

THE RATIONAL GOOD

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The Rational Good by L. T. Hobhouse

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L. T. HOBHOUSE

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GOOD**

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PREFACE

THE following chapters were originally written in 1908-9, in amplification of a sketch of ethical theory contained in my *Morals in Evolution*, which had been published three years earlier. I was not, however, satisfied with the result, and put the manuscript aside for several years. It has now been almost entirely re-written. My obligations to various writers on Psychology and Ethics will be manifest, but the general theory which most nearly corresponds to the central doctrine of the work is one which I heard expounded in a paper read in New York in 1911 by a distinguished lecturer on Ethics, and have never met with again in print. Mr. J. A. Hobson kindly read the work in its original form, and made many valuable criticisms. Mr. A. W. Perris has performed the same service to the revised work, and several alterations and additions are due to his suggestions. I have also to thank him for revising the proofs.

Sather 1.70
1922

L. T. H.

WIMBLEDON,
October, 1920.



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(1) Impulse, as opposed to reason, seems to dominate human action. (2) This view has been fortified by psychological analysis which sees in the alleged "reasons" for action an expression for underlying impulses. (3) But, if intellect without impulse is void, impulse without intellect is blind, (4) and the intellectual element is not purely derivative but has intellectual sources. (5) On the other hand, it is a fallacy to oppose the Practical Reason to the body of impulse as a whole. (6) In fact intelligence begins by defining the ends of impulse, (7) while, as it develops, impulse is transformed. The question is, what part intelligence (and in particular Reason) plays in the transformation.

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(1) "Bare" impulse involves but is not identical with feeling. (2) The function of feeling is to guide impulse in adaptation to the conditions of life. (3) Impulse informed by anticipation of an end is desire. The term has then a wider meaning than that of "bare" impulse. (4) The impulse to an inclusive End involving many related desires is a volition, (5) and the impulse to an end dominating all life is the Will. (6) The Will is the mass of

impulse as an organized system (7) resting on feeling in a generic sense of the term. (8) The principle of Control then lies not outside, but within the system of impulse-feeling, and it is here if anywhere that practical rationality must be found.

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CHAPTER III

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(1) The rational judgment is that which is consistent, grounded and objective, the first two characters being the test of the third. (2) The search for grounds leads up to immediate judgments both particular and general. Particular immediate judgments, however, are not indubitably true, but are corroborated by interconnexion. (3) Immediate general judgments likewise require interconnexion. (4) Interconnectedness is in fact the rational basis of belief. (5) The grounds on which interconnexion rests are universal relations. (6) The principles of interconnexion rest on the consilience of all consistent acts of inference. (7) The rational in cognition is then the effort to attain truth by the persistent interconnexion of judgments through universal relations.

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(1) Is there any reason in the choice of ultimate ends, i.e. is there a Rational Good? (2) Generically the Good appears as a harmony (mutual support) of feeling and effort, (3) or of feeling and passive experience including, e.g., observation of the behaviour of another. Generically pleasure is feeling in harmony and pain in disharmony. (4) The fact asserted by the judgment "This is Good" is thus a relation between an experience and a feeling.

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Either element may be called good as pertaining to the whole.

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CHAPTER V

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(1) The Rational Good must be a consistent scheme of purposes interconnected by universal relations in which subjective disturbance is eliminated. (2) This involves a dual harmony of feeling with feeling and of feeling with experience. (3) There may be internal consistency from a more partial point of view but rationality involves universalism, i.e. a system comprehending the whole world of all minds in a single scheme. (4) The authority of this scheme rests on the fact that the judgments composing it form a reasonable system, and assert a reality which is not dependent on the opinion of the individual. Its psychological force is the organization of impulse-feeling which reason effects. (5) The foundation of the reality which it asserts is the interconnectedness of all minds. (6) The elements of impulse-feeling evolve under the conditions of existence and are of the instinctive type. (7) The impulse towards harmony is rational though it has not attained finality but continually corrects itself.

CHAPTER VI

THE REALIZED GOOD 127

(1) Harmony involves the modification of impulses so far as incompatible. (2) This depends on the development of personality, (3) and of the social principle. (4) Development is a progressive harmony (5) which in its matured form may be described as happiness in the fulfilment of life as a whole. (6) This definition is not incompatible with

the principle that the individual mind requires an object beyond itself. PAGE

CHAPTER VII

APPLICATIONS 166

(1) The recognized moral order contains irrational elements. (2) How are rational principles to be brought into relation with it? (3) Different interests must be preserved except so far as they conflict. (4) Where there is conflict the test is consistency carried through life as a whole. (5) In developing a rational order three rules of method are of use, (6) viz. (a) the system must "work," (7) (b) must impose no restraint not necessary for its working, (8) (c) must be impartial. (9) Bearing of the principle on abstract rights and collective wholes.

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IMPLICATIONS 193

(1) Relation of the Principle of Harmony to Utilitarianism (2) and to Idealism. (3) Self-sacrifice cannot be resolved into self-realization. (4) Disparity of values, apparently opposed to the principle, is found to corroborate it. (5) The sanction of the principle is internal harmony. (6) It accords with a spiritual interpretation of the world-process. (7) The anti-ethical view of development is false.

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