

many men now groan under, and to escape which they may yet destroy our civilization itself, in their rage pulling down the good with the bad. Capitalism — which means the present British world system — must collapse out of its own inherent contradiction; we have been told this by its acutest critics, both of the Left and of the Right; but whether this collapse is of the nature of a catastrophe, exploding in the Marxian horror, or of a gentler easing into a more human system depends upon the men and ideas that gain control in our day. The policies of the present rulers of Great Britain are directed on the catastrophic path, and Mr. Howe's book is of high value in pointing out that America should not allow herself to be led in that direction, no matter what blandishments may be used upon her.

GEOFFREY STONE

Sublimated Utilitarianism*

READERS of Prof. Stace's previous books and articles will anticipate in the present work two outstanding qualities: in style, an extreme simplicity and directness; and in thought, a genius that is primarily systematic, even when dealing with historical problems. *The Concept of Morals* is simple, direct, and of a most refreshing candor; and it is quite strictly a work in systematic Ethics. The author hoes his own row, largely in independence of historic philosophy. His knowledge of the history of philosophy, which is certainly at the back of his mind, remains at the back

* THE CONCEPT OF MORALS by W. T. Stace (MACMILLAN. 307 pp. \$2.25).

of his mind, to be drawn forth at intervals only, for the illumination of some specific problem.

The part of history with which Prof. Stace is most nearly concerned is the present, and it is from the present situation in Ethics that he takes off. The field of ethical theory he sees as divided between "absolutists" and "relativists"; and neither of these camps can provide the modern man with the doctrine that he needs. "Absolutism is dead", as are all systems of morality founded upon religious sanctions: any theory of this kind is simply unacceptable to modern minds, and "absolutism" continues to be mouthed only by cloistered professors of philosophy who have fallen grievously behind the times. On the other hand, "ethical relativity", as Mr. Stace loses no time in showing, simply "makes nonsense" of the moral life. What men *understand* by the pursuit of goodness becomes impossible, if this "goodness" be conceived merely in terms of group standards, which vary from age to age and from place to place. On the basis of relativity, there is no conceivable sense in which Christian ethics are higher than the ethics of the Hottentot; they are simply different. If nowhere there is a common standard, valid for humanity as a whole, then moral progress (or moral devolution) becomes the hollowest of illusions. Prof. Stace is fully aware of the effect which ethical relativity will have upon society, once it is given the chance to prevail. The individuals who frame a doctrine of this sort may well escape its corrosive influence—even their children may. But through the years it will take a dreadful toll.

Since Prof. Stace is bent primarily upon developing a systematic theory of his own, he is under no

obligation to examine all rival views; otherwise, he might be criticized for drawing the issue thus sharply, and omitting to mention certain more moderate positions — *e.g.*, that of the Oxford Intuitionists (on the Right) and (on the Left) that of the more rational of the Logical Positivists. The opposition which he does draw is certainly not unreal; it does exist. Of relativism, in the broad sense, Prof. Stace has given us a sufficient refutation. Of “absolutism”, however, he has merely said that it is old-fashioned; and we should therefore be on our guard. We should look to see whether Prof. Stace has really disposed of absolutism, or whether its primary emphasis reappears in his own theory. The latter seems to me to be the case.

In his own mind, however, the author is convinced of the necessity for avoiding both extremes. We must show morality to be “universal, but not absolute”. This means that although “our (human) morality is relative to our (human) nature”, still within this framework of human nature it is absolute. “By a universal morality I mean one which applies, not merely to this race or that during this age or that, but to all humanity in all ages.” If a race of supermen should arrive upon the scene, this morality would not be valid for them; but as long as men remain men, its validity is assured. For again:

What do we *mean* by a universal morality? We do *not* mean a moral principle which is, as a matter of empirical fact, believed and approved by all men. We mean a moral principle which is *applicable* to all men in the sense that, even if they do not accept it, they *ought* to do so. What we have to show is that the same moral obligation in

reality falls upon all men. We do not have to show that all men know what this obligation is, or that there is among them any agreement about the matter. We have to show that what really *is* right is the same for all men. . . .

The way in which this is to be accomplished is strictly limited by Prof. Stace's analysis of the word "ought". Although he uses it frequently and with emphasis (as in the foregoing quotation), he agrees with the Logical Positivists that it must bear "an empirical meaning" or else no meaning at all. The Moral Law, and all other statements containing the word "ought", cannot therefore be left in the "ought" form; they must be reduced to the "is" form, to statements of fact. The assertion that all men "ought" to conform to the same morality must then be translated into the assertion (a) that all men *do as a matter of fact* have certain universal needs in common, and (b) that these needs *can as a matter of fact* be satisfied only by conforming to this one morality. This reduction, forming the basis of a strictly "natural ethic", is surely convincing at first sight; and a "natural ethic", such as Prof. Stace sets forth, may be unexceptionable as far as it goes. The soul no doubt has "needs" that are satisfied only by morality, just as it has "needs" that are satisfied only by God: we may speak in these terms, all along the line, if we so choose. But we must recognize, at the same time, a certain prime difference among "needs". There are needs which are actually or explicitly felt as such by all men; and there are again needs that are explicitly felt as such by some men only. The former are "universal" in the strict, empirical sense; the latter may be

called "universal" *only upon a hypothesis* — the hypothesis, namely, that what is explicit in some men may be presumed to operate implicitly in all. If it is the former kind of need that mortality subserves, then our ethic will be not only "natural", but naturalistic; while if it is the latter kind, it will not be properly "natural" at all.

The question is, then, which kind of "universal need" Prof. Stace has in mind, when he says that there are such needs, of which morality is the only satisfaction. And on this crucial point he wavers. His empiricism draws him in one direction (toward the kind of needs that are actually or explicitly universal); and his moral sense draws him in the other (toward the kind of needs that are only implicitly universal, or universal under an hypothesis). Now the "need" in question is the sort of thing that any natural scientist could investigate, and is closely identified with impulse or sentiment; and now it is a nearly mystical notion — a final End or Value which *must* simply be acknowledged as such — which *demand*s acknowledgment — but which *is* as a matter of fact so acknowledged by all too few of us. We may call these two views the "low" and the "high" view respectively.

The "high" view comes forth most clearly in Prof. Stace's account of "happiness". All men desire happiness, and all strive toward it. The author takes his stand, therefore, upon the basic Utilitarian doctrine that the end of human action is happiness and that actions are not right or wrong in themselves, but according as they promote happiness or fail to promote it — according as they are means to this end. What then is "happiness"? Prof. Stace firmly rejects the

view that it is a sum or aggregate of pleasures. But neither, he thinks, is it an "unanalyzable ultimate". We can enumerate certain "satisfactions" — such as health, material comfort, a measure of leisure and relaxation, the affection of family and friends — which contribute to happiness, as Aristotle contended; but happiness is not merely the sum of these particular satisfactions. "We must say, on the contrary, that happiness is one thing and that satisfactions are quite another thing. . . . Once we get clear in our minds the conception that we may have in our souls on the one hand a set of satisfactions; and on the other hand a state of happiness; and that these two are quite distinct; and we shall have made an enormous stride forward towards the understanding of a number of ethical problems."

If we try to explain this duality of satisfactions and happiness, there are two considerations that will help us. "In the first place, there is something in the individual personality of each man which determines the degree of his happiness independently of any satisfactions which he has or does not have. Some men seem to be born happy, others to be born unhappy. . . ." And in the second place "some satisfactions . . . contribute more to happiness, others less". What a satisfaction contributes to happiness does not depend upon the intensity of the satisfaction, as the cruder of the Utilitarians thought, but upon its "specific nature" — *i.e.*, "that character of it which distinguishes it from other kinds of satisfaction". No law can be stated which helps us to understand *why* a satisfaction of one specific nature yields more happiness than a satisfaction of another specific nature. We

simply find in experience that it is so. It is a brute fact. . . . The connection between *this* specific nature and *this* value is not a connection of implication of logical necessity. We have to "wait on experience", as Hume would have expressed it, to discover what value is attached to what specific nature. It is simply a fact that bodily satisfactions yield little happiness (that is, are of low value). And this fact had to be discovered in experience by long generations of men . . . There is no conceivable reason why the facts should be as they are. . . .

This discussion of "happiness" is crucial to Prof. Stace's position. And the significant thing is that "happiness" does after all turn out to be an "unanalyzable ultimate", as unanalyzable as "good" is for the Intuitionist (and absolutist!) G. E. Moore. If happiness "lies outside satisfactions", as Mr. Stace tells us it does, and is the standard by which these satisfactions are judged higher or lower, then we shall simply have to *accept* this standard as absolute Value, without demonstrating it in any way. All ultimate values are by definition *acknowledged* — they are never proved. Prof. Stace insists over and over again that it is "self-evident" that we should seek our own happiness, and that the only mystery is why we should seek the happiness of others. But this is not really self-evident at all; and, as a matter of fact, true happiness *is* sought by comparatively few. The *roué* would not even understand the "happiness" which Prof. Stace has set forth, much less desire it; just so, bad men would be bored and unhappy in Heaven. The reduction of "oughtness" to "isness" will not hold water in the end. For all men *do not as a matter of fact* desire hap-

piness, conceived as Mr. Stace conceives it. No doubt they *ought* to desire this happiness, but *actually they do not*. And to say merely that they "ought" to desire it is to render the "reduction" of no effect.

It is extraordinary that Prof. Stace should think that he has avoided the intuitionism and absolutism upon which all value theory depends. In ethics at any rate, "absolutism" does not mean a preoccupation with the Absolute; it means that in the moral life there is something outside ourselves — outside our natural impulses, sentiments, and desires — that stands waiting to be grasped. Prof. Stace's notion of "happiness" is absolutistic in this sense, for it is something beyond the actual, something which *is* most truly satisfactory although it may not *appear* to be so. That our knowledge of this true happiness hangs upon experience, individual and racial, does not alter the situation in the least. The fact that an *a priori* must be discovered experientially does not prevent it from being a genuine *a priori*, genuinely obligatory for all men; and the idea of "happiness", as Prof. Stace himself presents it, is such an *a priori*.

Various reasons might be given for the author's failure to recognize this point; but two reasons at least are plain. The first is that Prof. Stace has not fully emancipated himself from Rousseauism. He still views man as "naturally good". Now, if men did really seek true happiness by nature (as, for example, they seek the satisfactions of food and sex), then Mr. Stace's position would be fully justified. That evil is for us ultimate and inescapable, and not merely adventitious, is the one and only consideration that renders every "natural ethic" inadequate. Prof. Stace

conceives himself to be writing such an ethic, and all his prejudices and assumptions are set in that direction; but his conception of "happiness" will not fit into the naturalistic mold, because it is a better conception than he himself knows.

The second reason appears in the one brief but very significant passage in which Prof. Stace comes to grips with the objection which we have raised:

. . . All men wish to be happy. And for all men there is but one road, the road of morality. And let it not be said by some clever person that there are men who do *not* wish to be happy. All men wish for something (else they could not continue to live). And *what* they wish for — however strange it may be, however it might make most of them miserable — is that which *they* conceive will make them happy.

So happiness is after all to be identified with what we *conceive* to be happiness, and since all men have some conception of what would make them happy, therefore all men pursue happiness as a goal! We here recall the intense subjectivism — indeed, the almost solipsism — of *The Theory of Knowledge and Existence*; and we realize how the errors and half-truths and ambiguities of modern philosophy go back to a single source — the sundering of human thought from the world it knows, and the shutting of it up within itself. If we cannot believe that sense-perception lays hold of anything outside itself, then we cannot believe that value-perception does either; both sense qualities and values, on this view, collapse into empty subjectivity. And then the only way to gain any kind of universality, in either field, is to show that the external world or the hierarchy of moral values corre-

sponds to some deep-seated "need" or impulse of human nature. The valuational defect of Prof. Stace's thought is essentially an epistemological defect, and can be corrected only by putting away the subjective sophistries of Locke and Hume and Descartes, and starting forth anew on the ground of realism.

The "low" or naturalistic view of the "need" which morality subserves has already been suggested; but it is more precisely expressed in the two final chapters, on "Why Should I Be Moral?" Where moral value is not clearly recognized as a simple object of acknowledgment, the discussion of ethical obligation will always be found to turn upon the theme of egoism and altruism; and this is largely the case with Prof. Stace. The end of moral action has been defined as happiness; but not all actions which increase happiness are moral. They must also be unselfish and just. The definition of morality includes three concepts: (1) happiness production; (2) unselfishness or altruism; and (3) justice. Altruism is being fair and just as between myself and other human beings; justice is being fair as between human beings other than myself. Of the two, justice is thus the more fundamental notion, and may be considered the genus, of which altruism is a species. In this inclusive sense, justice is "the recognition of the intrinsic equality of all persons as persons". Extrinsicly, men are of course unequal, and this inequality must be taken account of in various ways; but simply *as persons* they are to be viewed as equal, and in so far to be treated impartially. (The practical difficulty here is to know where the intrinsic ends and the extrinsic begins. Is it an intrinsic or an extrinsic fact about a man that

he is my friend, and shall I thus be partial or impartial in regard to him? Practical difficulties, however, arise on the best of theories.)

In view of all this, the question "Why should I be moral?" immediately transposes itself for Prof. Stace into the question "Why should I be just or altruistic?" It being self-evident that I should seek my own happiness, why should I also seek the happiness of others? "And the answer is that this is the only way to reach *my own* happiness." This curious fact is then traced, much in the manner of the eighteenth-century moralists, to two psychological traits of our nature — sociality, and "our capacity for being made happy in some degree by the bare fact of the happiness of other persons". These traits, it is argued, are just as universal as reason, and therefore can as plausibly be made the basis of morality as reason can. The fallacy lies in the fact that "universal" is here taken in the purely extensive or empirical sense; and when so taken, the sex-impulse might as well be made the basis of morality, since it too is universal in extension. Value — the other dimension of reality from the actual and existent — is here read out of the universe, together with our obligations to realize *it* (not merely to get an impulse of our nature satisfied). And it must be thus read out, if it is not acknowledged to begin with. The really vital issue being thus disposed of, or not even considered, the modernist's argument crystallizes around "egoism *versus* altruism", where altruism itself turns out to be a peculiarly subtle kind of egoism. This Prof. Stace admits, but he sees no help for it. Satisfaction is a satisfaction, and on this "low" view

morality ministers to one or two satisfactions among the rest.

It may be maintained, as I have already suggested, that *The Concept of Morals* is satisfactory as a theory of natural Ethics — that it is valid as far as it goes, and only needs to be supplemented by other considerations. In the beautiful little “Epilogue” appended to the book, the author argues something like this on his own behalf. His attitude toward the “other world” is not one of denial, but of agnosticism. Certainly agnosticism is better than the insolent nihilism of the Logical Positivists. But some of us think that at this latter day, agnosticism will be found not capable of saving our world from distractedness.

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