetites – likes and dislikes, desires and aversions, hopes and fears, etc. See my work *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts*, chapter 10.

boasting about it to his passenger – that's the extra pleasure of enjoyment.

## 2. Non-attachment

Detachment or asceticism, or (less pejoratively put) *non-attachment*, consists in becoming aware of *the distinction between* the attachment of self to pleasures or pains, and the primary pleasant or painful objects, events, sensations, mental impressions, ideas, etc. Once one develops this awareness, one becomes able to *abstain from "drawing"* pleasure from pleasure, and pain from pain, i.e. able to cease emphasizing pleasant or painful feelings with enjoyment or suffering. Such emphasis (i.e. attachment) is, in the last analysis, an unnecessary compounding of the problem posed by pleasure and pain.

Pain is known to all as a negative influence on the will – although, if we ignore or overcome this influence, we turn the pain into an instrument of improved will. Similarly, people must realize, pleasure can be a negative influence, if we attach to it – i.e. it is equally wise to detach from pleasure as from pain. The two poles must be treated in the same way, for *one cannot become independent of the one while remaining dependent on the other*.

To succeed in detaching from pain, one must also detach from pleasure. One cannot be a hedonist and hope to avoid suffering pain or displeasure. The moment one allows oneself to enjoy (i.e. cling to) pleasure, one sets oneself up for the suffering of pain (i.e. trying to head it off or push it away or run from it). The two imply the same addiction of spirit, the

same spiritual affliction. One has to give up on enjoyment of pleasure or diminished pain to become truly free.

It is of course easier to give up suffering than to give up enjoyment. But one has to understand that both these habits build up the ego (or more precisely, the self-identification with the body-mind complex). If the ego is sustained by enjoyment, it will continue to feed suffering. Such habits cannot of course be stopped overnight: but, gently does it, they can be weeded out over time.

Thus, when experiencing pleasures, do not linger on them and try to maximize them, as we are all wont to do, but instead look upon them meditatively. This will enable you to also find liberation from pains – i.e. to contemplate them calmly, without fearing them or trying to minimize them.

The causes of or reasons for the pleasures or pains are interesting to know, but ultimately rather irrelevant. Meditators do not pass too much time looking into their life story for the particular sources of their psychological problems; Freudian-style psychoanalysis is itself a form of attachment and self-confusion with phenomena. Meditation is concerned proactively with remedying and preventing the root causes of problems, just as a mechanic fixes a car without needing to know how it crashed.

Underlying both suffering and enjoyment is some sort of radical discontent. Suffering expresses this condition by self-pity; enjoyment expresses it by trying to give oneself a boost. The opposite of both these reactions is the attitude of *contentment*. This is not the opposite of suffering only, note

well, but the antithesis of both suffering *and* enjoyment[167]. It is freedom of the spirit from passing material and mental phenomena of whatever polarity, freedom from the ups and downs of random emotions.

Non-attachment does not mean feigned or forced detachment (the latter is a pejorative connotation of the term detachment, but not its only sense). Non-attachment is not emotional paralysis, in the way of someone who has built up rigid defenses against emotions. It consists in being cool and collected, not frozen or repressed. It is "being zen" (as people say nowadays in French), i.e. not getting overly excited over virtually nothing. If one meditates sufficiently and well, non-attachment comes naturally.

## 3. Wise Moderation

It has to be stressed, so there is no misunderstanding: recommending 'non-enjoyment' (in the sense above defined) does *not* mean being *against* pleasure. To be impassive is not to be apathetic. Naturally, pleasure is preferable to pain or even to non-feeling.

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[167] Most translations of Buddhist texts imply the opposite of suffering to be happiness; but this is inaccurate. The term contentment is more appropriate here, and this is the contrary not only of suffering but also of enjoyment, as just explained. Note well that contentment is not an emotion, something the soul passively feels, but *an attitude*, an actively chosen posture of the soul's will. The term happiness is perhaps best reserved for the ultimate bliss of enlightenment, for no one can be said to be truly happy who has not permanently reached such realization.

If one experiences a pleasure (or is relieved of a pain), so well and good – there is no intrinsic harm in that. There is no reason to in principle reject pleasure as such when it happens to occur; nor even to avoid pleasure if one sees it coming – indeed, to do so would constitute another form of attachment. On the other hand, one should not try to make an existing pleasure last or increase; nor, a fortiori, should one pursue pleasure for its own sake or pass one's time dreaming of it when one lacks it. Such hedonist behavior is bound to result in unhappiness (sadness, resentment, conflicts, weakness, etc.) – it is not worth it.

Note however that, because of the polarities involved, our position relative to suffering is not entirely symmetrical to the one just formulated with regard to enjoyment. Our advice to avoid suffering does not logically imply a fatalistic acceptance of pain as such. In the case of pain, if one can avoid it (before the fact) or get rid of it (after the fact), one should of course do so, if there are no more pressing considerations to the contrary.

One should do so – because pain is an obstruction to consciousness and volition, as is most evident in tragic situations (like certain diseases, or like torture). The problem of suffering arises only when pain becomes one's overriding focus, i.e. when any amount of pain (real or imagined) is unbearable. Oversensitivity to pain is spiritually unhealthy.

It is natural to protect and cure our soul's body-mind appendages from harm, and even to look after their wellbeing. The issue here is only to what extent such concerns and pursuits are biologically valuable, and at what point they become harmful in themselves. The limit is attained when our more materialist concerns and pursuits

begin to hinder or damage our ultimately more important spiritual values.

Thus, the posture advocated here is: neither exacerbated hedonism nor extreme asceticism, but moderation and wisdom.

# 24. CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Drawn from *Logical and Spiritual Reflections* (2008), Book 1, chapters 6 & 7.

## 1. Freewill

Next, let us consider Hume's opinions regarding freewill. Given his opinions with regard to the self and to causation, we can with relative ease anticipate the way his thinking will go with regard to human volition and ethics.

Since Hume has denied the self, he cannot be expected to believe in volition in the ordinary sense, i.e. in freedom of the individual soul to will or not-will something irrespective of influences one way or the other. Therefore, one would expect him to opt for some sort of determinism[168]. Although he has denied causation, or our knowledge of it, in the physical realm, this does not logically exclude causation in the

[168] Parenthetically: to his credit, Hume realizes that freewill ought not be identified with mere spontaneous occurrence. Indeterminism, whether in the physical or mental realm, constitutes a determinism of sorts relative to human beings. If things happen to us at random, without any cause, we are subject to them as surely as if they were determinist causal factors. That is, their own lack of causes does not diminish their causal impact on us.

"mental" realm, so such determinism would be consistent for him.

Yet, he struggles to salvage for human beings some vestige of volition. We are not in his view mere rubber balls that react to events in wholly predictable ways. We are it seems somewhat free to do what we feel like doing. Our actions are related to our character, desires, passions; it is such distinctive attributes of ours that make these actions our own. We are thus determined by impulses, preferences and emotions – or rather, they *are* 'us', we are their sum total. This is consistent with his view of the self as an aggregate of passing mental phenomena.

This is of course not what we would call free will. It is rather slavery to random passions. Hume admits as much when he says: "Reason is, and ought only to be, slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them"[169]. By this he means that, though induction and deduction provide us with information that may affect our actions, they cannot determine it. According to him, only the passions can truly move us; it is ultimately with them that we identify and go.

Now, this tells us a lot about the way Hume's mind works, and even about the way many other people's minds work, but it does not accurately reflect the full range of human nature. It may apply to some of the people some of the time, but does not apply to all of the people all of the time. For though it is true that reason does not necessarily affect our actions, it is also true that passions need not do so. Just as the information reason gives us can influence our actions but may well be

169 *Treatise*, Book II, Part III, Sect. iii.

ignored, i.e. is not determining – so it goes for the passions. We do not have to be slaves of our passions or identified with them; we are in fact distinct from them and able to transcend them.

It is true that many (maybe even most) people are not aware of this freedom of the will, and let their passions rule them. Some people, by the way, are similarly ruled by their reason, i.e. they are tormented by family, social, political or religious obligations, and unable to resist them. But such passivity or dependence is not normal or inevitable; it is a curable sickness of the soul. The passions, like reason, can only really 'influence' the soul, not 'determine' it – the soul still in all cases has the capacity and the responsibility to choose between them and decide which way to act. This is clear to anyone who practices self-control.

We can with effort learn to rule over our own minds, and indeed such policy is wisdom itself. But this demanding virtue depends on our making a clear distinction between causation (or deterministic causality) and volition (or personal causality), and on our understanding what 'influence' means.

A person is said to be influenced by something to act (or not act) in a certain way if the person's perception or conception of the thing makes acting in that way easier (or harder). Such *facilitation* (or on the contrary, impedance) of the will is never determining: the person remains free not to will in the direction of (or against) the influence; he or she can still go the other way. The potentiality of the will is increased (or decreased), but the person still has the final choice.

Thus, influence is a special sort of conditioning of voluntary action. The action is not caused (in the sense of causation) directly by the event or thing influencing it – but rather, our *awareness* to some degree of that event or thing (be it concrete or abstract) affects us (the doer of the deed), by making such action more or less easy than it otherwise would be. The influential thought pushes us or slows us down, but we still (so long as we have freewill) have to make an effort to actualize anything.

Once we understand the causal relation called influence, we can distance ourselves from our passions and even from our reason, and view them all as mere influential information, to be taken into consideration in motivating or deciding action, but which should never be allowed to usurp the sovereignty of the soul, who ultimately alone commands the will and is responsible for its orientations. But Hume cannot see this, because he is himself still too unconscious and too involved in his passions. Having denied the very existence of a self or person, he naturally misconceives the will as subservient to the passions.

Thus, Hume confuses his personal opinions and behavior with general truths about human nature. Here again, we find him making inaccurate observations and over-generalizing. He does not always realize the hypothetical nature of his propositions, and the need to try to establish them with reference to precise inductive procedures. Since he has misconceived induction to begin with, he has incapacitated himself methodologically.

Philosophers do not have special powers of ‘insight’ into truth, independent of logical scrutiny and correction. They

think like everyone else by inductive means, and they can make mistakes like everyone else if they are not careful.

## 2. The Is-Ought Dichotomy

David Hume's views and opinions on many philosophical topics seem (to me) to be driven by the desire to exempt himself from 'morality'. That often seems to be the underlying driving force or motive of all his skeptical philosophy, what it all manifestly tends towards. By denying induction, causation, the self and an effective power of freewill, he is justifying the idea that "anything goes" in knowledge and in personal behavior. This overall trend is again confirmed when we consider some of his positions regarding ethical reasoning.

Hume questions the possibility of deriving prescriptive statements, which tells us what we ought to do or not do, from descriptive statements, which tell us the way things are or are not. The distinction between these two sorts of statement is in his opinion so radical that one cannot be reduced to the other. This means effectively that moral or ethical propositions have no formal basis in fact, i.e. they cannot be claimed as true in an absolute sense. There is no logical way, in his view, to deduce or induce an "ought" from an "is".

Prescriptive statements are then, according to Hume, at best just practical advice on how to pursue our self-interest and the interests of the people we value (or more broadly, sympathize or empathize with). This is a kind of pragmatism or utilitarianism, in lieu of heavier moral notions of duty or

obligation. In this way, ethics is made essentially amoral – an issue of convenience, a mere description of the ways we might best pursue our arbitrary values. The implication is one of relativism and convention.

It should be added that Hume's conclusion with a non-ethics or relativistic ethic is consistent with his position on freewill. For if we do not really have freewill, but are inevitably driven by our passions, and moreover can rely on them rather than reason for guidance, then we have no need for ethics. *Ethics is only meaningful if we have a real power of choice and must therefore take decisions.*

Hume's view of ethical logic is an interesting mix of truth and falsehood, which is why many have agreed with him and many have found it difficult to refute him. Ethics is of course a vast and complex subject, and I do not propose here to treat the topic in detail[170]. I would just like to show briefly how and why Hume's approach, for all its seeming skeptical mastery, is here again superficial and narrow.

The issue raised is primarily formal. What are prescriptive propositions and how do they relate to descriptive ones? The obvious answer to the question would be that prescriptions *relate ends to means*. I ought to do (or not-do) this *if* I want

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[170] Note that I do not believe it is the task of the ethical philosopher to foresee every situation in life, and prescribe optimum behavior for them. Certainly, the philosopher is called upon to consider difficult general cases and propose wise responses. But each situation is unique in some respects, so the main task in this field is to teach people to think for themselves – in sensitive, intelligent and logical ways – about ethical issues. Ethical philosophy is primarily ethical logic, and only secondarily deals with certain contents. It is not a totalitarian doctrine. Each person has to live his or her own life.

to (or not-to) obtain or attain that. The 'ought' (or 'should' or 'must') modality is essentially the bond in a specific kind of if-then proposition, with a desire or 'value' as antecedent and an action or 'virtue' as consequent.

Such if-then propositions are not themselves descriptive, but are deductively derived from descriptive forms. When we say "if we want so and so, then thus and thus is the way to get it", we are affirming that "thus and thus" is/are *cause(s) of* "so and so"[171]. The latter is a factual claim, which may be true or false. It follows that the prescriptive statement can also be judged true or false, at least in respect of the correctness of the connection implied between its antecedent and consequent.

Be it mentioned in passing, prescriptive statements may be positive (imperatives) or negative (prohibitions). As well, note, the negations of prescriptive statements, viz. not imperative (exempt) and not prohibited (permitted) are also significant ethical modalities. But for brevity's sake we will here only concentrate on imperatives, for the rest logically follows.

We see from our above definition of an imperative that it is *conditional*. Good or bad mean good or bad *for* something or someone. The imperative is only true as such *if* we grant that the value pursued is indeed of value. But how can we ever know whether any of our values are valuable in an absolute sense? This is Hume's query, and it is quite valid. But his

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[171] I won't here go into the different determinations of causation. Suffices to say that obviously if A is the only way to X, then I can say: "I must do A to get to X". But if there are alternative ways to X – say. A, B and C, then I can only say: "I must do A or B or C to get X" – i.e. my prescription is disjunctive.

conclusion that values are formally bound to be arbitrary (i.e. cannot be deduced from plain facts) is open to challenge.

Our task is to show that we can arrive somehow at *categorical* imperatives[172], i.e. ethical standards that can ground and justify all subsequent conditional imperatives. One conceivable way to do so is to use a dilemmatic argument: 'Whether you want this or that or anything else, the pursuit of so and so would in any case be a precondition'.

Something is an absolute value if it is necessary to the pursuit of *any and all* arbitrary values one personally opts for. A relative value can be by-passed in the pursuit of other relative values, but an absolute value is one presupposed in every pursuit and must therefore be respected unconditionally.

Are there any such absolute values? Clearly, yes. An obvious such value is *life* itself: if one lacks life, one cannot pursue anything else; therefore life must be protected and enhanced. Another absolute value is *the self* – if the soul is the source of all our actions, good or bad, then the soul's welfare is an

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[172] It should be clear that, although I use this expression intentionally, I do not mean by it the same as Kant did. It is form, not content. I am here discussing formal ethical logic, not advocating a general or particular categorical imperative. Kant considers an imperative categorical if it is universal, i.e. applicable to everyone, all *agents*. Whereas in my view, a categorical imperative can be quite singular. What makes an imperative categorical, instead of hypothetical, is its necessity to all *goals* open to that agent. Logically, this is more symmetrical. What means are universal in this sense, i.e. universal to all goals (not necessarily all people)? Life, bodily wholeness and health, soul, cognition, volition, valuation, mental wholeness and health – these are means we always need to succeed, whatever our particular goals.

absolute value. Whatever one wants, one needs the physiological and psychological means that make such pursuit at all possible – viz. one's bodily and mental faculties. And most of all, one needs to be present oneself!

These are obvious examples. What do they teach us? If we wish to understand, use and validate ethical propositions, we have to realize *what makes all such discourse possible and necessary*. A simple illustration and proof of that is that if I tell you 'don't follow any ethical doctrine', I am uttering an ethical doctrine, and therefore committing a self-contradiction.

Ethical propositions do not apply to inanimate objects. They apply only to living beings, because only such entities have anything to win or lose. But to apply them to all living beings is not correct, for though plants, insects and lower animals can objectively be said by us to have values, their functioning is either automatic or instinctive, and they cannot understand or voluntarily apply ethics.

Only humans, and maybe higher animals like chimps or dolphins, can have ethical thoughts and the power of will to carry them out. These thoughts are verbal or non-verbal in the case of humans, and necessarily non-verbal in the case of higher animals. Thus, in the last analysis, explicit ethical discourse concerns only human beings.

And we can say at the outset that to engage at all in ethical discourse, humans have to study and take into consideration their nature, their true identity. They have to realize their biological and spiritual nature, the nature of their physical-mental organism and the nature of their soul. Moreover, since biology and spirituality relate not just to the individual in

isolation, but to larger groups and to society as a whole – ethics has to be equally broad in its concerns.

If this large factual background is ignored in the formulation of ethical propositions, one is bound to be arbitrary and sooner or later fall into error. In conclusion, we can develop an ethic that involves absolute values and is based on factual truths. Ethics is clearly seen not to be arbitrary, if we consider the conditions that give rise to it in the first place – viz. that we are fragile living beings, with natural needs and limits, and that we are persons, with powers of cognition, volition and valuation.

If all the relevant facts are taken into consideration, then, an "ought" encapsulates a mass of "is" information, and can therefore be regarded as a special sort of "is". That is, if properly developed, an ethical statement can be declared true, like any other factual claim. It is ethical fact, as against 'alethic' fact. Of course, if not properly induced and deduced, an ethical can be declared false – but not all ethical propositions are false.

Hume failed to realize the said logical preconditions of any ethics, and therefore got stuck in the shallow idea that ethics cannot be deeply grounded in fact. Since the scope of his considerations was partial, he could at least see that an "ought" is to start with conditional, but he could not see further how it could eventually be made unconditional. He therefore wrongly concluded that inferring an "ought" from an "is" is fallacious reasoning. This was later pompously called "the naturalistic fallacy"[173].

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[173] By George Edward Moore, in his *Principia Ethica* (1903). I say 'pompously' to stress that no logical fallacy is involved, in my

## 3. The Standards of Ethics

In the above discussion of the ethical means and ends, I pointed out that, for instances, life and soul were two things that could logically be affirmed to be natural and absolute standards of value, since they are preconditions of any ethical discourse, i.e. since ethical discourse is only applicable to beings with life and more specifically with soul, i.e. beings with powers of consciousness, volition and valuation like us humans.

As I have suggested in my work *Volition and Allied Causal Concepts*, the term "life" in this context does not just mean bodily life – though this is doubtless its primary meaning. The term can also legitimately be taken to refer to spiritual life, i.e. the life of the soul. Indeed, in the last analysis ethics is concerned with bodily welfare rather accessorily: its main concern is with the soul's welfare.

An obvious consequence of such extension of meaning is that those who believe in life after death (as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam) or in reincarnation (as in Buddhism and Hinduism) can construct an ethics without committing a

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view. The issue is a logical problem – but one open to solution. My rejecting this so-called fallacy is not intended to reject offhand Moore's central thesis, viz. that of the intellectual primacy of the concept of 'good', i.e. that we tacitly understand the term in some way before any theory attempting to define it.

logical error. That is to say, ethics is not necessarily limited to this life and this world.

Clearly, if we assume that our life goes on or returns in some form even after our body has died, it is logically quite okay (though at first sight it might seem paradoxical) to build an ethics in which the body might be deliberately risked or sacrificed in favor of the soul's longer-term interest.

Those who view their life on earth as a mere visit in a longer journey naturally and quite logically evaluate their thoughts, words and deeds with reference to that broader context rather than in the narrow sense of physical survival. Although such survival is important to ethics, it can on occasion be overridden by more abstract, wider or higher considerations. Such occasions provide one with a test of one's true values.

Of course, such self-sacrifice can easily be wrongly based on fantasy and illusion, since we do not know of the hereafter except by hearsay or presupposition. In most circumstances, it is wise to assume that one's continued survival is the most beneficial course of action. But in special circumstances one might well judge that to accept some present evil would endanger one's future life or lives. For example, some saintly persons have preferred to die rather than to be forced to kill an innocent person.

People can conceivably and sometimes do risk or give their physical lives in defense of their family, their people or nation, humanity as a whole, life as such, or in God's service, because they perceive themselves, not as delimited bodies

and independent individuals, but as parts of a larger whole – a group of people or of living things or the collective or root soul that is God. The value of one's life is in such case a function of the value of the larger unit.

In sum, though we may use the term "life" as a short and sweet standard of ethical discourse, the term should not exclusively be understood in its simplest, material sense, but may logically be widened to admit more spiritual goals, whether this-worldly and other-worldly.

# 25. CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

Drawn from *Logical and Spiritual Reflections* (2008), Book 3, chapters 20 & 21.

## 1. The Laws of Thought in Meditation

The three laws of thought are commonly considered by many current commentators[174] to be (at best) only relevant to rational discourse, and not relevant at all or even antithetical to meditation and all the more so to its finale of enlightenment. Nothing could be further from the truth, as will now be explicated.

The laws of thought are principally 'moral' imperatives to the thinker, enjoining him or her to have certain cognitive attitudes in all processes of thought. They call upon the thinker to make an effort, so as to guarantee maximum efficiency and accuracy of his or her thoughts. The 'metaphysical' aspect of the laws of thought is a substratum and outcome of this practical aspect.[175]

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[174] Judging by Internet postings and debate on this topic.

[175] It could also be said that the two aspects are 'co-emergent', mutually significant and equally important. But here I wish to stress the psychological side of the issue.

1. **The law of identity** is a general stance of 'realism'.

   In *discursive thought*, this means: to face facts; to observe and think about them; to admit the factuality of appearances as such and that of logical arguments relating to them; to accept the way things are (or at least the way they seem to be for now), that things are as they are, i.e. whatever they happen to be; and so on.

   Clearly, these same cognitive virtues are equally applicable to *meditation practice*, which requires **awareness**, receptivity and lucidity. The antitheses of these attitudes are evasiveness, prejudice and obscurantism, resulting in "sloth and torpor"[176].

   At the apogee of meditation, in the *enlightenment* experience, this is expressed as (reportedly) consciousness of the "thus-ness" (or "such-ness") of "ultimate reality".

2. **The law of non-contradiction** is a general stance of 'coherence' (which is an aspect of 'realism').

   In *discursive thought*, this means: while giving initial credence to all appearances taken singly, not to accept two conflicting appearances as both true (or real), but to place one or both of them in the category of falsehood (or illusion); to seek to resolve or transcend all apparent contradictions; to pursue consistency in one's concepts and theories; to reject inconsistent ideas as absurd and self-contradictions as untenable nonsense; and so on.

   Clearly, these same cognitive virtues are equally applicable to *meditation practice*, which requires

[176] See Kamalashila, p. 253.

**harmony**, balance and peace of mind. The antitheses of these attitudes are conflict, confusion and neurosis (or madness), resulting in "restlessness and anxiety"[177].

At the peak of meditation, in the *enlightenment* experience, this is expressed as (reportedly) the "oneness" (monism or monotheism) of "ultimate reality".

3. **The law of the excluded middle** is a general stance of 'curiosity' (which is also an aspect of 'realism').

   In *discursive thought*, this means: engaging in research and study, so as to fill gaps in one's knowledge and extend its frontier; engaging in speculation and theorizing, but always under the supervision and guidance of rationality; avoiding fanciful escapes from reality, distorting facts and lying to oneself and/or others; accepting the need to eventually make definite choices and firm decisions; and so on.

   Clearly, these same cognitive virtues are equally applicable to *meditation practice*, which requires **clarity**, judgment and understanding. The antitheses of these attitudes are ignorance, uncertainty and delusion, resulting in "doubt and indecision"[178].

   At the pinnacle of meditation, in the *enlightenment* experience, this is expressed as (reportedly) the "omniscience" of "ultimate reality".

Thus, I submit, rather than abandon the laws of thought when we step up from ordinary thinking to meditation, and from that to enlightenment, we should stick to them, while

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177 See Kamalashila, p. 249.

178 See Kamalashila, p. 258.

allowing that they are expressed somewhat differently at each spiritual stage. Whereas in discursive thought awareness is expressed by intellectual activity, in meditation the approach is gentler and subtler, and in enlightenment we attain pure contemplation.

When such final realization is reached[179], the laws of thought are not breached, but made most evident. "Thus-ness" is the essence of existence; it is the deepest stratum of identity, not an absence of all identity. "One-ness" is not coexistence or merging of opposites, but where all oppositions are dissolved or transcended. "Omniscience" is not in denial of ordinary experience and knowledge, but their fullest expression and understanding. What in lower planes of being and knowing seems obscure, divergent and uncertain, becomes perfect at the highest level.[180]

Those teachers or commentators who claim that the laws of thought are abrogated once we transcend ordinary discourse are simply misinterpreting their experiences. Either their

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[179] I submit, on the basis of my own limited experience, but also out of logical expectation of consistency between all levels of being. I think many people more knowledgeable than me would agree with the descriptions here given of the higher realms.

[180] Buddhist, and especially Mahayana, philosophers often stress that nirvana (the common ground of all being) and samsara (the multiplicity of changing appearances) are ultimately one and the same. Even while admitting this, we must remain aware of their apparent difference. The whole point of the philosophical idea of monism ("nirvana") is of course to resolve the contradictions and gaps inherent in the experience of plurality ("samsara"). At the same time, the one-ness of nirvana is in a sort of conflict with the multiplicity of samsara. We must somehow both admit and ignore this tension. In truth, all this remains an unsolved problem at some level.

experience is not true "realization", or their particular interpretation of their realization experience is just an erroneous afterthought that should not be viewed as part of the experience itself.

Instead of the laws of identity, non-contradiction and exclusion of any middle, they propose *a law of non-identity, a law of contradiction, and a law of the included middles!* According to them, the ultimate reality is that nothing has an identity, all contradictories coexist quite harmoniously, and there may be other alternatives besides a thing and its negation!

They adduce as proofs the Buddhist principles of non-selfhood, impermanence and interdependence.

But they cannot claim that something has no "nature" whatsoever, for then what is that "something" that they are talking about? If it is truly non-existent, why and how are we at all discussing it and who are we? Surely these same people admit the existence of an "ultimate reality" of some sort – if only a single, infinite, universal substratum[181]. They call it

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[181] The "great self" or "ocean of permanence", to use the words of Dogen (p. 267). Note that Dogen is not here saying there is no such thing, but is stressing that we do not – as some people claim – *automatically* all return there after death, but rather are subject to various rebirths according to our respective karmas; he is implying that to get there is hard-won realization, not something given *gratis* to all comers). Some identify this underlying ultimate reality with the "*Deus sive Natura*" of Baruch Spinoza (Holland, 1632-77). But I hasten to add that I do not subscribe to Spinoza's equation of God and Nature, which implies that God is like Nature subject to determinism. For me, as in normative Judaism, God is the free, volitional creator of Nature. He underlies and includes it. It is a mere product His and but a tiny part or aspect of Him.

"void" or "empty", but surely such a negation is not logically tenable without the admission that something positive is being negated; a negation can never be a primary given.

Similarly, we might argue, "impermanence" means the impermanence *of* something and "interdependence" means the interdependence *of* two or more things. They cannot claim infinite impermanence, without admitting the extended existence in time of something however temporary; and they cannot claim a universal interdependence, without admitting causal connections between actual facts.

There is an unfortunate tendency here to use words without paying attention to their relational implications. Another example of this practice is to speak of "consciousness" (or perception or thought or some such cognitive act), without admitting that this implies consciousness *of* something (called an object) *by* something (called the Subject).

This is done deliberately, to conform with the ideological prejudice that there is no cognizing self and nothing to cognize. Similarly, so as not to have to mention the Agent willing an action, volition is concealed and the action is made to appear spontaneous or mechanical. They refuse to admit that *someone* is suffering, thinking, meditating or becoming enlightened.

Another claim often made is that our common experience of the world is like a dream compared to ultimate reality. The implication being that the laws of thought are not obeyed in a dream. But in truth, even in a dream, though images and sound come and go and seem to intertwine, actually there is no contradiction if we observe carefully. As for the difference between dream and awake experience, it is not strictly a

contradiction since they are experienced as distinct domains of being.

*Contradiction is not even thinkable, except in words (or intentions)*. We cannot even *actually* imagine a contradiction, in the sense defined by Aristotle (is and is not at once in every respect). We can only *say (or vaguely believe)* there is one. We of course commonly encounter apparent contradiction, but that does not prove that contradiction exists in fact. It is an illusion, a conflict between verbal interpretations or their non-verbal equivalents.

We formulate theories; they yield contradictions; we correct the theories so that they no longer yield these contradictions. We tailor our rational constructs to experience. We do not infer contradiction to exist from contradictions in our knowledge. We question and fix our knowledge, rather than impose our beliefs on reality. That is sanity, mental health. That is the way knowledge progresses, through this dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

## 2. Reason and Spirituality

In Judaism, the rabbis consciously practice non-contradiction (and the other laws of thought) in most of their discourse; but in some cases, they desert this virtue.

For example, it often happens that equally authoritative commentators have divergent interpretations of the same text; nevertheless, both their positions are upheld as traditional and true so as to avoid any suggestion that any important rabbi might ever be wrong. In such cases, the rationale given is that

the different, even conflicting, perspectives together deepen and enrich the overall understanding of that text. In non-legal contexts (*haggadah*), there is no pressing need to decide one way or the other, anyway; while in legal contexts (*halakhah*), a decision is often made by majority[182].

Also, as I have shown in my *Judaic Logic*, some of the hermeneutic principles used in the Talmud are not in conformity with syllogistic logic; some yield a *non sequitur* in conclusion, and some even a contradiction. In such cases, the absurdity occurs on a formal level, within a single line of reasoning (rather than in relation to conflicting approaches); yet the conclusion is often accepted as law anyway, because the (erroneous) form of reasoning is considered traditional and Divinely given.

However, it is interesting to note in this regard that there is a Talmudic law[183] about two people who find a prayer shawl and bring it together to the rabbinical court, both claiming it as their property (on a finders-keepers basis); these people are not permitted to both swear they found it first, since these oaths would be in contradiction and that would make one of them at least a vain use of God's name (a grave sin).

This Judaic law shows that the rabbis are ultimately forced to admit the logical law of non-contradiction as binding, i.e. as indicative of objective reality.

Similarly, in Buddhism, there are many teachers who insist on the importance of keeping one's feet firmly on the ground

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[182] Although in some cases, centuries later, scattered groups of Jews may follow different interpretations of the same decision.

[183] I unfortunately cannot find the exact Mishna reference at this time, but I heard it discussed by two Rabbis.

even while one's head is up in the heavens. They teach that karmic law should not be ignored or denied[184] – meaning that one should not act as if there are no laws of nature in this world and anything goes. To act irresponsibly is foolish and at times criminal. I would include under this heading adherence to the laws of thought; for without the awareness, harmony and clarity that they enjoin, healthy respect for causality would not be possible.

It is important, at this juncture in the history of philosophy, that people understand the danger of denial of all, or any, of the laws of thought. Due to the current influx of Oriental philosophies, and in particular of Buddhism, some would-be philosophers and logicians are tempted (perhaps due to superficial readings) to take up such provocative positions, to appear fashionable and cutting-edge. But while predicting that Western philosophy will be greatly enriched by this influx, I would warn against abject surrender of our rationality, which can only have destructive consequences for mankind.

Logic is one of man's great dignities, an evolutionary achievement. But it is true: logic alone, without meditation, morality and other human values, cannot bring out the best in man. Taken alone like that, it can and sometimes does apparently lead people to narrow-minded and sterile views, and dried-up personalities. But in the last analysis, people of

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[184] I give you for example Dogen, who quoting Baizhang ("don't ignore cause and effect"), Nagarjuna ([do not] "deny cause and effect in this worldly realm... in the realm of practice"), Yongjia ("superficial understanding of emptiness ignores causes and effect") and others, decries "those who deny cause and effect" (pp. 263-9).

that sort are simply poor in spirit – their condition is not the fault of logic as such. In fact, they misunderstand logic; they have a faulty view of it – usually an overly deductive, insufficiently inductive view of it.

The current ills of our society are not due to a surfeit of logic. Rather, our society is increasingly characterized by illogic. Many media, politicians and educators twist truth at will, and people let themselves to be misled because they lack the logical capacity or training required to see through the lies and manipulations. Rationality does not mean being square-minded, rigid or closed, as its opponents pretend – it means, on the contrary, making an effort to attain or maintain spiritual health. To give up reason is to invite mental illness and social disintegration. Taken to extremes, unreason would be a sure formula for insanity and social chaos.

Aristotle's answer to irrationality was effectively to train and improve our reason. I do not think this is "the" single, complete solution to the human condition – but it is for sure *part of* the compound solution. Logic is only a tool, which like any tool can be unused, underused, misused or abused. Logic can only produce opinion, but as I said before it helps produce the best possible opinion in the context of knowledge available at any given time and place. It is not magic – only hard work, requiring much study.

Rationalism is sometimes wrongly confused with 'scientism', the rigid state of mind and narrow belief system that is leading mankind into the spiritual impasse of materialism and amorality. On this false assumption, some people would like to do away with rationalism; they imagine it to be an obstacle to spiritual growth. On the contrary, rationality is mental health and equilibrium. It is the refusal to be fooled by

sensual pursuits—or spiritual fantasies. It is remaining lucid and open at all times.

The 'scientific' attitude, in the best sense of the term, should here be emphasized. For a start, one should not claim as raw data more than what one has oneself experienced in fact. To have intellectually understood claims of enlightenment by the Buddha or other persons is not equivalent to having oneself experienced this alleged event; such hearsay data should always be admitted with a healthy 'grain of salt'. Faith should not be confused with science; many beliefs may consistently with science indeed be taken on faith, but they must be admitted to be articles of faith.

Note well that this does not mean that we must forever cling to surface appearances as the only and final truth. There may well be a 'noumenal' level of reality beyond our ordinary experience and the rational conclusions we commonly draw from such experience. Nevertheless, we are logically duty bound to take our current experience and reasoning seriously, until and unless we personally come in contact with what allegedly lies beyond. Those of us who have not attained the noumenal may well be basically "ignorant" (as Buddhism says), but we would be foolish to deny our present experience and logic before such personal attainment.

Wisdom is an ongoing humble quest. An error many philosophers and mystics make is to crave for an immediate and incontrovertible answer to all possible questions. They cannot accept human fallibility and the necessity to make do with it, by approximating over time towards truth. I suggest that even in the final realization we are obligated to evaluate our experience and decide what it is.

The phenomenological approach and inductive logic are thus a modest, unassuming method. The important thing is to remain lucid at all times, and not to get carried away by appearances, or worse still by fantasies. Even if one has had certain impressive meditation experiences, one should not lose touch with the rest of one's experience, but in due course carefully evaluate one's insights in a broader context. Logic is not an obstacle to truth, but the best way we have to ensure we do not foolishly stray away from reality. Rationality is wise.

# 26. CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Drawn from *Logical and Spiritual Reflections* (2008), Book 4, chapters 6 & 9.

## 1. Mental Health

Just as our physical health is defined with reference to the human body, and its various members, organs and systems, as the optimum condition and function of that body – so in the case of mental health. Mental health is ***the optimum condition and functioning of the psyche***.

The psyche, the subject-matter of psychology, is of course a very large concept. It includes to some extent the body, since our mental life is largely psychosomatic, and since the body is the substratum of the so-called mind; especially, our mental health depends on the healthy condition and functioning of our nervous system, including the brain and the sense organs. On a less physical level, the psyche has two main domains, the spiritual and the mental (in a narrow sense of the term).

By the spiritual domain, I mean the soul, and by the (narrow) mind I mean the mental phenomena that occur (as it were) around the soul. With regard to those mental phenomena, they are perceptible (to various degrees) things or events, like

thoughts, dreams and emotions. They are, strictly speaking, outside the soul. They can be experienced and manipulated by the soul, but their existence depends on the nervous system too; and indeed, sometimes they are entirely products of the nervous system.

The soul is the true self, that which constitutes a person within us. The soul may be active or passive relative to mental phenomena and relative the physical aspects of the psyche (i.e. the nervous system). The soul itself has three obvious faculties[185] or powers, namely cognition (intuitive, perceptual, logical and conceptual), volition (our will) and valuation (our values). The core issue in mental health is the health of the soul, although the issue is wider than that.

Mental health refers mainly to the correct functioning of the three faculties of the soul. It has three components, corresponding to these three faculties. These are of course closely interrelated, each requiring both the others to function. Mental health has degrees. The degree of overall mental health is proportional to the degrees and combinations of degrees of health in these three areas of human endeavor.

- The faculty of cognition is at its best when it is well prepared and trained to know the surrounding world and how to deal with it. That is certainly true and important, but the main cognitive health issue is **self-knowledge.** This is achieved by introspection[186] and self-observation

[185] The term 'faculties' should not be taken to imply that the soul contains entities or departments – it merely refers to capabilities to cognize, to will and to value.

[186] Note that 'introspection' has a widening circle of meanings. The deepest level of meaning is the self *intuitively* aware of itself (i.e. of the soul), and of its cognitions, volitions and valuations. The

in action. Without a lucid, profound and extensive knowledge of one's own inner workings (motives, desires, fears, emotions, capabilities, etc.) and outer behavior, one is bound to feel imprisoned or lost in strange territory.

- The faculty of volition, likewise, has to be maintained for maximum efficiency in dealing with mental and physical phenomena. But the essence of health in relation to it is **self-control** (in the best sense of the term, not implying oppression), i.e. getting into the habit of doing what needs to be done (energy) or not-doing what needs to be avoided (restraint). This is essential to self-trust and self-confidence. For it is clear that if one allows oneself to be at the mercy of every passing fancy, impulse, urge, obsession, compulsion, bad habit, one will soon experience great anxiety, for anything might happen anytime. Without discipline one becomes one's own worst enemy.
- The faculty of valuation is properly used when or insofar as one's values are conducive to life, to self-knowledge and to self-control. This may be called **self-value** (in the best sense of the term, not implying egoism or egotism, selfishness or vanity). Clearly, if one has twisted values,

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next level is the self aware (perceptually and conceptually) of the mental phenomena in its mind (in the narrow sense), i.e. memories, imaginations, verbal thoughts, moods, etc. The third most superficial level of meaning is awareness (again, perceptual and conceptual) of its bodily phenomena, i.e. physical sensations, visceral sentiments, the sights of its body in different postures and positions, and so forth. All these levels are significant – but in ethical judgment, it is intuitive introspection that has the most impact.

> contradictory values, an inclination to perversion of some sort, and so forth, one will soon become confused and ultimately bring about one's own self-destruction.

Thus, briefly put, the three most spiritual aspects of mental health are self-knowledge, self-control and self-value. These are spiritual, because they concern the soul (or spirit or self), the core of our psyche or mental existence. When the Subject of cognitions, the Author of volitions and the Valuer of valuations is appropriately looked after, he or she is healthy and the rest follows. If the self's faculties are on the contrary neglected, the opposite occurs. We may thus speak of spiritual health – or in the opposite case, of a sick soul.

This is one aspect of mental health, its most intimate aspect. Of course, mental health does not only refer to how we take care of our soul, but to the full range of survival conditions and tasks. We need to improve our general cognitive abilities, e.g. by studying inductive and deductive logic, by being attentive, by remaining sober, and so on. Our capabilities of action will be improved by controlling our diet and our sex life, by staying physically fit, and so forth.

In short, without going into details, mental health relates to a wide range of inner and outer behavior patterns. It is therefore closely related to what we call ethics, the study of what is conducive to life. A person who cultivates mental health gets inner equilibrium and self-respect as reward, and achieves happiness, or at least basic contentment. Whereas the opposite person, sentences himself or herself to much inner conflict and self-contempt, and ends up suffering considerably.

Moreover, although the primary task of mental hygiene relates to oneself, this has a strong impact one one's social relations. That is to say, a mentally healthy person will naturally treat other people with respect and consideration, since that is the way he or she is used to dealing with himself or herself. On the contrary, a mentally unhealthy person will have many inter-personal conflicts, and suffer fear, anger, hatred, and similar negative emotions as a consequence.

Thus, mental health begets both dignity and decency. And inversely, mental sickness spoils life for self and others. Mental health is ennobling; mental sickness is debasing.

When one has mental health, the ongoing task is to maintain it and increase it. When one lacks it, the first task is to obtain it, i.e. to cure oneself of mental sickness. A very powerful way to obtain, maintain and improve mental health is *meditation*. Through meditation, one gets to really know oneself, gets to really take charge of oneself, and gets to really see for oneself what is good and what is bad in life, right and wrong in behavior.

## 2. Transcending Suffering and Karma

Bodhidharma makes clear that causes within this world cannot produce effects outside it; the Absolute can only conceivably be reached independently of the relative. Thus, the key to overcoming suffering and its underlying bad karma is not to be found in external rituals and deeds aimed at merit, but through an internal change of mind.

He insists that "invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings observing precepts, practicing devotions, or doing good works" are useless; only by "seeing [your buddha-] nature" can you "attain enlightenment". As he explains:

> *If you attain anything at all, it's conditional, it's karmic. It results in retribution* [i.e. reward or punishment]. *It turns the Wheel* [of karma]... *Unless you see your nature, all this talk about cause and effect* [i.e. acquiring religious merit] *is nonsense.* (P. 17.)

Thus, Zen meditation is not a way to change something, to annul our bad karma and its consequent suffering, but a way to awaken us to something that is already ever-present, something beyond karma, i.e. our "buddha-nature". This is liberating, for:

> *Once a person realizes his original nature, he stops creating karma* (p. 41). *That which is truly so, the indestructible, passionless dharma-self, remains forever free of the world's afflictions* (p. 93).

It follows that: "The essence of the Way is detachment" (p. 47). In his *Outline of Practice*[187], Bodhidharma describes how this spiritual path is treaded. He refers to "reason and practice". By reason, he means meditations that "turn from delusion back to reality"; while by practice, he means: "suffering injustice, adapting to conditions, seeking nothing

[187] This essay is also reproduced in D.T. Suzuki's First Series of Essays (pp. 180-183), under the name "Meditation on Four Acts".

and practicing the Dharma" (p. 3)[188]. All four of these practices are about detachment, or non-attachment.

1. "*Suffering injustice*": when you encounter some hardship that seems unfair to you, tell yourself that somewhere in your history (it does not matter just where) you must have deserved it somehow. In this way, you neutralize the suffering that believing you are being unjustly treated gives. You transcend the academic and fatiguing issue of justice or injustice, and remain internally unaffected by relatively external circumstances.[189]
2. "*Adapting to conditions*": this does not refer to external adaptations to conditions, but again to an attitude of willingness to make do with any currently existing

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[188] At first sight these "four all-inclusive practices" seem intended to parallel the Buddha's "four noble truths", viz. the fact of suffering (i.e. that existence is suffering), the cause of suffering (it is due to attachment), the cure of suffering (removing the cause, becoming unattached), and the way to the cure (the prescribed eightfold noble path). But while the two sets are obviously associated, they are not identical. The Buddha's foursome consists of three descriptive items and one prescriptive item; whereas, Bodhidharma list is altogether prescriptive (with three negatives and one positive).

[189] Note that I (unlike Bodhidharma) do not believe that universal justice necessarily exists. I agree however that one should strive to be as indifferent to the issue of justice as one can, because to get locked up in such concerns is definitely a spiritual retardant. Notwithstanding, the pragmatic wisdom of unconcern with justice for oneself ought not be taken to imply that one should be indifferent to justice *for others*. The latter concern would fall under the fourth heading here, that of "practicing the Dharma". One should obviously neither afflict other people with unjust acts, nor (as far as possible within one's power) allow third parties to so afflict them.

conditions or eventual changes of conditions. In this way, one is not at the mercy of favorable or unfavorable circumstances, but remains at all times mentally (i.e. more precisely, spiritually) prepared for and able to cope with whatever life dishes out.

3. "*Seeking nothing*": is a virtue based on the realization that you open yourself to negative experiences when you are dependent on positive experiences. Everything in this world that appears desirable comes together with other things that are undesirable. You may for a while find satisfaction in certain people or possessions; but sooner or later, these will turn into less pleasant experiences, since all things are impermanent. All data considered, it is more pleasant to remain aloof and serene.
4. "*Practicing the Dharma*": seems to refer to altruistic attitudes and acts. But even here, non-attachment is stressed, in order that egoism or egotism does not result from them. The aim is to transcend the distinction between self and other, to work for the good of all.

Thus, these four practices can be described as different forms of non-attachment. Not getting worked up over one's supposed deserts; not preferring this to that, but being well able to deal with whatever comes; not pursuing sundry material and social things, thinking foolishly that one will find happiness by such means; and, on the positive side, being helpful to others.

Non-attachment saves one and all from suffering. It is attachment that ties us to karma and causes us to suffer; by non-attachment we immediately transcend this finite world and get to live our life from the infinite perspective of our

buddha-nature (i.e. in nirvana). This buddha-nature is, of course, empty "like space"[190].

[190] P. 43.

# 27. CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Drawn from *Logical and Spiritual Reflections* (2008),
Book 5, chapters 8-10.

## 1. Enlightenment Without Idolatry

**The phenomenal self.** When Buddhists speak of one's 'consciousness' or 'mind' they are often referring to what could be described as one's sphere of experience at any moment. Moment after moment, all around the central point where cognition actually takes place, there is a cloud of phenomena: bodily sensations and sentiments, appearances of surrounding sights and sounds, and mental images and sounds, verbal and non-verbal thoughts, and moods. It is important during meditation (and eventually, beyond it) to get to be and to remain aware of this totality of variegated experience, and to realize the great weight of this experience in one's life.

According to Buddhists, this phenomenal mass is all there really is to one's life – and thence they conclude that there is no self. This phenomenal cloud, they claim, is what we call the self, it is the whole of the self. Moreover, according to the Yogacara school, this cloud is *only* mind (since, they argue, all experience is necessarily mediated by consciousness). But

I beg to differ on such views – and claim that we must pay attention to *the center* of that sphere of experience too.

At the center is the self, the one who is experiencing. This Subject experiencing the changing phenomenal objects is the real meaning of the word self. It is a non-phenomenal entity, who is not experienced outside itself, but is known to itself by intuition. That is the soul or spirit. Buddhists philosophers deny it, but I am not convinced by their reasoning. Even so, I am convinced that Enlightenment is (as they claim) the central goal of human existence – the meaning of it all.

The Jewish core value is, of course, service of God, i.e. fulfilling the commandments given in the written and oral Torah. But, it seems to me, the higher one tends spiritually, the better one can fulfill such a mission. Enlightenment means the perfection of wisdom. So there's no contradiction between these values. The more perfect the tool, the better it does the job.

**The value of Enlightenment**. The Buddhist idea of Enlightenment (*boddhi*) is one of its great contributions to human aspiration and inspiration. I would like Judaism to more consciously value and pursue this goal, through meditation. Of course, Judaism would never accept the idea that Enlightenment makes one a 'god'. I agree with this crucial caveat.

There are some significant points of similitude between the Judaic-Christian-Islamic group of religions and the Hindu-Buddhist group. One point all (or at least some schools in all) might agree with, is the notion that we are all rooted in an infinite God or Original Ground and that we will all one day return to this Source. Indeed, these grand religions may be

viewed as teachings on how to prepare for or accelerate such a return.

Now, both groups would consider that when an individual human manages somehow to merge back into God (or whatever the Source is called), God remains unaffected, i.e. nothing has been added to Him. From the latter's viewpoint there was never separation, no breach of unity. Where the two groups would differ, however, is in the status acquired by an individual who fuses with the Deity. The religions of Indian origin would regard such a person as having become a 'god', or even identified with the one and only God; whereas the Middle Eastern religions would consider the individual as ceasing to exist as a distinct entity.

I would refer to the tacit image of a drop of water flowing back into the ocean: certainly, that drop loses all 'personality', and moreover it becomes a mere part of and does not become equated with the ocean as a whole.

The Jewish religious way often seems like a constant hectic rush to perform countless rituals. It seems intended to keep you busy and stressed, as if agitation is proof of devotion. Set prayer sessions, some of them hours long, obligations to study without time limit, and many other demanding duties fill the days, evenings and weekends of those who faithfully follow this way.[191]

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[191] I should also mention, here, how we are sometimes (e.g. late at night at Pessach) required by the law to eat and sleep at unhealthy hours, not to mention the consumption of unhealthy foods and drinks (meat and alcohol). Moreover, little allowance is made for fresh air and regular exercise. The natural cycles and needs of the human body are too often overlooked.

Although that way gives one some satisfaction, if only the feeling of having a good conscience, if one has done all that needed doing fully and correctly (which is not always easy), it cannot be said bring peace of mind in the sense of cessation of "running after" things. Indeed, some commentators boast of this:

> *The Jewish approach to life considers the man… who has a feeling of completion, of peace, of a great light from above that has brought him to rest—to be someone who has lost his way.* (Adin Steinsaltz, p. 99)

Such an attitude is, in my view, an unfortunate devaluation of Enlightenment. In fact, it is a sort of cop-out: the rabbis, admitting that the way they have developed is unable to deliver the inner contentment and illumination all human beings yearn for, present this restlessness as a virtue above peace.

The missing ingredient here, it seems to me – what is needed to slow things down and give us time to breathe is – still and silent meditation. I here quote the 6th century CE Indian mystic and founder of Chinese Zen, Bodhidharma (p. 49):

> *Not thinking about anything is zen. Once you know this, walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, everything you do is zen...Using the mind to look for reality is delusion. Not using the mind to look for reality is awareness. Freeing oneself from words is liberation.*

Traditional Jewish observances do on the whole perform their function, which is to bring us closer to God. I believe that sincerely, which is why I personally continue to practice Judaism and recommend it to fellow Jews. However,

sometimes I get the impression that Judaism obstructs or blocks one's natural personal relation to God.

The main problem in my view is the 'commandment' format of Jewish law, which results in its excessive ritualism and legalism and almost non-stop verbosity. Jews are constantly in the position of slaves receiving peremptory orders under threat, rather than of free men and women kindly advised to voluntarily act in wise, objectively good and naturally virtuous ways. The commandments seem too often of uncertain value, if not contrary to reason; and those who object to them are viewed with much disapproval. It is argued that since these are God's orders, they must be wise imperatives; but their lack of evident wisdom in some cases makes their alleged source doubtful to some people.

At such times, it is actually meditation that keeps me going in Judaism. Thanks to it, I do not attach much importance to the imperfections I perceive in it, and remain focused on what seems to me the essential: getting personally closer to God.

**Against Idolatry**. Idolatry is clearly forbidden by God to Jews in the Ten Commandments[192]. God is to be the one and only object of worship – there is no other "god" by His side or in opposition to Him to worship.

Moreover, God does not "incarnate" in human form, or other material body or ghostly form of limited size; the very idea of incarnation is idolatrous. We are therefore forbidden to

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[192] The issue of idolatry in Judaism is a complex one, and I do not pretend to know all its ramifications. The present remarks may well go beyond the letter, into the spirit, of Jewish law. They are intended as an independent, philosophical analysis, not a religious legal opinion.

mentally worship any putative god or incarnation through belief, fear or love. All the more so, we must not physically worship any representations of alleged gods or incarnations, by bowing before statues or flat images or movies and similar acts. This interdiction obviously suggests that the worship of images of any alleged divinity or even of the true God is spiritually extremely damaging, in this world and/or the next.

According to the Rabbis, the interdiction of idolatry applies not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. It is one of seven Biblical commandments intended for the "Children of Noah" (i.e. the non-Jews, or Gentiles). This is stated in the "oral law" and subsequent rabbinical commentaries. In that case, Judaism may be regarded as categorically rejecting all religions that involve idolatrous beliefs and practices to any degree. Similar teachings are in principle found in Islam, no doubt thanks to Jewish influence.

With regard to Christianity, the issue is more complex, however. Some Jewish commentators (Maimonides comes to mind) appear to class it as a monotheistic religion. They argue that Christians *intend* to worship the formless one and only God, even as they worship alleged incarnations of God (the Son, the Holy Ghost) by prostrating themselves before images and similar acts. Most Christians would agree with this assessment, and class themselves as monotheistic. In my view, certain aspects of Hinduism and even Buddhism may be similarly classed as ultimately 'monotheistic' in intent or in effect.

It would clearly be preferable, however, from a purely rational viewpoint, if all religions eschewed all thoughts or acts that could be regarded as idolatrous from their curriculum.

## 2. Good People

**Discriminating between good and bad**. "May all people be happy!" say the Buddhists. In my Jewish view, this Buddhist wish should be understood in proper sequence. Not as an indiscriminate, unjust wish that all people *as they are* be happy now – for then evil people would get away with their evil! Rather as a wish that such people change for the better, and when they thus earn happiness it will come upon them. This is similar to the Talmudic story of a Talmudic rabbi who was told by his wife (if I remember rightly) not to curse evil people out of this world but to wish evil to depart.

And really, I think that is what the Buddhist expression is intended to mean. For Buddhism does not consider that happiness will befall anyone *contrary to their karma*, but rather that anyone *who attains enlightenment* will find 'happiness' therein. For they will then have lost their ignorance, and the intrigue and violence it generates, and their problems would disappear. Thus, the pious wish should more accurately be stated as "May all people attain enlightenment!" – and in this non-provocative form, who would oppose the idea?

Of course, the issue remains: can all people indeed become good? Supposedly, if we all proceed from the One, we can all return to the One – so Buddhism would apparently say.

On the other hand, would we want a Hitler to ever redeem himself – should there not for him and the likes of him be no redemption ever?

**The good man**. The good man[193] is of course a strong man, in the sense of someone with a power of will sufficiently developed to overcome morally negative influences and temptations, and forge ahead towards morally positive ends. He has character; he is not at the mercy of chance impulses within himself.

However, such strength of character is not his deepest secret. His true power is his moral intelligence – viz. his understanding that the good is valuable and the evil is valueless and counterproductive. He is not fooled by illusory attractions or repulsions. It is for this reason especially that he does not find it so difficult to avoid evil and pursue good.

That is, through lucid insight, the good man neutralizes the power of negative influences to slow him down or arrest him, and enhances the power of positive influences to facilitate his way towards spiritual success. He is consistently wise: he is not moved by the mirages that the evil impulse presents him, but on the contrary empowers his better side. He never dithers between good and bad.

By way of contrast, the spiritually low or evil man is basically stupid. He convinces himself (sometimes through superficially clever intricate arguments) that evil is attractive and good is unattractive – and for this reason he is overwhelmed by evil and uninterested in good. Alternatively, he mentally places good and evil on the same plane. It is he, by his own twisted imaginations, who has given evil power over himself and weakened his native goodness.

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193 Or good woman – here the term ‘man’ is intended as meaning ‘human being’.

Thus, the virtuous man is not victorious so much due to exceptionally strong will, but because of his perceptiveness and wisdom, which render his ordinary strength of will more easily effective. The wicked man, on the other hand, has woven for himself such a *delusion* about the value of evil or non-value of good, or through doubt, that he weakens and incapacitates himself in any attempt to avoid evil and do good.

I thus, in the last analysis, agree with the Buddhist idea that the root of evil is essentially a *cognitive* failure – a self-inflicted fiction, illusion, foolishness and stupidity. The volitional problem behind moral failure is relatively secondary; it is subsidiary to the weakening of self and strengthening of obstacles due to erroneous convictions. For this reason, meditation and sound reasoning are both essential antidotes.

This explains why the perfect man (the *tzadik* in Judaism or the enlightened man in Buddhism) is said to be free of good or evil. This does not mean that he is morally permitted to do evil, but that he has no desire to do evil. And this does not mean that he is forced deterministically to do good, but that he clearly sees that evil is without interest and stupid. Thus, he never falls into vice or fails to be virtuous, *not because he lacks free will*, but because of active moral intelligence.

This conception of morality can be clarified further by considering the extreme case – that of God. We conceive of Him as having Omnipotent free will, and yet as never committing evil or even abstaining from good. These characteristics are seen as mutually consistent, if we understand that God is obviously not forced by anything (any deterministic force or influence on His volition) to be Perfect,

but being Omniscient and All-wise He is simply never fooled by evil and is anyway always more than strong enough to overcome its superficial attractions. For this reason, it is safe to say that utter goodness is the 'nature' of God, without thereby implying that He is at all determined or influenced to so act. Even though he always opts for the good, it is always a free choice of His.

We must try to tend in that direction, following the principle of *imitatio Dei*. The tzadik is someone who has found the spark of Godliness within him to such a degree that he naturally acts in perfect accord with that principle.

**The danger of religiosity**. Though religions are in principle intended to improve people, religion can sometimes be an obstacle to self-improvement, because it may give us a false sense of perfection. One seems in accord with its essential demands, and so comes to ignore 'little imperfections'. Our shortcoming may be improper social behavior, i.e. lack of respect, consideration, politeness, and the like (what is called *derekh eretz* in Judaism); or perhaps a holier-than-thou attitude or a more pronounced form of fanaticism.

This observation is nothing new. Many people steer clear of religion precisely to avoid such ugly side-effects of it. We see around us, and history has often shown us, many cases of this disease – in Judaism, in Christianity and in Islam, and no doubt likewise in the other religions. To be fair, such unpleasant aspects of religiosity sometimes emerge from secular philosophies or from science. Conceit and arrogance are not the monopoly of any single doctrine.

The truth is, all religions and all philosophies (including science) *are part of 'samsara'*. They can help us approach

'nirvana', but they cannot take us all the way there. They are intrinsically flawed by their format as rational and volitional pursuits – whereas true transcendence requires a sort of fundamental 'letting go' of this world and one's place in it. So, whatever doctrine one adheres to, one should not allow oneself to be blinded by it. It is always a means, not the end.

## 3. A World of Mercy

There is a Jewish doctrine according to which this is a world of mercy (tempering justice), whereas after death we go to a world of (strict) justice. One's first reaction to that claim might be: 'what, you call this a world of mercy?' Yes, the idea here intended is that the sufferings we go through in this world are very light compared to what we justly deserve. Thus, we are better off paying off our debts by suffering in this world, rather than having them exacted off us in the next world. For there, the full payment will be required, without mercy.

The teaching here taught is that we should take advantage of the opportunities for redemption offered to us by this world, because here we have freewill and can repent and do good deeds. Whereas, in the world after death, we can no longer fix our errors or perform positive *mitzvoth* (duties), but must passively receive whatever we have coming. Thus, this is a teaching designed to push us to act while we still have the chance to do so.

This idea is comparable to the Buddhist doctrine that to be born as a human being is a very exceptional opportunity to attain enlightenment/liberation (*nirvana*). Such a chance

should not be wasted on vanities or in negative activities, but one should strive positively for removal of bad karma and for spiritual growth. Otherwise, next time one may be reborn in a less favorable estate, and become stuck in the cycle of *samsara* (birth and death, implying suffering) for eons.

Needless to say, one can see in this context the stupidity of suicide[194]. According to this teaching, such an act is not an effective way to escape from one's difficult situation, but only a way to make matters worse (in the hereafter or the next life). Trying to avoid challenges is useless and counterproductive. One should always bravely face the difficulties of life and cheerfully try to improve one's situation as well as one can. Life is certainly a great gift. And time passes so quickly.

Lately, the media fashionmongers have started pushing relentlessly in favor of voluntary euthanasia or 'assisted suicide'. Most Western countries have already made passive euthanasia (i.e. withholding life support) legal, and now some have legalized active euthanasia (i.e. killing) and the issue has become hot in most others. The advocates of this social innovation make it seem like an act of mercy – parading some people with terribly painful incurable diseases to excite our pity. These advocates are of course materialists, who do not believe in any sort of afterlife or rebirth.

They do not consider that it may be more merciful to allow the sufferer's bad karma to play itself out on this earth in this lifetime than to artificially cut it short. They do not consider

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[194] I mention this, due to reading often lately about youths – in Japan, in Britain – committing suicide. No doubt they feel afraid of life, and presumably have been given no spiritual education that would give them the strength and courage to face it.

that things might be worse thereafter, precisely because the karma was not allowed to play itself out. How do I know? I don't! But do they? Certainly not! They have no sure knowledge either, only mere speculations.

Moreover, the advocates of euthanasia do not really consider that helping someone commit suicide for whatever motive might still be murder. They are usually the same people or type of people who legalized abortion on demand, indifferent to the suffering and privation of life of the babies killed. They are close to those who support homosexuality, and in particular the adoption of children by homosexuals. They are people who consider their pursuit of any pleasure or avoidance of all pain as unquestionable absolutes. They do not acknowledge that we may earn certain pains or have no right to certain pleasures. They have little or no regard for spirituality or ethics.

And they have nothing to offer the suffering souls other than a quick and supposedly painless death. At least religion offers hope of cure or redemption. In situations of great suffering, why not try prayer and repentance? It might help, psychologically if not existentially. Also, when possible, try meditation.

# 28. CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Drawn from *Logical and Spiritual Reflections* (2008), Book 5, chapters 11-13.

## 1. Understanding Injustice

Justice occurs when you do some good or bad – through intention or some other mental act, through speech or some other physical act – and you get back what you deserve in relation and in proportion to that deed. Injustice means that some good is not followed by commensurate good or is followed by undeserved bad; or that some bad is not followed by commensurate bad or is followed by undeserved good.

Thus, justice and injustice are concepts depending on our notions of what deeds are good or bad, and of what is deserved or undeserved in relation and in proportion to them. Our 'perception' of justice or injustice has an emotional effect of its own on us. Note first that since justice and injustice are essentially rational judgments, the word 'perception' here may be misleading. We indeed perceive the situation, but its evaluation as just or unjust of course depends on a conceptual process.

When we rightly or wrongly perceive justice to have occurred, we feel comforted and pleased. Inversely, when we rightly or wrongly perceive injustice to have occurred, we

feel threatened and angered. (Note the acknowledgment that such judgments may occasionally be in error; there is no guarantee of correctness.)

Because perceptions of justice or injustice strongly affect us, it is important to understand these concepts. Such understanding has a calming effect on the mind, and even on the soul. Religious doctrines such as that of Divine justice (under the religions based on Abraham's monotheism) or that of karma (under Hinduism and Buddhism) were certainly designed to pacify us in this regard. But before we consider[195] these doctrines, a number of philosophical reflections are worth making.

Justice and injustice are not concepts relating to a wholly mechanistic world. Under a universal system of determinism and/or spontaneity, nothing is either just or unjust, everything just 'is'. Moreover, there being no conscious living being to feel effects or evaluate them, these concepts are irrelevant and inapplicable. In a world with only God – i.e. Someone omniscient, omnipotent and perfect through and through – there is automatic universal justice and no injustice at all.

The concepts of justice and injustice logically both come into play only in a world containing any number of living entities endowed with limited consciousness, volition and powers of valuation. That number could be only one, provided that single entity is not God, i.e. is a mere creature with limited powers (this could be assumed under a solipsist philosophy). But actually, our world seems to have many such entities,

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[195] Or reconsider them – for I have commented on this topic in many of my past works. Here, I seek to bring additional clarifications.

with some powers of cognition, freewill and valuation (there are apparently at least 6 billion humans who would fit this definition, not to mention other animals).

This insight – that *the concepts of justice and injustice depend on there being some non-mechanistic and less than Divine entities in the world* – is valid whether considered in the framework of atheism (as in modern materialism or in early Buddhism) or monotheism (as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam). It is all the more valid under polytheism (as in Hinduism, in some forms of Buddhism, and in other religions), since such religious form by definition involves numerous competing wills.

If for the sake of brevity we refer to the entities under consideration as entities with freewill (since this power presupposes consciousness and implies valuation), what we want to stress here is that **some injustice is inevitable in a world with competing wills**[196]. In a world without will at all, there is neither injustice nor justice. In a world with only God having will, there is only justice and no injustice. It is only in a world like ours that injustice occurs – and indeed, injustice is bound to occasionally occur in it.

Once this principle is comprehended, it is much easier to emotionally accept the existence of injustice. The existence of injustice in the world is not because the world is badly constructed or mismanaged – but is a *logical inevitability* given the existence of a multitude of competing entities with limited powers of awareness and will.

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[196] The word freewill involves a redundancy. An action that is not free would not be referred to as 'will' – but as a mechanistic 'event'. Will is called free only to stress this obvious fact. Thus, will and freewill are synonyms.

Granting God created the world and us in it, He could not have made it otherwise. To give us some powers of will, He has to abstain from exercising His full power of will (omnipotence). To have freewill is to be able to do good or bad – i.e. not to do the good one ought to do, on occasion; and even to do the bad one ought not do, on occasion. Even if some people were to always do only good, there is every likelihood that some people will occasionally do bad or not do good, or simply make mistakes.

This is equally true in a belief system devoid of God (which many people favor nowadays). In a mostly mechanistic world containing some entities with some powers of freewill, such entities are not likely to act always in a fully beneficial manner. Some people will sometimes inevitably, through wrong judgment or bad will, cause harm to themselves or to others, in a way that bears no rational relation and/or proportion to preceding deeds.

This "inevitability", note well, is a *statistical* fact, not implying determinism (otherwise, we could not logically refer to such events as acts of will). However, the intent here is not to reduce all events in human life to luck. It is only to deny that there can be automatic *universal* justice in our world, and to acknowledge that some injustice must occur, by virtue of the complexity of that world. It is not a statement that all is unjust, but only a statement that justice and injustice both occur.

And indeed, that is how we see the world in common sense, as a mixture of both. It is precisely for this reason that we have notions of both justice and injustice. Given this as an empirical fact, two questions arise.

The first question is: even if injustice *appears* to occur in the short run – might not justice be *restored later on in life or in an afterlife*? Such an assumption is a premise of many religions. In Hinduism and Buddhism, there is belief in a natural system of "karma" – through which every good or bad deed is *automatically* eventually (in this life or some later one(s)) compensated. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, there is a similar faith in future reward or punishment, except that it is made *dependent on* the will of God, who may choose to mercifully withhold retribution.

In the latter case, God's behavior towards us is conceived as *dependent on our later behavior (regret, repentance, etc.), and on our prayers*. There is also, to a lesser extent, in all these religions, a doctrine that one person may sometimes take on the suffering of others and so lighten their load somewhat. In this context, it is considered useful in some religions to direct prayers to saints[197].

On a more secular plane, the awareness that justice is not automatic and some injustice is inevitable gives rise to private and public efforts at redress. Individuals sometimes reward a good deed or avenge a wrong by someone else. Societies usually establish elaborate justice systems, to ensure some of the injustices that do occur are compensated in some way.

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[197] No one in Judaism prays to living or dead *people* (e.g. Moses or some Rebbe). Likewise (to my knowledge) in Islam (they do not pray to Mohammed). But prayers to saintly people and to people presumed to be gods incarnate are common in other religions: Christians pray to Jesus or Mary, Buddhists pray to Buddhas or bodhisattvas, and Hindus even pray to their flesh and blood gurus.

Note well: if we believed that natural justice and/or Divine justice ensures appropriate retribution for all good and bad deeds, there would be no point in human acts of justice or a societal system of justice. On the contrary, such interference on our part could create confusion. It is precisely because we understand that justice is, at least in part, a human moral responsibility that we elect parliamentarians to enact laws, and appoint judges and a police force to implement these laws.

This leads us to the second question: *what to do about injustice?* From a spiritual development point of view, it is of course essential to demand a maximum of justice *from oneself* (towards self and others). One should also help others obtain justice, whenever and to the extent possible. But to expect constant and full justice, or worse still to demand it, *from others* (towards self) is not very wise; it is to condemn oneself to unnecessary conflict and suffering.

One should as much as possible disregard the misdeeds of others towards oneself, and move on. To get entangled in concerns like revenge is a waste of valuable time, a distraction from more important spiritual pursuits. One should realize the "samsaric" nature of this world we are in: it is so made that one cannot hope for 100% justice within it. So, it is best to accept things as they are, and take things in stride, as far as possible. One can train oneself to be "above it all" – and become relatively immune.

Of course, in some cases it would be wrong and even suicidal to accept injustice. For instance, it would not be wise (for others' sakes, if not one's own) to allow a murderous dictatorship to pursue its course. On the other hand, often our vexations are due to envy or excessive desire. For instance,

one may get upset at not getting as much salary as one's colleagues at work. Follow the golden mean.

A word about the concept of "social justice" is appropriate here. This concept is based on the naturalist idea that all humans are born "equal", and the context they are born into (genes, family, social milieu, wealth, etc.) is a matter of good or bad *luck*. This could be construed as a relatively materialist notion, which is less emphasized by people who believe in karma or in Divine management. But that does not belie it.

Often, it is true, people who demand social justice (meaning mainly economic equality) are simply envious and wish to obtain unearned benefits. On the other hand, it is true that "we are all in it (this world) together" and we can by judicious effort make it a world with maximum opportunity and minimum suffering for all. This is the real premise for social justice: it is ultimately good for everyone. Helping others does not impoverish the haves, but enriches them by improving the world surrounding them and inside themselves.

## 2. Forgiveness

It is not always easy to forgive those who have caused us some tangible or assumed harm. Yet, forgiveness of some sort seems in ordinary circumstances wise, if one wants to avoid wasteful entanglements. So, it is worthwhile reflecting on this topic. Forgiving means abstaining from demanding reparation for damage sustained; or again, refraining from seeking revenge.

Forgiveness varies in kind, with regard to the victim's attitude towards the offender:

- One does not punish someone one believes culpable.
- Or one 'understands' the culprit, considering him or her at some level or to some degree less guilty than he or she strictly appears to be.
- Or one is willing to relinquish judgment, going so far as to let the matter drop and forget it altogether.

Forgiveness may take different forms:

- *Conditional pardon*: this is not forgiving without first receiving at least a sincere apology, an acknowledgment of guilt and promise not to repeat the offense, so that one is not taken for a 'sucker' and 'screwed' again.
- *Unconditional pardon*: this is graceful forgiving, not dependent on a prior sign of repentance from the offender, considering that such grace may eventually cause his or her conscience to realize the harm done and the debt owed.
- *Pragmatic pardon*: disregarding the offense, moving on to other things. This may mean avoiding the offender thenceforth, or resuming interactions with him or her as if nothing happened. One may take such an attitude out of practical necessity; or so as not to remain blocked by hate, dropping the matter to be emotionally freed of it.

These are some aspects of forgiveness and common motives concerning it. Note that to forgive is not necessarily to forget.

Even when one forgives, one may nevertheless vow not to forget, so as not to be victimized again. In such cases, one remains on guard against a proven danger, ready henceforth to defend oneself.

In this context, a reflection on the Christian statement "forgive them, for they know not what they do"[198] is in order. Such a motive for forgiveness may be considered self-contradictory, insofar as forgiveness presupposes some responsibility, which presupposes actions that were to some degree voluntary and conscious – if they were totally unconscious and involuntary, there is nothing to forgive, i.e. the concept of forgiveness is *not applicable*. One can still consistently say "don't be angry, for they know not what they do"; for one might well be angry at a natural phenomenon, and seek to calm one's anger, although one has no one to resent or forgive. Of course, it is also consistent to say: "forgive them, for they *hardly* know what they are doing", implying a bit of self-awareness – but one must consider to what extent "they" have chosen to be so unconscious. But in any case, one should not forgive by fooling oneself into doing so.

Forgiveness is usually the wisest course, because anger and hatred are attachments, i.e. weaknesses. One should not let one's enemy have this hold on one – i.e. weaken one and make one swerve away from serenity and nobility. It is bad

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198 As I recall, this was uttered by Jesus against the Jews or the Romans involved in his crucifixion, somewhere in the Christian Bible. This dramatic event was sadly used for centuries as a pretext to bash "the" Jews in general. That is to say, the "forgive them" statement was paradoxically interpreted as a call *not to* forgive!

enough that one has been wronged; it is preferable not to make matters worse for oneself by getting overly hung up on the episode. Let it pass, so far as possible. However, some crimes are unforgivable and it would be a crime to forgive them. Sometimes, one refuses to get involved in punishing guilt, out of laziness or selfishness. One then descends into advocacy of moral relativism or amorality, to justify one's inaction. No, one must conscientiously fulfill one's responsibilities, where applicable. Thus, be neither hotheaded nor indifferent, but find the right balance between mercy and justice.

Meditation both requires and produces forgiveness. One cannot advance far in meditation, if one is not willing to "let go" of unpleasant experiences. Also, the more one advances in meditation, the less are unpleasant experiences of any interest or importance. The mental influence of negative events diminishes, so that they appear less negative and so, when applicable, more easily forgiven.

**General forgiveness**. The Buddhists have a concept of "*metta*", which emphasizes universal love and compassion – even towards one's enemies, even towards people who have committed great crimes. This is of course a concept of total, immediate and unconditional forgiveness. The idea is that, through such magnanimous non-attachment to hatred and revenge, one becomes able to change people for the better and forge peace. It is argued that if one hangs on to resentment one only keeps the spiral of violence going.

I find it hard to subscribe to such a view, which in today's morally confused world is serving more and more as a justification for passivity to injustice. It is the sort of upside-down view that places Nazis and Nazi-hunters – or

Palestinian terrorism and Israeli self-defense– on the same moral plane. The net result of this Buddhist idea is that victims are reproved for complaining or defending themselves, and their aggressors are tolerated and appeased no matter how heinous their crimes.

Permit me to doubt that such an attitude can lead to world peace, or social peace, or inner peace. It is, instead, a formula for suicide and utter anarchy; justice has to be enforced at some level, or injustice is bound to reign. By failing to resist crime, we weaken the innocent victims and make them more and more vulnerable, and we strengthen and encourage thugs. Justice must be swift and firm, to make clear to all potential criminals that there is no profit in their antisocial behavior, and thus to protect the innocent as much as possible.

As for the universal compassion enjoined by Buddhism, I wonder whether it is fair to describe it as a high-minded virtue. If we examine the motivation involved within the individual practitioner, who in meditation trains himself to forgive and love his enemy, or anyone he perceives as evil, we see that: in the hope of gaining personal spiritual elevation or liberation, he is willing to be indifferent to the suffering of the victims of criminals, or even to reach-out in a friendly manner to criminals. This is best described as a selfish cop-out or sell-out.

However, if we avoid extremes, ‘metta’ is certainly commendable. An almost general loving-kindness can be cultivated by reflecting on the fact that we are all in this difficult world (samsara) together. We are all poor sods who landed here all of a sudden, not knowing from where and not knowing till where and when. This is our common lot. Some of us may seemingly have a luckier fate, but all of us

experience some difficulty. One should not be too judging. Perhaps if I was born and raised in the place of this other person, I would have come out worse than him or her.

## 3. Actions and Reactions

**The consequences of actions**. All human actions have some sort of consequence; that is evident and not open to debate. However, discussions arise as to whether our actions always, necessarily have just consequences (for good or bad, as the case may be), or whether they may have unjust or non-just consequences (i.e. more or less than exactly what is deserved).

According to the "karma" theory of Buddhism (and indeed Hinduism), justice is ensured quite naturally. Actions automatically cause eventual symmetrical reactions, although the agent of the action (i.e. the doer of the deed) may have to reincarnate after death to receive the whiplash (i.e. for the "law of karma" to hold). But Buddhism has not clearly described this reincarnation process, nor provided convincing empirical evidence for it (some sort of demonstration of continuity between purported incarnations). Note that ultimately there is no mercy built into this conception, except perhaps for the mercy that individual humans[199] might choose to exercise.

In Judaism (and similar religions), justice is conditionally ensured by Divine intervention. God sees the misdeed and

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[199] Or their more enlightened counterparts, i.e. Buddhas, bodhisattvas or *devas* ("gods").

reacts to it as He wills, in strict justice or with mercy. This conception could either mean that God always takes complete charge of the connection (so that without Him human actions would have no necessary consequences), or more probably that He has instituted a natural action-reaction justice process that He may on occasion override with mercy. Here, then, the reactions to our actions are not (or not entirely) preprogrammed, but depend on ad hoc decision by God case by case. Obviously, such decisions involve some degree of willful choice by Him, else they would never mercifully derogate from justice.

In Judaism, as in Buddhism, the ethical account may be settled within the present life – or it may have to be dealt with in an afterlife. For it seems evident empirically that not all accounts are settled in the present life, else we would not have the impression that some evil people sometimes get away with evil and even enjoy more than they deserve and that some good people suffer unjustly or remain unrewarded for their good deeds. Both lines of thought, therefore, tend to agree on the existence of a 'heaven' and a 'hell' of some sort after the current life. These might be distinct places, or they might merely characterize specific conditions of rebirth within this same world.

Thirdly, of course, there is the philosophy of Naturalism, based on realistic assessment of empirically evident phenomena without assuming anything beyond them (i.e. a vague and unproved reincarnation, let alone Divine intervention). This hypothesis considers that good or bad deeds do sometimes impact on the universe and are absorbed by it, without respectively benefiting or harming their doer. This view is also logically credible, although least satisfying

to our native sense of right and wrong. It is (I presume) the view held by most people in the West today.

I cannot pretend to logically prescribe one of these views to the exclusion of the others. They are all theories, all to some extent based on facts and all involving proposals that inductively go beyond these facts. Who can say for sure which one is objectively correct? I can however, echoing Pascal's Wager, say that people who ignore the Judaic or Buddhist warning of eventual retribution if we do not do right and avoid wrong *may* conceivably eventually find themselves in dire straits. Comparatively, nothing much is risked by not opting for the Naturalistic thesis – the only 'loss' is not being able to do whatever one likes or not-do whatever one dislikes, i.e. a more limited range of possible action.

Based on this reasoning, it would seem wise to act *as if* justice exists (i.e. even though one cannot definitely prove it), and do good and avoid doing evil. Moreover, it would seem wise to hope and pray for God's mercy (again, even if there are no guarantees one will get it). One might otherwise, to repeat, eventually have some unpleasant surprises.

**The concept of karma**. The Buddhist (and likewise Hindu) concept of karma is inconsistent and imperfect in various respects.

For a start, it presupposes a world that has existed eternally, so that every event in one's life has a karmic precedent in previous lives in infinite regression. But this is contrary to modern ideas in astronomy and biology, according to which the material world has an undifferentiated beginning (quarks or earlier) and life has a start (on earth at least, some four billion years ago). The Buddhists may of course reply that

such apparent beginning is a mere continuation of existences in previous material worlds or of previous purely spiritual existence(s).

Actions *do* indeed have consequences, but these are perhaps *not* always very 'just' (in all appearance). The hypothesis that actions always *ultimately* have just consequences involves an act of faith. It is an attempt to make the world more 'reasonable', an attempt that sometimes only produces painful disappointments and disillusions. We have to be honest and ready to accept that Nature is apparently sometimes just but *not* always so. This unpleasant observation might be mitigated through a karmic (or monotheistic) theory, but at the empirical level it is indubitable and best kept in mind.

Next, consider that logically there has to be a *first* crime (an aggression, or whatever), and an *innocent victim* of that first crime. For if we believe in *free will*, the crime is a gratuitous, *ex nihilo,* choice, and its victim is innocent. If we claim that the victim is on the receiving end because he (or she) did the same or a similar crime before (in this or in a previous lifetime) – we are effectively saying that he is *not* innocent, but *deserves* the victimization this time round. We should then congratulate the criminal, for committing an act of justice, punishing an evil person, closing the karmic circle (inevitably, according to the karmic premise). Thus, the karmic theory turns a victim into a criminal and the real criminal into an enforcer of justice!

Moreover, the real criminal cannot then be deserving of bad karma later on for his action (since it was de facto a 'just' act), whether he chose his action freely or was deterministically pushed to do it (by the force of universal

karmic law). He is largely exculpated. At most, he could be faulted for his inappropriate motive. In that case, the infinite cycle of karma is interrupted; i.e. there is no reason to expect him to be in turn a victim later on. This is the *inherent inconsistency* in the eternal karma viewpoint – it logically eliminates itself. The concepts of victim/criminal are *only* relevant in a freewill-doctrine context. The concepts are stolen in other contexts.

In my view, there *are* truly innocent victims of crime, first-time events of crime, and criminals truly guilty of crime. To *explain away* crime by karmic/deterministic views is to effectively accuse without any evidence (i.e. 'on principle') the victim of being an ex-criminal (and so deprive him of his dignity as a victim) and to praise the criminal for effectively doing justice. The proposed explanation produces confusion: it reverses the roles of the protagonists. It is an ideological viewpoint and a patently unfair one.

We may suppose that the karma theory was introduced as an explanation, to console people shocked by the injustice of physical aggressions, and other such events in the world. It obviously has some 'grain of truth' in it: there is indeed *some* 'karma', in the sense that some human actions apparently have *consequences that are satisfyingly just (*for good or bad) in our eyes. The problem is that *not all* human acts manifestly have such appropriate consequences; some seemingly have inappropriate consequences, either neutral or contrary to ethical expectations/demands. Thus, the theory cannot be inductively proved by generalization, only at best by adduction.

We may also object to the universality of karmic explanation by pointing out that not all suffering is due to victimization

*by someone else*. This means that we cannot lay the blame on a *similar* crime by the sufferer, as it suggests. I am referring here to accidents and natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, epidemics, famine and the like). Since in such cases there is (usually) no human action at *root* and indeed (again, usually) no human action could have prevented them, we cannot establish a *causal* connection and claim the untoward event happened *because* the victim deserved it (and even less that the victim can be inferred to have deserved it because the event happened!)

Karmic theory would have to claim equivalencies, i.e. work out some sort of conversion or exchange rates, between certain human acts and various accidents and natural disasters. Such intractable theoretical complications mean that karmic theory lacks technical precision (that is, it is not sufficiently fleshed-out, as required by epistemology) and is very hard to substantiate. Furthermore, we should not only look at *bad* natural events, but also at *good* ones – and how would we establish that someone Nature has well taken care of deserved it?

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