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When I was about thirty-seven years old I acted in a manner of which I had always disapproved. I had known of other people acting in the same way, and had always felt that they were doing wrong. It was in sex matters that I sinned, and the case was the more startling because I had been guilty of no outwardly wrong action of the kind since I was quite a young man, and for about a year before the lapse I had been stirred by a strong desire to change my whole way of life and be of more use in the world than heretofore. And the question arose — Was I to confess my conduct to those whose lives were linked to mine and whom I could not wound without lacerating myself? or had I better conceal it?

If I told them the truth it would hurt them and I should fall in their esteem, while, on the other hand, by not telling them I should be entering on a course of concealment which would easily lead to untruthfulness and ultimately, perhaps, to systematic deception.

I had from childhood kept a clear perception that truth is better than falsehood, and the feelings which had grown up on this opinion caused me now to be frank; and as soon as I had confessed, and saw how the knowledge of my conduct acted on those who were nearest to me, it became obvious that I must not repeat my miscon-

duct. All the excuses and justifications which seemed so plausible while I was looking at the matter from my own point of view — swayed by a strong personal bias, — vanished when I had to face the case as it really stood, and saw that it affected not one or two people only, but necessarily reacted upon all with whom they were in touch.

I had in fact run up against the root question of human conduct : Is there a right and a wrong? I had assumed that it is right to tell the truth and wrong to tell lies, and this had decided for me another important question of conduct. Evidently each part of our conduct is linked on to all the rest. Morality (i.e. right conduct) relates to all we do, and knits our life into one organic whole. We cannot be moral in one thing and irresponsible in another. If right and wrong can be predicated of human actions at all, they relate to all our actions — and we cannot separate out some one section of life (our family, our business life, our sexual relations, our friendships and enmities, our amusements, or our studies) and say that in this department we wish to be free from the rule of right and wrong.

I was resident at that time in Russia where such problems are discussed with great frankness, and with these thoughts working in my mind it came natural to me to speak of them to some personal friends. I found that more than one acquaintance had gone through experiences similar to my own, but not all of them had felt it necessary or desirable to confess their actions. This one, and that one, had chosen the path of concealment, the ultimate consequences of which were not yet apparent. For convenience sake let me speak as though the considerations which were presented to me, and claimed my attention, all came from one and the same friend.

I pleaded that surely truth is better than falsehood. This my friend would not admit to be necessarily so ; he said he had become convinced that our ideas of morality are conventional. He recognised an evolutionary process going on in the ^vorld. Some power of w^hich we know nothing, for reasons we cannot

discern, ages ago evolved enormous antediluvian animals with tremendous teeth and claws adapted to their environment, and enabling them to fight — which was what they were destined for. When the power (Nature) had done with them, it wiped them all out and continued its process of evolving fresh types, which it successively used up and wiped out. Among the rest came man. To man nature has not given such terrible teeth and claws, but it has furnished him with faculties which adapt him also to his environment. It has given him a conscience and a capacity to feel sympathy and love. These, he said, are evidently mere adaptations of the primitive tribal instincts of the savage, which, in turn, w^ere adaptations of the sexual and maternal instincts of the animals. Love is a lubricant designed to enable the machinery of human society to work without too much friction. It is merely one more adaptation of creatures to their environment, just as were the teeth and claws of the antediluvian monsters. "What we call "promptings of conscience" are merely inherited habits, the results of the fear of punishment transmitted through the nervous system.

My friend stated the matter somewhat in this way: —

"We do not understand this Nature of which we are a part, nor do we know its purpose. An earthquake swallows up a town; the bird tears the worm to pieces; the beautiful rainbow represents both the fruitful and life-giving rain, and the destructive and life — destroying flood which sweeps the helpless child from its despairing mother.

" Deify this Nature if you like ; talk, as the sentimentalists do, of the perfect harmony which (they say) exists, or will some day exist, between what is going on in Nature, and what we feel would satisfy us. Or, like Moses, say that an all-good and all-powerful God created this world as we see it and pronounced it to be quite satisfactory; or, like the pessimists, curse Nature for her heartless cruelty, for being 'red in tooth and claw.' But for those of us who care to be at aU truthful in the matter, the plain fact remains that

we simply do not know what Nature is aiming at; many of her processes and operations are terrible, shocking and revolting to what we are accustomed to call 'our best feelings,' and we do not even know whether Nature is aiming at anything at all.

"We may dislike death, decay, destruction, and misery — but they exist and have to be reckoned with. All the efforts to believe, as the Greeks did, in a beautiful harmony of Nature, like the Jewish attempts to believe in a good God who overrules all things for the best, are merely attempts to lull ourselves into a comfortable state of mind. They are not rational beUefs but Epicurean consolations — a kind of intellectual opium-eating.

" We are infinitesimally small parts of an infinitely large whole which we do not understand. If we knew the scheme of creation w^e might be able to see how we fit into it, and whether our life has or has not any meaning. But not understanding the plan and purpose of the whole machine, it is hopeless to ask what this or that particular little wheel is for. We are simply groping in the dark, and when we speak of right and wrong we are only deceiving ourselves. Not knowing what Nature has designed us for, we cannot know whether it is raore moral to oppose her in her designs and be wiped out, or to assist her in her plans and equally be wiped out.

" For science tells us (only men dislike what is unpleasant, and therefore this is often slurred over or kept in the background) that not only is death inevitable, both for ourselves and our friends, but that the human race itself will come to an end, and the earth will perish, and the whole solar system will pass away. No doctor ever yet saved any life; the utmost he could by any possibility do was to postpone the inevitable death. All the progress people talk about is progress towards the destruction of the world and the termination of the race.

"Reason, conscience, and love, therefore, are expedients, adaptations designed by nature for her own unknown purposes, but, more than this, they are merely temporary expedients. There is nothing permanent about them. What is called the 'soul' or the 'spirit' is to

Some, again, may say that the true line, on one or both these sides of hf e, is undiscoverable ; we must wait and drift a bit. That, for the present at least, the problems of morality are inscrutable. We may knock but it will not be opened unto us, we may search but shall not find. We are on the river of life but must not know whether to row upstream or drift with the current.

But surely this attitude is a foolish one; the plain man, facing the facts of life honestly, feels and knows it to be false. Life is indivisible, and life is always in the present. There can be no solution of the economic problem without a solution of the sex — problem. The two are inseparably linked together in the life of man. And how can a man help to guide his fellows unless he know in which direction to point them on both these issues?

All who wish to leave the world better than they found it, all who think they have perceived some truth, and hope to do some service, cannot escape from the responsibility of serving in the same army with the saints, the prophets, and the martyrs — i.e. with those to whom truth was precious, and duty imperative; who saw clearly that there is a morality embracing all our actions, discernible to man in the present — now and for ever.

Like them we must perceive that truth and right exist, — and our earnest effort must be that "righteousness shall flow down like a river and truth like a mighty stream."

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The plain, unperverted man needs no argument to show him that his spirit strives towards goodness. But in the conflict between Church Christians asserting what is un-verifiable, and scientists shutting from their minds the plainest facts of their inner consciousness, so many cultiued people become perplexed, that I have thought it worth preserving this product of my own wanderings in the wilderness, in the hope that it may be of use to some of them.

the body what the flame is to a candle — a result of its gradual combustion. The 'spirit' can no more continue to exist after the body has decomposed than the flame can go on burning after the candle has been consumed.

" Some people are fond of advising you to develop powers, and form habits which tend towards life — and to shun others which tend towards death. But this is a fallacious manner of expressing oneself, for none of our faculties or habits tend anywhere but towards ultimate death. The difference is only that some paths lead to the goal more quickly than others.

" So far from any clear rule of right or morality being discernible in the operations of Nature, nothing of the kind exists even in the mind of man. Human morality is merely conventional. It differs not only from the morality of the bees and the ants and other animals, but even among men themselves what is right in one age is wrong in another, and what is moral in one country is immoral in another. Under the Mosaic law it was right to slaughter one's national enemies and to have a hundred wives. In modern England most people are shocked if you have even half-a-dozen wives, and though many people still admire a Cecil Rhodes for 'painting the map of Africa red' with human blood, some people begin to disapprove of killing men, and of regarding the lives of foreigners as being less sacred than the lives of one's own countrymen."

My friend instanced to me a case in which his own conscience had led him wrong. He had been brought up to think it wrong to read novels on Sunday. When he was a young man he wanted to read a novel on Sunday, and did so, but his conscience made him perfectly wretched about it. This, however, only lasted till he had become accustomed to reading novels on Sunday. Then he perceived that he "had been hampered by a ridiculous Jewish superstition, the power of which was called conscience."

"There is a continual shifting and surging of opinions backwards and forwards, now to the left hand, and now to the right. Under such circumstances, only the fanatic will try to dogmatise, and only

the ascetic will forgo the few pleasures, not harmful to our physical life, which are open to us."

Again my friend argued: "Even admitting that we could discern right from wrong, could we alter our conduct? Could we be any better or any worse than we are?

" In nature there is no effect without an antecedent cause. Whatever is now going on in the world is the effect of what was happening millions of years ago. We have been shaped to what we are by the combined influence of soil and climate acting on our food and our surroundings, and on those of our ancestors for thousands of generations. There is no spot on your body, no atom in your brain, no thought that rises within you, but is an inevitable result of antecedent physical causes; that cause may be what you had for dinner yesterday (causing indigestion and irritability), but even the way you ate your yesterday's dinner was influenced by what your remote ancestors fed on millions of years ago, when the foundations were laid of the character you have inherited.

" Is it not sheer self-conceit and self-deception to imagine that we can counteract the accumulated results of all these antecedent causes, which have been operating steadily through the ages. Can we work miracles? Can we bid the sun stand stiU ? or (what is equally impossible) say to the inevitable result which must follow from what has gone before — 'Thou shalt not be!' We fancy we are free to act only because we do not see the threads by which we are moved — in reality we are mere automata."

It is always painful to disagree on the fundamental problems of life and conduct with those whom you respect and care for. It was so in this case, and, moreover, a dread haunted me that perhaps the power which had presented these problems to me, and given me a desire to solve them, and a perception that their solution was necessary, had yet left me incapable of solving them, — as a fish is sometimes left on dry land, a few feet from the river, struggling and gasping for the water it is unable to reach.

worse than zeal in the service of all. Sexual attraction and the family bond, while they may draw men from isolation and egotism, may also hamper man when more developed, and confine his interests and activity to a narrower circle and to a lower plane than they would reach were he free.

From this point of view, war, commerce, and sexual-attraction — useful instruments in the progress of the race — tried by the standard of the ideal, fall short and stand condemned as things w^e have to outgrow and leave behind on our upward path towards a fuller spiritual life.

It may be said that what I haA'^e briefly indicated as my perception of the inevitable and desirable line of human progress, is not the right line at all. That the application of Christ's law of love in economics does not make towards the brotherhood of man, or that, in sex matters, it does not make towards chastity and purity. Some may hold that Christ's law itself is erroneous; others that Christ was wrong in attempting to apply it practically to the different phases of human life ; that he should not have expressed any definite opinions on such difficult questions as those of property, law, government, or sex; that, in fact, the application of the "law of love" — to such a problem, say, as landowning — should not be considered in advance, but should be left, by each individual, until the stress of events force him to take some immediate personal action.

But my argument is that those who behave in progress at all should understand that progress must have a direction — the stream must flow somewhere. What we need is to discern which way it is flowing, and to know whether we approve or disapprove of that direction. This can only be done by unbiassed free-thinking.

My views may be all wrong, but then — those who care about the matter should show me where the error Ues, and co-operate with me in seeking to discern the true line of human advance. If Christ's law of love be wrong, — what is right ? If it be right, let us study its practical apphcation both in economics and in sex matters.

who feel that life has an aim, and that in the conduct of our lives we all need guidance, and are all (whether we know it or not) influencing and guiding others. If you desire freedom, remember that it is truth which alone can really set us free.

Even to our present perceptions, the "struggle for existence," in war and commerce, is no inscrutable evil, neither is sexual desire, — great as are the evils that have resulted from each of these things.

Through war and patriotism, men, from mere isolated individuals, or families, have been welded into groups capable of some heroism and some self-sacrifice for a common cause. Through business competition men have obtained some mastery over the laziness and self-indulgence of their natures. Through this training (and thanks to the misery it has involved) man is being driven forward (often by "a recoil from his own vices") to seek for wider union, and for a fairer field in which to use his powers in the service of others. And men have at last come to a point from which they can begin to discard as hindrances the means by which they have advanced so far.

So it seems to be with the sex-passion. Who that has watched it awaken in a selfish breast an interest in at least one other existence besides his, or her own; and has seen how^, through that one other, it has opened their hearts to sympathy with a whole class (or sometimes to a perception of the iniquity of a social system) can fail to see that this force also serves as a means to a good end ? But again, watching it carefully, and seeing how this passion excites, torments, and pre-occupies men and women; narrowing their interest to what concerns one other or a few others — how can we but desire escape from it for ourselves, and for all to whom we wish well ?

We should try neither to underrate nor to exaggerate the service these things have rendered, and are rendering, to the development of man's nature. Patriotism is better than selfish isolation, but worse than a recognition of the brotherhood of man. Industrious effort to secure one's own living is an advance on laziness, but is

This fear disappeared when I came to face the difficulties seriously. There was much that I could not solve or fathom, but what man needs to know in order to steer his course aright can be found by those who really seek it. The difficulty (it now seems to me) lies not so much in perceiving what is right, as in doing it. But thought is enormously important, because it is to man what the rudder is to a ship : it gives the direction. The tide may carry the ship to one side, the wind may even drive it back, but that does not mean that it is unimportant how the ship is steered. Unless it be steered rightly, what hope is there of reaching harbour? So it is with man. His actions result from his feelings, but his feelings grow up rooted on his sense of the meaning of life.

Thoughts such as those expressed by my friend do not often trouble plain, honest folk, but they colour and influence the minds of many of the sophisticated and over — instructed people of our day; and what makes them perplexing is that they contain a certain proportion of truth, and are often mixed up with theories and conclusions which are vahd.

Pure gold is easily distinguishable from amalgam, but it is difficult to separate the one from the other in a coin. So with a man's view of life. What is true and what is false may be easily distinguished if they are once separated: perplexity arises from having them intermixed.

What I first felt about my friend's arguments was that it would not do for me to yield to them, for if I admitted them I should never know what to like and what to dislike, what to do and what not to do. But no sooner did this thought form itself than I felt ashamed of it. I felt (not with my reason only but with my whole being) that : " Truth is great and shall prevail " : that to truth we must be ready to say, "Though thou shouldst elay me, yet will I love thee." A passage from Huxley recurred to my memory: "Granting that a religious creed would be beneficial, my next step is to ask for a proof of the dogma. If this is forthcoming it is my conviction that no drowning sailor ever clutched a hen-coop more tenaciously than

mankind will hold by such dogma, whatever it may be. But if not, then I verily believe that the human race wiU go its own evil way; and my only consolation lies in the reflection that however bad our posterity may become, so long as they hold by the plain rule of not pretending to beheve what they see no reason to believe, because it may be to their advantage so to pretend, they will not have reached the lowest depths of immorality."

Yes, surely! No pleasure, no expediency, no profit, no utility, will ever justify us in believing in the existence of right and wrong if it be true indeed that modern thought (Science) has demonstrated that we are but parts of an inscrutable whole, that we and our race must perish utterly, body and spirit, — that all morality is merely conventional, and that even our conscience and our reason are but inevitable results of integrations and disintegrations of matter over which we have no control.

The view of life which my friend represented flows logically enough, I think, from the materialistic or synthetic philosophy which is to the fore in our day.

We are surrounded by something which we call the material universe. The perceptions which reach us through our five senses reveal to us an order of Nature. What we perceive seems to obey fixed and definite laws which we can investigate. Our own bodies, and even our brains, belong to this external universe which we know through our senses, and the evolutionary and synthetic philosophy deals with all this. It goes further and undertakes to tell us all that can be known of the spirit in man. The mainspring of life, the prime mover, it speaks of as the "unknown and the unknowable," and it invites us to dismiss it from our thoughts in order to concentrate our attention on the knowable.

This philosophy professes to cover the whole ground of human knowledge, and as long as I admitted that claim, and looked to it for guidance in my own conduct, it baffled and perplexed me. My friend, on the basis of this philosophy, demonstrated the absurdity of believing in an absolute right and wrong, and Herbert Spencer,

authorities, and legalities ; we must look well to it that these are replaced by a clear, well-verified perception of what we are aiming at. For the house swept and garnished and left empty was soon occupied by seven devils worse than the first.

Before we are fit to destroy the old, or can do even that efficiently, we must first know what we seek: what we hold to be right: towards what ideal we are striving. This is true equally of the economic and the sexual sides of life.

If you have perceived that, despite the struggle for existence which is said to be a " law of Nature," mankind is slowly, through the ages, climbing — through cannibalism, slavery, feudal tenure, serfdom, wagedom — towards the brotherhood of man, and if your spirit approves that advance, and longs to aid it, the time has come when you can profitably use your perception of the absurdity of human law, and the iniquities of competitive business. There is then no danger that you will encourage others to forge bank-notes, because you see the wrong involved in banking.

If you have perceived that, despite that struggle for sexual union which we are told is a "law of Nature," mankind has slowly, through the ages, climbed — through unnatural vice, promiscuity, varietism, polygamy, polyandry, monogamy, — towards greater and ever greater chastity and purity, and if your spirit approves that advance (so that the "love affairs" of a Christ are inconceivable to you) the time has come when you can profitably use your perceptions that the conventions of society are stumbling-blocks, legal penalties an iniquity, and that even monogamy is far from affording a final solution of the problem. There is, then, no danger that those whom you influence will, by your misdirection, be led backwards to any of the customs from which the mass of humanity have partially escaped, after the experience, the relapses, and the painful efforts of many thousand years.

If you aim at freedom as an end in itself, careless as to how freedom should be used when it is gained, then the more strenuous your efforts are, the more surely will they evoke a reaction in those

seeks to inflict any penalty, is, it seems to me, an evil. On the other hand, "Judge righteous judgments" is not less necessary advice; for by seeking to perceive the truth regarding ourselves and others, and about our mutual relations to each other, we can best learn the lessons of life : learn to understand and escape from our own faults and learn to help others.

Very much has been pre-determined for us. It seems impossible that we should relapse into cannibalism, and equally impossible to live up to the level of the highest truths we have seen.

We are like travellers who have passed through many miles of forest and who can neither leap, at a bound, back to the entrance, nor overleap the many miles which still lie before them. They are not free to do the impossible, but they are free to select the direction in which they will move. They can continue to advance, or can swerve to the right or left, or can even turn back in despair.

The above are my perceptions as to the existence of right and wrong. If they be erroneous I hope someone will explain to me my mistakes ; if they be true I hope these thoughts may prove useful to some who still are, as I tiU recently was, perplexed on the subject. Assuming them to be in the main correct, I feel drawn to make an appreciation of them with reference to the "advanced" people with whom I have come in contact since I settled in England.

If there is such a thing as right, there must also be such a thing as morality: conduct tending towards the right, conduct that makes for the establishment of perfect relations among men, and the establishment of the Kingdom of Righteousness. This being so, it is surely of supreme importance to discern the right, if any. exist, as clearly as possible. Progress is only desirable if it be progress in the right direction. History shows us that all past civilisations progressed towards destruction. We, therefore, must realise that to progress is not sufficient: we must know what we are progressing towards, that is to say, we must seek for a clear perception of the truth as to what is right and what is wrong in human conduct. It is not enough to rid ourselves of conventional ideas, prejudices,

in the fourth great volume (" Justice ") of the fifth great section (" Principles of Ethics ") of his great scheme of Synthetic Philosophy, on this same basis seeks to demonstrate that the existing system of landholding (by which the people who till the land of England do not possess it, but live under the control of those who do) is one which practically accords with the principles of justice!

I could not help suspecting that when it deals with such questions the synthetic philosophy oversteps the limits within which it is competent.

I next came to perceive that what the synthetic philosophy neglects is the " subjective " view of life. This view regards "the spirit in man" actuating his reason and his conscience, as being the most real of all things. This spirit is the divine in man — a something durable, permanent, and reliable. By means of it we are constituted judges — having knowledge of good and evil. It is the "true life" the "hfe eternal" (in Christ's language) for the sake of which the physical life may well be sacrificed. Compared to this, all that reaches us through our five senses is external, foreign to us, unsatisfactory, changeable, temporary. This subjective view has been held, and dwelt on, by all the great religious teachers who have ever moved the hearts of men : by Socrates, Lao-Tsze, Buddha, Christ, Paul, Wesley, Woolman, Tolstoy, and by a host of others whose influence spreads from age to age and from continent to continent.

Now, the question before us is this : " Is there any real Right — absolute, firm, immovable, durable; belonging to a real, eternal order of things ? " And this raises the further questions : Is there something in each of us which is linked indissolubly to that real eternal order ? Are we, therefore, brethren? Moved by the same spirit? Owing allegiance to the same truth and the same duty?

Will the synthetic philosophy suffice to enable us to answer these questions ? It professes to answer all the questions to which mankind possesses any answer. It regards primarily what is external — what can be perceived and investigated through the five senses. It calls these things realities and facts, and it holds out

hopes that by means of these it will explain also your innermost perceptions ; and it warns you that every other method is mere self-deception.

And, indeed, to many of us, at first, this outer world does seem more solid and real than the inner world of our consciousness. We are, at first, inclined to disbelieve the teachers who tell us that the external is deceptive, unreliable, and temporary, and that the inner life alone is reliable and permanent. We are ready to call them "Mystics," and to put their teaching aside as unsatisfactory. Only after much thought do we begin to perceive to what an extent the external world deceives, baffles, and perplexes us. The mere number of facts relating to this external world is literally infinite, and we can know only a very few of them. Even a Newton may well admit that he is like a little child picking up pebbles by the shore of the ocean of the unknown. Even in the things we thought we knew, how often we are deceived! To borrow an example: you enter a room, a looking-glass fills one end of it and you advance to speak to a lady you see there — till you touch the glass, and your hand tells you that your eye has deceived you. When this happens we call it an "optical illusion." But there are cases in which we find our difPerent senses combining to deceive us, and we then call it a " fact." And as most men have senses similar to ours, when one man's senses deceive him he will easily find plenty of other people to confirm him in his error, and when the people who have made a special study of the matter are deceived, it becomes a "scientific fact." For thousands of years the earth was flat, and the sun rose in the east and sank in the west each day. And how sure people usually are of their "scientific facts," — until a fresh generation sweeps them into the rubbish heap. Have we not (particularly those of us who had not themselves investigated it) felt sure that the "Law of Gravity" was some- thing quite certainly and absolutely true? — and does not Edward Carpenter now show us that it is " a projection into a monstrous universality and abstraction, of partially understood

6. Lastly, my friend contended that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are pre-determined and inevitable results of what went before.

This is just where the man, whose view of life includes the subjective perception of his own inner consciousness, finds himself at issue with all the philosophic systems which try to confine themselves to a knowledge of what can be studied through the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and feeling. The root of the whole matter is, that if we know^ ourselves we perceive an inward spirit preferring good to evil. As Tolstoy puts it : " Goodness is really the fundamental metaphysical conception which forms the essence of our consciousness ; it is a conception not defined by reason, it is that which can be defined by nothing else but which defines everything else ; it is the highest, the eternal aim of our life."

Examining my own inner perceptions, I believe I possess a will. We do not know why or how the spirit operates upon the physical brain, which, but for that incoming life, ^vould be merely automatic. Neither science nor inspiration have shown us how to produce life, or explained its secret to us. The dilemma is that we must assume (1) either that we are automata, or (2) that we possess some measure of will: and with the facts of life before me I am driven to assume that I possiBss some measure of will. We may reject religion as a superstition, morality as a delusion, and duty as a fallacy, yet we shall continue to desire and strive for something, if for nothing better than for the gratification of some personal CElprice, or the satisfaction of some physical want.

We are not free from the limitations of time and space, nor are we free from the influences of heredity, environment, soil, and climate : my body is a result of what occurred before I was born. And this is what should save us from harshly judging one another. " Judge not that ye be not judged " would be sound and sensible advice, even if it' were shown that no Christ ever spoke it. For all judging of the kind we ourselves might reasonably try to escape from — i.e. all judging in which the judge assumes a position of superiority or

lepers — all are alike moving towards the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Which direction we should move in, is no insoluble enigma. When anyone tells us that morality is mutable, that we are left without guidance, and cannot know right from wrong, the reply is one which was given thousands of years ago : " It is not too hard for thee, neither is it too far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it ? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it that we may do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

5. But we are told conscience veers round, as in the case of ray friend with his Sunday novel.

Is not the case this? He had been accustomed to he guided by the authority of his elders, and to use his own judging faculty merely within prescribed hmits. Then he became conscious of a conflict between his own reason and the dictates of authority. He should have faced the problem squarely, and cleared his own mind. Finding (as all may find who will think about it) that a man can and must think with his own head, he would have been free to choose his path, and have felt no further compunctions about following it. His conscience troubled him, I take it, rather because he shirked the problem than because he read the novel. Ultimately he did think for himself, and then his conscience was at rest.

We are aU too apt to be intellectually lazy, shirking the problems of life, and saying we do not know the solutions. We are all too apt to be inteUectuaUy dishonest, not thinking freely about the questions life puts before us, but allowing a secret bias for some friend, or book, or creed, or church, or occupation, or amusement to swerve us from following straight after truth. We are too apt to be intellectually cowardly, not believing that our minds were given us to be used, and that they are worth using and trusting.

phenomena in a particular region of observation?"[1] We are beginning to understand that the " laws of science " are not absolutely, but at best only relatively true. Again, how sure most people are that the trees are green. Someone with an eye rather differently shaped sees red trees where I see green ones. But being in a majority I say that he has a defect of the eye called Daltonism. Really, so far as science has guessed at present, the tree is neither green nor red. Certain waves of light pass from it to our eyes. These waves impinge on the retina, the nerves pass on a sensation to our brain, and we say we see green trees. If the other shape of eye were more common, trees would be red.

Under the materialistic philosophy " matter and force" are the ultimate. Our investigation of them has to decide what importance we should attach to man's spirit: reason, conscience, and judging-faculty.

The contrary philosophy (call it Socratic, or Christian, as you please) discerns the essential difference between that which perceives and that which is perceived, and while it recognises and includes what can be known of the external universe, admits the validity of the inductive method of investigating nature and recognises that we learn and are developed by what we perceive, yet instead of looking to the external to decide for us what we are to regard as good or bad, it holds that all we perceive has to be judged by the spirit of man. Pascal has put the essential position thus: "Man is but a reed, the feeblest of things — but he is a thinking reed. The whole universe need not rise in order to crush him. A vapour, or a drop of water, is sufficient to kill him. But when the universe crushes him, man still remains nobler than that which kills him, because he knows that he is dying, while of the advantage the universe has over him it knows nothing. Thus, all our dignity consists in thought. It is by that, and not by time or space, that we should

[1] "Modern Science — a Criticism," published in the volume of essays entitled "Civilisation, its Cause and Cure."

raise ourselves. Let us therefore labour to think rightly: that is the principle of morality."

From the synthetic philosophy we get no clear guidance: only a piling up of so-called "facts" and a process of generalising on these " facts : " different authorities coming to different conclusions, perplexing the intellect but not stirring the heart. The subjective view said that there is a divine life present in each of us. We must realise that it is our true self. In it and not in our physical existence resides true, real, permanent life. Trust it, use it, perceive that it is the ultimate from which there is no appeal; realise that the same spirit lives in you as lives in all your brother men— and you have grasped the master-key to all the problems of morality, ethics, and religion.

This is the crux of the whole matter : each man must look within himself and say whether he is conscious of a power approving and disapproving — seeking for what is good. If a man be not conscious of it, if the idea seem to him mystical, unreal, fantastic, — then" moraKty, as I understand it, can have no meaning for him. But if he recognise this life, or Kght, or spirit, or soul, or divine spark, or divinity (call it what you will) in himself, he possesses the essential basis of morality and religion.

Is there or is there not a right and wrong discernible to you and to me, and incumbent upon us both ? If we use our minds freely (not swayed by prejudices nor overmastered by our physical nature) can we, or can we not, understand each other, sympathise with each other, aid each other spiritually, and advance hand in hand together?

If not, we can never more approve or disapprove of any man's conduct, never be moved by admiration of any self — sacrifice, nor be touched by righteous indignation at any wrong. If I have no judging — faculty, capable of discerning right and wrong, I must remain neutral, and divide my approbation and sympathy equally between the Judas who betrays, the High Priest who prosecutes, the Pilate who condemns, and the Jesus who sacrifices himself for

be) are hypotheses which cannot be verified; and, dogmatically asserted, they have produced a very natural reaction, and inclined men towards mere negation. The influence of this reaction is perceptible aroimd us to-day. The basis, however, on which Christ, or Socrates, built in this matter still stands firm, and this much at least we have, many of us, found in our own experience of life — that while we are chiefly occupied with the physical and material side of life we need constant occupation and stimulant to keep us from perceiving the approach of death; but when we are occupied with the spirit, and are following after that which is good, the fear of death finds no place, and we need no such pre-occupation or hypnotic influence to blind us to it.

4. Next as to what my friend said about the instability of the moral code.

It is true that no code of external rules exists which would fit all men in all ages. But observe the working of your own mind, and it is easy to see why this is so. What we desire and seek is perfection. No sooner is one step gained than it becomes necessary to take another. Morality (by which I mean right conduct) does not consist in reaching an attainable spot and stagnating there, but, on the contrary, it consists in movement forward. Through the ages men have been travelling along converging lines towards one ultimate aim —the City of God.

If we are walking from York to London, wotdd it not be unreasonable to tell us that we must be going wrong because yesterday we were anxious to reach and rest at Grantham, while to-day we are entering Peterboro? The immutability lies in the ultimate aim — when we approached Grantham we were making for London, and so we are when we have pushed on to Peterboro'.

The owner who begins to have some compassion for his slaves ; the owner who lets his slaves go free; the woman who makes a friend of her servant; the rich man who chooses a life of poverty for conscience sake ; the Father Damien who gives his life for the

up and the sun cools down. They think Christ must have been romancing if he ever said he could show us life eternal, that being a matter we can know nothing about.

They say that life is to the body what the flame is to the candle. But the analogy is misleading. The difference is that the flame has no choice as to what it will do with the candle : it really depends on chemical activities and physical mobiUties. But man's spirit (which is his real life) can and does enable him to decide that he will drown himself out of jealousy, risk his life for patriotism, or go to the stake for truth's sake. For the analogy to be complete, the flame of the candle would have to approve or disapprove of the stearin.

A truer analogy, I believe, would be to compare man's hfe to an electrical installation. When a good lamp is well attached a bright and steady light is shown, if the lamp be badly attached the flame is irregular, and when the lamp is broken the light goes out. But the electric current (man's life or spirit) continues to flow with equal power whether the lamp (man's body) be sound, or injured, or destroyed.

For those, however, who accept the materialist's point of view, my friend's argument should, I think, be conclusive. It is unreasonable to believe in any absolute right and wrong if our existence is only temporary. Logically it does not matter whether the arrangement lasts, say, for twenty years, till the death of the individual; or for millions of years, till the extinction of the race. If our spirit be the product of our brain, and our brain be admittedly perishable, what have we to do with the eternal? Right and wrong belong to the domain of the infinite. Morality depends upon that stream of tendency which makes for righteousness yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It needs, however, to be pointed out, that to say, as Christ did, that man has eternal life, is not the same as asserting as a fact, as the Buddhists do, that men will be re-incarnated, or as the European churches do, that men will rise from the dead and have a personal immortality. These (however plausible the one or the other may

the truth. If there be no right and no wrong, or if they be not such as a plain man may find, or if they be different for different men — then, not only the teaching of Christ, but every other attempt that ever has been made to supply direction or guidance to mankind must be futile.

The problem is a tremendous one: (1) On the one hand, admit the existence of an absolute right incumbent on each of us, and it follows that there exists a real, secure, and permanent spiritual order of things to which we are linked by the spirit in us which recognises right and wrong. (2) On the other hand, deny the existence of an absolute right and wrong, and it inevitably follows that all our discussions and efforts to influence each other are senseless.

But, important as the problem is, the solution is simple. We only need to consider the facts of our own nature, facts of which we cannot but be conscious, and we shall plainly see that we do distinguish right from wrong. Which of us when he reads the story of Socrates does not admire him for speaking the truth boldly before his judges. Which of us is unable to perceive that Jabez Balfour did wrong when he devoured widows' houses and for a pretence made long prayers? Do not the great and good who are gone reach their hands to us across the ages, making us feel that (however dormant it may be) in our innermost selves there dwells some spark of that divine nature which made them heroes, saints, and martyrs — that we, too (however unworthily), are sons of the same spirit.

It still remains to meet my friend's arguments, which, after this preparation, will perhaps not prove a difficult task.

1. Conscience and love, we are told, are mere results of the physical activities and chemical mobilities of matter operating through ages.

Have you ever seen a conjuror make a ball vanish? First, he lets you examine a solid ball, then he manages to substitute a collapsible trick ball for the real one, and rolling it between his hands it gradually becomes smaller and smaller till at last you can't see what has become of it.

That is very much like what the materialist does with conscience. Conscience is something real and actual, which influences me and of which I am subjectively conscious. The philosopher comes along and undertakes to make this con- science disappear. This he does by substituting for the thing itself — of which we have knowledge at first hand and not through our senses — the external phenomena which accompany the existence of a conscience. Passing then from the phenomena which indicate that I, and the people I know, have consciences, to similar external phenomena which indicate that other people, further removed from me, had consciences, he gradually leads us further and further from what is familiar and sure, to what is distant and unknown, till at last we reach the primitive tribe, the apes, the bees, and the ants, and, past them, the colloid or jelly — like substances in which physical life is supposed to have comtnenced. Here we have quite lost sight of conscience. Instead of speaking about the thing itself (the power which influences our conduct) he has discussed its derivation, and asked where it comes from. Starting with the fundamental confusion of supposing that something subjective (like conscience) can be explained by the objective methods of biology, physics, or chemistry — he ends up by informing you of the important fact that your conscience proceeds from chemical activities and physical mobilities, the question how we ought to use our conscience remaining unanswered.

2. Next we are told that Nature (of which we are parts) is non-moral and inscrutable.

Well, I am prepared to admit that Nature appears to me to be non-moral. I may devise plausible guesses to explain the earthquake or the flood, but if, in order to know how to act, I had objectively to observe all nature, to accumulate myriads of facts, to generalise from them, and by searching to find out the purpose of creation, I should despair of ever accomplishing the task, and should be ready to admit that we cannot know right from wrong. We do not know the whole design of the universe, and we should beware of involving ourselves in logical perplexities by asserting (as Moses did) that

God created the earth, or by saying (as the nature-worshippers do) that all the ways of nature commend themselves to our moral sense. We should content ourselves with making sure of what is necessary and sufficient, and should not assert what is questionable and cannot be verified.

But putting aside the ambitious design of fathoming the mind of the All, — admitting that we, being finite, cannot grasp or span the infinite — let us turn from what we cannot know to what we do know. Commune with the spirit that is within you, and you will find that as the bird know^s how to live in the air, and is not perplexed how to act, and as the fish is able to live in the water, and knows what to do there, so raan too can live his life, guided in its problems by the spirit within him, and not unconscious that that same spirit links us, not only to our fellow-men, but also to the faithful horse or trusty dog, and makes us desire more comprehension of, and union with, the flowers, the grass, and all that exists.

This does not mean that if man voluntarily indulges in ethical conundrums which have no real application to his own life — he will always be able to solve them. I remember being asked what an Eskimo should do who saw the force of the vegetarian's objection to taking life, but who found that he w^ould die if he ceased to eat whale's blubber. I had to give it up ; because I am not an Eskimo, and do not find it necessary to live on whale's blubber. His course would depend on the strength of his conviction, and on his readiness to sacrifice physical existence for spiritual well-being.

3. Again, as to the temporary, and consequently unsatisfactory, nature of human existence.

This is, I think, a very important point in my friend's position, for it links the question of the reality of right and wrong to the question whether the spirit of which we are conscious in ourselves is finite or infinite. There are people who wish to admit the existence of right and wrong, but who incline to the belief that we perish utterly at the death of our body, leaving behind only our dust and our influence, which in its turn will perish when the world is used