PROBLEMS OF BELIEF

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Preface

I AM aware that this is a little book on a big subject. But it is no longer possible to write, or at any rate to publish, big books on philosophic subjects. The deplorable decline of European civilization, revealed and accelerated by the war, together with the 'dry rot' which nearly everywhere infests the high places of the academic world, are rapidly bringing about a situation in which there is no audience for anything that cannot be 'filmed' or 'broadcasted.' It is no wonder, therefore, that the restricted public of professional philosophers has not the strength of mind to scrap old problems (which in any progressive science would have been discarded long ago as spurious and futile), nor the courage to explore the enormous possibilities of the alternatives that have never been considered. Philosophy seems content to mark time on the old well-trodden ground, and philosophic 'reflexion' has become mere rumination. At no time is it easy to stir men up to think; now our traditions and our mode of life conspire to reduce our thinking to a minimum. I do not therefore flatter myself that this little book will succeed in its primary aim by evoking any great

amount of fresh thought and stimulating philosophic progress. But even eras of stagnation and decadence leave intact the duty of not sacrificing every germ of new truth upon the pitiless altars of Baal.

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Chapter I — *Introductory*

THE study of Belief is difficult, and has been greatly neglected. It is difficult, in part because it is infected with all the complexity of human nature, but more because it demands for its complete treatment the co-operation of two sciences, which in this case happen to be on very bad terms. The subject of Belief has the misfortune to lie in the borderland between logic and psychology, and to be capable of treatment by either, but incapable of subjection to either; so that only the co-operation of both can reduce it to order. Otherwise, either its logical or its psychological aspect will rebel against the treatment inflicted on it. Thus, if we adopt the luminous distinction, between the *causes* and the *reasons* of belief, first made by Lord Balfour in his important *Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, which professional philosophers have so unduly neglected, there will always be three questions which may and must be raised about any belief. We may ask, (1) How did it come to be? What caused it? (2) What is it worth? What reasons are there for it? (3) How do its origin and its value affect each other? Now the first question is one of psychology; the second, one of logic; while the third con-

cerns the relations between psychology and logic. Belief, therefore, seems predestined to be a bone of contention between psychology and logic, if both are anxious to claim it, or, alternatively, the bridge to link them together, if neither can afford to ignore it. Actually, however, both seem tacitly to have agreed to leave it in No Man's Land, because each has felt that to annex it would impose too severe a strain on its own internal economy, as it was conceived to be.

So Belief was left derelict and allowed to fall a victim to Theology, which had obvious reasons for interesting itself in certain sides of belief. Theology, however, was more anxious to exploit than to explore the subject. It cared little about the proper nature of belief, but much about obtaining credit for its own contentions. It had, moreover, a strong bias in favour of positive belief as against disbelief, which it decried as 'unbelief,' and so discouraged the study of the psychological facts of belief and their critical evaluation. In virtue of this theological domination, positive belief has come to seem intrinsically meritorious in the eyes of most, and disbelief to seem intrinsically wicked, while 'belief' has come to mean specifically *religious* belief. Yet this is plainly only one case of belief, an important case no doubt, but one that can only be appreciated properly in the whole context of our habits of belief.

About belief in general, therefore, common

sense has no very definite convictions; indeed, it can hardly be said to have reflected on it. But it is taken to be quite a simple and straightforward affair. Any plain man can answer plain questions about his beliefs. It is simply a question of knowing his own mind. If he believes, he believes fully and knows it; if not, he disbelieves as completely and consciously. Anything betwixt and between belief and disbelief is regarded as abnormal, as an unpleasant, undesirable condition to be got out of as speedily as possible. The only species of belief that are popularly recognized are 'rational' belief, which is essentially logical and accounted for by logic, and 'instinctive' belief, which is 'merely psychological,' though sometimes taken to mean something deeper, welling up from the roots of our being. Rationalists, however, are apt to condemn this valuation of instinctive beliefs as 'mystical.'

As against the undue simplifications of such accounts, it will be the aim of this study to bring out that the subject of Belief is anything but simple, and presents a series of psychological problems of the most fascinating sort. Its psychological nature is, of course, fundamental; but after it has been made out, Belief will be found to develop relations vital not only to logic and religion, but to action as such, and to every aspect of human life and activity. These relations will, indeed, prove so intricate and important as in

the end to confront the student of Belief with the most ultimate questions of metaphysics. In short, from being a No Man's Land avoided by the adjacent sciences, Belief becomes the centre from which radiate the routes to almost all the interesting problems of philosophy.

Chapter II — *The Nature of Belief*

NATURALLY, the first question to raise about belief is, *What is belief?* and this question is primarily a question of psychology. It may, however, be answered variously according to the type of psychology we select. Thus, in the classical chapter xxi. of his *Principles of Psychology* James mentions descriptions of belief as a mental state or function of cognizing reality, as a sense of reality, as a sort of feeling, or acquiescence, or consent, and, finally, as a *psychic attitude towards a proposition* (p. 287). The differences of these descriptions are due, of course, to the different standpoints from which various psychologies view the operations of the mind. As, however, we are free to *choose* our standpoint, we shall do well to choose a suitable psychology. What we need is not a psychology that labours to describe belief in terms of 'objects' and 'relations,' but one that is *activist*, and does not regard it as scientifically inadmissible to allow the mind to select and manipulate the objects it attends to. Now if we ask the question, *What is belief?* in this 'activist' spirit, it is plain that the last of these descriptions is much the best. For we can then conceive belief as an ultimate and characteristic fact of human nature.

Let us, then, define belief as a *spiritual attitude of welcome which we assume towards what we take to be a 'truth.'* As such an attitude, it is plainly an affair of our *whole* nature, and not of mere 'intellect' —if we can legitimately use this abstraction at all.

This fact, however, at once introduces complications. For if beliefs have many roots, and these are not all intellectual, it will follow not only that their strength and vitality will not depend on their 'rationality' alone, but also that intellectual criticism may be powerless to eradicate them. Again, if our nature is *not* 'whole,' its discrepant parts may well generate conflicting beliefs, and their conflicts will, in various ways, detract from the stability, value, and validity of our beliefs. As, then, belief admits of degrees, conflicts, varieties, and variations, it will not be surprising if stable and assured belief turns out to be comparatively rare. For it will mean the special case in which our whole nature *can* act in unison, and welcomes a truth whole-heartedly and abidingly. But usually we do not rise to such harmonies, and find our 'rational' beliefs flouted and thwarted by others which are rooted in the cravings of our hearts and the impulses of our appetites.

At the opposite pole to belief stands *disbelief*—the whole-hearted *rejection* of a 'truth'—*i.e.*, truth-claim. This, also, will be a relatively rare attitude of mind, especially when it is sheer disbelief—*i.e.*, just inability to believe a 'truth' that

is offered, and not consequential on belief in other, incompatible or more congenial, truths. Indeed, it may even be argued that disbelief is always belief in something else; but this, perhaps, is going too far. It is logically possible to distinguish between the case where we disbelieve 'A' because we believe in 'B,' and the case where we reject 'A' because of its own defects—*e.g.*, because it seems to us absurd, 'self-contradictory,' or unmeaning: so psychologically we seem able to disbelieve 'A,' just because it strikes us as intolerable or incredible.

Between the two extremes of belief and disbelief extends a vast region occupied by the various intensities and shades of belief: half-beliefs, quarter-beliefs, pseudo-beliefs, make-believes, beliefs seasonal, temporary, or momentary; 'illogical' beliefs that are 'self-contradictory,' and yet do not cancel out and disappear; beliefs inhering in portions of our complex personality other than the dominant or 'normal' self, the 'unworthy' beliefs of our lower nature, and the 'ideals' of our aspirations. The whole of this mixed population must be enumerated by the census of a conscientious psychology, for it all counts, and is relevant to the operations of our minds; yet it will all be found to fall short of full belief and stability in some respect or other. It is not, however, negligible on this account, and, indeed, makes up the great mass of

'beliefs' encountered in the field of intellectual debate.

An alternative way of regarding this region of incomplete belief is to conceive it, not as mediating between belief and disbelief, but as constituting the field of *doubt;* but this will imply a change of *attitude.* For, unlike the decisiveness of full welcome (belief) and of definite rejection (disbelief), doubt has nothing definitive about it: it is essentially transitional, mobile, and fluctuating. This characteristic, however, allies it to *inquiry;* nor is it unimportant for psychology to concern itself with the spheres and functions of uncertainty, hesitation, deliberation, inquiry, and probability. For to know when to doubt and when to believe, when to deliberate and when to act, may make all the difference between sanity and insanity, success and failure in life. Logically, also, this region is of the utmost importance; for it is here that truth is discovered or made, and discriminated from error; it is hence that fully tested truths are exported to the realm of belief and convicted errors transported to that of disbelief.

The value of doubt, however, has not been adequately recognized. Owing to the theological associations of the word belief, the negative features and drawbacks of the states of mind included in this region have been unduly emphasized. Doubt has been conceived as a peril to the soul, as an unmitigated evil, or even a crime, second only to

unbelief; priests and princes have treated it as something dangerous and abominable, to be punished, suppressed, and extirpated at all costs. Neither its good, nor its uses, have been perceived.

The reasons for this treatment were partly psychological, partly social. It is a psychological fact that a state of doubt, especially if it is prolonged and concerns vital matters, feels unpleasant; it is also a fact that dogmatic minds find any sort of doubt hard to bear. It is a fact, further, that doubt must not in practice be prolonged; if it does not cease when action should ensue, it may be ruinous. Theoretically, no doubt, suspense of judgment may be the logical attitude which *ought* to be adopted towards all questions on which absolute certainty is unattainable by one who has limited knowledge and limited leisure for inquiry; but actually so intransigent an attitude is not maintained, even by those who profess it theoretically. It would mean, in theory, a refusal to acknowledge the claims of any actual truth, and so be tantamount to utter scepticism: in practice, it would mean complete paralysis. Again, it is true that social needs demand a measure of general agreement about the values recognized in a community, in order that there may be social cohesion enough for common action: and, in a crisis, it may be expedient or necessary to suppress doubts and doubters.

Nevertheless, the case for repression has been grossly overstated. Even psychologically doubt, especially when accompanied by a belief that it may be removed, need not be more seriously painful than a moderate degree of hunger when accompanied by the joyful expectation of a speedy meal. About the sufferings of dogmatists from doubt it seems enough to say that they should be largely medicinal: they are the very people whom it would benefit to realize that the way to truth leads normally through error, doubt, and probability, and not through uncontradicted affirmation. Again, though it is possible to go astray by doubting and deliberating overlong, human nature surely is much more prone to cocksureness and hasty action. Socially, also, the need for uniformity has been exaggerated. On the practical essentials of life men are quite sufficiently agreed, and there has long ceased to be any effective doubt. The subjects of active debate are mostly theories about which alternative views may be taken without serious inconvenience, if only because the rival views all conduct, however deviously, to the same practical conclusions. Thus none of the many metaphysics conduct their authors to practise self-elimination. Moreover, it is arguable that societies have suffered far less from disintegration by dissent than from the suppression of dissenters that tried to rejuvenate and reform them. For every society that shook itself to

pieces in a rash effort to advance too fast, history can point to a dozen that perished of intellectual torpor, of arteriosclerosis of the brain, and, like the Pharaoh of Exodus, of petrifaction of the heart; nor is there any more fatal cause of social catastrophes than the stubborn conservatism that clings to old ideas and methods long after the changes of circumstance have antiquated them. If civilization destroys itself in the next war—and, perhaps, it may better perish in a gigantic conflagration than from the lingering decay to which its defiance of eugenical science dooms it—it will be because the old men, who make war and peace (and bungle both!), have not the faith and flexibility of mind to abandon an ancient pastime of mankind, when it becomes too dangerous.

The true *apologia* for doubt, however, is the one which insists on its positive value and its affiliations to inquiry, research, and discovery. It is the condition of spiritual progress. So long as what appears is accepted without question, there can be no progress in knowledge, because there is no case for investigation. Thus the stimulus that incites us to new truth always comes from doubt about the old. Some of the ancients appear to have had an inkling of this; for Heraclitus taught that truth, like all things, sprang from conflict, and Protagoras declared that of all things two views might be taken.* It is a pity that subse-

* Diogenes Laertius ix. 51.

quent philosophers did not develop these hints and recognize the vital relation between doubt and discovery in science. But Descartes was too much the pupil of the Jesuits to see any but the bad side of doubt. His methodological doubt was not conceived as a method of exploration, but as a device for anchoring himself to an impregnable rock of certainty as speedily as possible. Truth was to be sessile, not adventurous, and to settle down for good and all after a brief dalliance with vagrant scepticism, that produced only an innocuous crop of wild oats and enhanced the merit of the prodigal's return to the shelter of traditional dogma.

It is only in our day that the scientific fertility of doubt has been rediscovered. Alfred Sidgwick has expounded the value of 'sceptical' criticism as a method of inquiry, and John Dewey has emphasized the vital need of a continuous reconstruction of beliefs to keep them abreast of the changes of reality. The scientific value of doubt has thus been put beyond question; but only by making science accessory to the war upon our craving for the comfort and repose of assured belief. It is something of a shock to find that the restless progressiveness of science will not, in principle, allow it to conceive *any* truth as incorrigibly perfect, and impels it for ever to revise and improve even its most certain doctrines. And if it is true, as most theologians have believed, that religious truth is essentially final, absolute, and,

therefore, unprogressive, there will arise at this point an irreconcilable divergence between science and religion.

Perhaps, however, we may find that the theologians have exaggerated, and do not really need the stupendous certitudes of absolute truth to satisfy religious postulates: or, rather, that they have not sufficiently analysed the notion of certainty. For what is commonly called 'certainty' is actually of various kinds. It comprises 'practical' certainty, which is good enough to act on, and is continually acted on with success. It may be exemplified by our beliefs that all men now living will die, and that the sun will rise to-morrow. It comprises, also, 'intuitive' certainty, which is best exemplified by our intimate convictions that we exist and that our existence is incomparably precious. It is also claimed conspicuously by the deliverances of our senses, but does not prevent them from producing illusions and hallucinations. Then there is 'moral' certainty, which is based on faith in a person whose character we believe ourselves to know, and is not inferior in sustaining power to any of the other sorts of certainty.

In all these cases our certainty would appear to be psychological, because it rests upon an actual feeling of certainty and seems to allege nothing else. But, as usual, a topic cannot appear in psychology without having a counterpart in logic. So we hear of 'logical' certainty. What this means

is not very clear, because, as usual, the logical terminology is ambiguous. In one sense logical certainty would appear to be superior to psychological. Thus one chance in ten millions is practically negligible, and psychologically inappreciable; but it is not zero logically. Logical certainty, therefore, can claim a greater exactness, which may have, indeed, no practical importance, but reproves our slap-dash tendency to ignore the off-chance.

However, there is a further, and more technical, use of 'logical' certainty for the expectation of a conclusion deduced from a 'valid' form of reasoning. In a 'demonstration' the conclusion is said to be logically certain. Whether it is also certain in point of fact is quite another question. Actually, the certainty of inference does not rank very high among our certainties. Partly, no doubt, because demonstrations are invented to assuage our doubts; 'it must be so' is apt to indicate a much lower degree of confidence than a simple 'it is.' And the logical reason is that any truth of inference is of necessity conditional. Its truth-claim is only valid if the grounds from which it is inferred are sound, and where these are questionable, the conclusion drawn from them, despite its 'logical necessity,' grows doubtful too.

There remains 'absolute' certainty, which needs careful interpreting. It can, of course, be taken psychologically, and will then mean merely

a certainty felt to be complete, without reserves or qualifications: but this will leave open the logical question whether the mind that feels thus absolutely certain has a *right* to do so. Perhaps, therefore, it should be taken logically. But if so, absolute certainty cannot mean logical certainty in the second sense distinguished above. For such logical certainty cannot be absolute: it must be conditional, and dependent, and relative to its grounds. Nor can absolute certainty be obtained by an appeal to the Absolute of metaphysics. For not only does this Absolute depend on arguments which are far from certain, but, on their own showing, they could produce absolute certainty only in the Absolute, and not in finite minds.

It would seem, then, that a *logically* absolute certainty must be relegated to the position of an ideal. It is to be conceived as the 'limit' to which our certainties may approximate, but which we can never be certain that they reach, even when they *seem* to do so.

The conclusion that absolute certainty is not actually to be found, is amply confirmed by an examination of the most certain truths the sciences can proffer. In these days the claim to absolute certainty would probably be advanced only for the truths of mathematics and of formal logic, such as the 'law' of identity. But neither of these cases will bear examination. The truths of mathematics are, no doubt, deducible from systems derived from

postulates with full 'logical necessity.' But the systems themselves are alternatives which may be constructed variously, and the fundamental postulates are arbitrary and optional. Euclidean geometry and common arithmetic owe their preponderance over other systems, not to any superiority in logical character, but to their greater simplicity, and consequent convenience. Mathematical truth, therefore, is dependent on its presuppositions, and remains conditional. If pure mathematics are not absolute, still less are applied. Any use or application of a mathematical 'truth' is always precarious. Whether $2 + 2 = 4$ in any particular case, will depend on the objects we choose to regard as twos and fours. It will not apply, for example, to drops of water. As for the formal 'laws of thought,' they are nothing in ultimate analysis but conventions about the use of words. The postulate that 'A is A' is simply one way of constituting a recognizable symbol. It guarantees nothing as to the behaviour of anything we choose to call 'A.' It does not prevent it from changing into 'B.' It does not estop us from disputing whether in any phase of the process of change it ought to be called 'A' or not. In any actual use, therefore, of the principle of identity, its truth is disputable. It is merely a *claim* that, *though in fact 'A' has changed*, yet it may still be taken as 'the same' *for our purpose*.*

* *Cf.* my *Formal Logic*, ch. x., §5.

We may, perhaps, console ourselves for our failure to attain absolute certainties which can be believed without effort and without risk, by discovering that the case for scepticism is nearly as unsound, and that absolute disbelief and universal doubt are also far from simple, and hard to justify.

Scepticism is a term which has two very distinct meanings. It may mean universal *disbelief* and a denial of all truth: it may also mean universal *doubt*, or the *right to challenge* any truth.

The first sense, which we may call *complete* scepticism, has been a favourite cockshy with philosophers. Without considering the prior question whether, and how, it is psychologically possible at all, they have been eager to show that it is logically wrong, because it involves a 'contradiction.' It is self-contradictory to deny *all* truths and yet to uphold the truth of your scepticism: there must, therefore, be at least *one* truth which the sceptic does not disbelieve. This sort of confutation, of which Epimenides's low opinion of the veracity of his fellow-Cretans is the most amusing example, need not detain us seriously: it is too obviously verbal, and ignores the real meaning of the sceptic. If this were inquired into, he would presumably explain that he believed in his scepticism, and disbelieved in all the other alleged truths, for the same reason—viz., the contradictory, incoherent, and incredible character of the latter.

But the real question is whether such an attitude of universal disbelief is psychologically possible. Now at first sight it seems to be so: there is no 'theoretic' impossibility about complete scepticism. But does 'theory' completely settle the question? Unless the sceptic is a god-like creature leading a life of pure contemplation, theory alone will not enable him to continue as a sceptic. It does not provide him with the means of subsistence. In order to live, he has to act. He has, for example, to eat. And when he acts, has he not to express belief in what, in theory, he regards as incredible? Has he not to act *as if* he thought meat were more nourishing than poison? He may say that he does not really believe it, but his acts seem more eloquent than his words, and awkward questions arise as to how they are to be interpreted.

Several lines of defence seem open to him. (1) The most obvious is to plead that his scepticism is purely theoretical, and indifferent to practical consequences. This would at once raise a general question as to the status of a pure theory that had no relation whatever to practice, and as to the meaning of the 'truth' it claimed. He would, moreover, provoke further questions as to why, if theory supplied him with no reason to prefer meat to poison, he did not act at random but invariably preferred the former, or whence, if all opinions alike were theoretically false in his eyes, he derived the principles by which he guided his practical

preferences—*e.g.*, of meat to poison. And it would have to be put to him that *these* principles, in whatever way he obtained them, were the truths he really believed in, and that his disbelief of the theoretic 'truths' he was 'sceptical' about was irrelevant 'eye-wash.'

(2) If he admits that his theory cannot be true, unless he can act up to it, must he not allow its practical consequences to count as bearing on its theoretic truth? And if so, will not its impracticability become a cogent argument against it?

(3) All the more that he has otherwise no means of convincing others that his scepticism is intended seriously. For the others, observing how he ignores his theory in his practice, will naturally regard his scepticism as a pose or a joke. And if he is at all self-critical, he himself ought to become sceptical about a scepticism that could be conveniently 'left behind in the study' (like Hume's) whenever he wanted to do anything, and to doubt whether it could be the genuine article.

In its second sense 'Scepticism' appears to be a much more tenable position. Universal doubt involves no contradiction, even in words; for the doubt itself can be doubted should reasons arise for doing so. But this only reaffirms the doubt. For to doubt our universal doubt only means that we are *not certain* that it is true—*i.e.*, that *its* truth, too, is doubtful, and this only enhances the universality of doubt, while confirming the

expediency of interpreting scepticism as doubt rather than as disbelief. Moreover, universal doubt cannot be disposed of pragmatically, like universal disbelief; for it is quite possible to act upon doubtful beliefs, and it will be quite reasonable to prefer to act on the least doubtful belief, or to take the risk that seems best worth taking.

However, the mere logical possibility of universal doubt is not enough to justify it: there must be reasonable ground for the actual doubt. And this can only be found in the unsatisfactoriness of the alleged truths which are doubted. All doubt, therefore, even though universal, must have a positive ground.

And may we not go further, and stipulate that it should also have a positive aim? In other words, may we not insist that we should not doubt wantonly, and merely because we are indisposed to believe, but only because we wish to remove the unsatisfactoriness which has aroused our doubt? To do this would be to assign a logical value to doubt. It would become fruitful, and affiliate itself to the method of Science. For a scientific truth claims rationality, and holds its pride of place, by a constant readiness to meet the challenge of doubt and to produce the reasons it has for claiming truth. Its tenure is literally that of the Priest of Nemi; it survives until one better and stronger (more 'valid') arrives to supplant it.

A further stipulation Science might prudently make before fraternizing with scepticism, would be

that the doubt should not be made compulsory. A universal *right* to doubt—*i.e.*, to challenge truths that seemed in some way unsatisfactory, might be recognized without entailing *actual* doubt.

With this proviso doubt, even though universal, becomes quite innocuous and beneficent. It merely means that scientific inquiry must start from a question, and that a question implies a doubt. Indeed, this is true of all questions, and all answers. Intellectual activity is stimulated, not by certainties, but by doubts. Every judgment is conditioned by a doubt, and to be really true must be relevant to it. It has been the greatest impediment to a rational appreciation of human thought and science that the traditional logic should have labelled this fact 'psychological,' and confined the term 'logical' to the form in which the defunct process of thought had found verbal expression. For 'logic' has thus been rendered a meaningless rumination upon the dead husks used by the living thought.

It is clear, then, that 'scepticism,' in this sense, is neither impossible nor objectionable. It is not desolating or devastating, but invigorating and testing. It does not undermine our beliefs, but fortifies such of them as are sound and valuable, by clearing away those that are rubbishy, dead, and decayed. And it explains how it is that it is precisely our doubtful beliefs that loom so large in our intellectual landscape. For it is upon these that mental activity is actually engaged.

THE beliefs in this very important class are 'implicit' in two senses. They are not, normally, *stated*, and they are not, normally, *doubted*. Though they sometimes come out in diaries (rather than in autobiographies—which always have a pose), they live, normally, in the background of our public life, or even underground, in the 'unconscious'* strata of our personality, and reveal themselves only indirectly by their effects: but they form the roots of which our overt character is the efflorescence. Hence, though at first sight they appear obscure and impenetrable, there is no understanding human nature without them. They are enormously important, also, because they largely concern vitally essential matters, so that if we lost our grip on them we could hardly carry on.

For not *stating* them several sufficient reasons may be given. In the first place they may be taken for granted, because they are not in dispute. It is not necessary to state—*e.g.*, that the natural man craves for happiness and (unless he is mad or enraged) spontaneously avoids what he finds painful and pursues what he finds pleasant, and thinks

* In several senses of this much-enduring word!

himself a fairly fine fellow who looks after the interests of 'Number One' to the best of his ability and knowledge: for even the perfunctory denunciations of hedonism and egotism by moralists (who too often do not practise what they preach) presuppose, without explaining, these natural impulses. Secondly, they are apt to determine our actions directly, and not circuitously by a process of reflection—*i.e.*, not to be really intellectual in their nature: hence, they cannot be adequately expressed, or exposed, in intellectual terms. Our emotions, instincts, intuitions, and cravings are sadly underrated, misrepresented, and travestied when treated as products of pure reason. They are something much more primitive and powerful; it may be very much better, or, again, distinctly worse. Hence, thirdly, it is possible to feel heartily ashamed of one's implicit beliefs, to feel them to be indecorous, or even dangerous. So we dare not avow them to others, or even to ourselves, but try to repress them, or at least our awareness of them. It is not merely in our dreams that we 'censor' our beliefs, as the psycho-analysts aver: some of us are quite clever enough to do so when wide awake. When one has a character made up largely of envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, it is best not to be too explicit about it, but rather to profess the noblest, or at least the most approved, sentiments. Hence social conventions impose a decent reticence,

and so implicitness, on many of our firmest beliefs. The Pharisee and the hypocrite, therefore, flourish at all times and in every society. Moreover, even as the extreme of wickedness becomes complacent about its own depravity, so hypocrisy culminates in repression of the consciousness of its own nature: what knowledge there is of it becomes 'implicit' or 'unconscious,' and ceases to trouble the beliefs that are professed and avowed. Lastly, if a belief is vitally necessary, but its avowal is socially *tabu*, the only thing to do is to act on it, but to leave it unstated. It would be socially intolerable, for example, if every one inflicted on every one else his candid opinion of himself: but unless he firmly believed in what the others (unless they are in love with him) think his fantastic estimate of himself, he would not achieve the tithe of what he does.

Implicit beliefs are not normally *doubted*, for reasons of a very similar sort. If a belief is taken for granted and not reflected on, that is a good reason, not merely for not stating, but also for not doubting it. If we are so unaware of an implicit belief that we have to learn its nature and intensity, like others, from our actions, we were clearly not capable of scrutinizing it in advance. Thus the selfish man may well be genuinely surprised to hear himself reproached with 'selfishness,' the vain man with 'vanity,' and the dishonest man with sharp practice, when they thought they were merely ex-

hibiting a due regard for their interests or a proper appreciation of their merits, or following the custom of their trade.

Again, social repression is not very successful in eradicating undesirable beliefs. Social *tabus* are far more effective in generating conformity than in instilling real belief, and every society is honeycombed with the lawlessness of those who, without repudiating the social creed, act on their personal convictions. It is not merely in U.S.A. that men will vote for prohibition and practise liquor-smuggling. Indeed, it is quite possible that a social *tabu* on the expression of a belief may actually augment the intensity with which it is held. For having been made perforce a private and secret thing, it is exempted from the assaults of criticism, and men feel free to believe just what they like about the subject. Hence, the many absurdities and monstrosities of religious sects and sexual heresies.

If implicit beliefs can be so vitally necessary that they need not be stated, still less can they be doubted. Vital need can disregard doubts, as it can dispense with reasons, or, if it pleases, fabricate them. It stands to reason that a vitally necessary belief must be held and acted on, whatever the quality of the reasons given for believing it. Actually, the reasons given are frequently bad, and merely attempts at 'rationalization' of the sort the psycho-analysts have detected; but this makes no difference. For such beliefs really rest

on the practical need for them, and not on their theoretic cogency, into which an element of illusion always enters. Their theoretic justification is really a secondary affair. At bottom we will to believe them, and bolster up our belief with any reasons we can find.

But even where our implicit beliefs do not amount to vital necessities, they may yet be impervious to doubt. For anything deeply rooted in our nature may be impossible to eradicate, because it would cost too great and too painful an effort.

On the whole, then, implicit beliefs hold an assured position and are very stable, just because they are not being actively debated and developed. But their stability is that of stagnation, and when they *are* doubted they often collapse, and show themselves so little resistant to criticism that anything may happen. We instinctively feel that we are moving in one of the many directions in which madness lies.

It is time, however, that we enumerated some of the typical cases of beliefs which usually remain implicit. As has already been indicated, among them are those which concern ourselves and our personal position in the world. The beliefs on which our self-esteem is founded are nearly always implicit; so much so, indeed, that their vital importance has hardly been noticed. Moralists have mentioned them only to condemn them *en bloc* as 'selfishness' or 'self-conceit,' without

troubling to explore their social function and value in stimulating men to make the most of themselves; and even satirists have derided them rather as human weaknesses than recognized them as one of the main sources of spiritual strength They are, in fact, indispensable as a stable platform for human action. A man must have an implicit belief in himself to be an efficient member of society. Nor should such belief be condemned as selfish in the narrowest sense. A man's beliefs about his family, his possessions, his tribe, his country, may be just as implicit as his belief in himself, and if he took no pride in them and did not believe in their excellence, it would be the worse for them, while he himself would feel *désorienté* and 'lost.' These objects of a wider selfishness may afford him compensation and a foundation for self-esteem in cases where his personal condition would not otherwise warrant it; hence it has often been observed that those are proudest of their country of whom their country has least reason to be proud, while the really great personages in history, a Jesus, a Paul, a Plato, a Goethe, an Alexander, a Julius Cæsar, a Charlemagne, an Akbar, tend to transcend the limits of their age and country, and tower above the societies from which they emerge. In one way or another, then, men always find a basis, real or illusory, for their self-esteem, though it would be instructive to make out just what this basis was for the most miserable members of the most wretched tribes in

the most unattractive regions. It is a pity that anthropologists are so rarely able to acquire any very intimate knowledge of the language and feelings of the peoples they study; for the reasons a Pygmy of the Semliki Forest or a Chukchi of Kamschatka gives himself for his faith in the value of his life and the goodness of his land would, no doubt, put to shame those for the belief of the average American that he inhabited 'God's own country' or of the ancient Jew that Palestine flowed with milk and honey.

Our properly intellectual beliefs do not become implicit to any great extent. Perhaps the Multiplication Table may claim to be an exception; which is probably the reason why the 'pure' truths of arithmetic are fraught with so little human emotion. But this is not to say that many of our implicit beliefs have not considerable philosophic interest. We all implicitly believe in the veracity of our senses and our memory, and in the routine of nature. On the strength of these beliefs philosophers have persistently attempted to turn sense-perception into an infallible criterion and touchstone of reality, and to make the 'uniformity of nature' into the fundamental principle of inductive inference. But they have been slow to learn that implicit beliefs are not readily convertible into explicit dogmas, and have tried hard to close their eyes to the facts that illusions and hallucinations can mimic any sense-perception and delusions any intuition, while stricter scrutiny

reveals that the uniformity of nature is merely our will-to-know's illegitimate jump from the habits of things to an unproved assumption with which to predict the future. The ordinary man is quite as much shocked as the philosopher, when his memory or his senses play him false, though, under certain conditions, he is quite disposed to welcome miraculous irruptions into every-day *routine*.

Normally, however, he is even more profoundly shocked when anything 'uncanny' runs athwart his implicit beliefs. Anything that casts a doubt upon the finality of the ordinary course of events, any hint of the unreality of time, or the insolidity of matter or personality, anything savouring of madness or possession, of dissociation or deliquescence of personality, of magic or telepathy or ghostly intervention in the affairs of the living, becomes the cause of acute mental distress. Whenever the *routine* of his animal life leaves him any leisure for spiritual concerns, primitive man devotes it to insuring himself against the inroads of the uncanny. His religion is ritual aiming at propitiating demons he hopes to flatter into behaving as gracious 'gods'; his burial rites are ritual to lay the ghosts of his nearest and dearest, and to compel them to stay dead. Civilized man, of course, has 'rationalized' these fears. He loudly proclaims the goodness of his God; but he still regards Him as capable of inflicting eternal damnation, and anxiously shrinks from questioning His sole authorship of the cosmic scheme under which he

writhes. He officially proclaims his disbelief in magic, ghosts, and every form of 'superstition'; but he still instructs his police to guard him against falling a prey to 'mediums' and fortune-tellers, and grows indignant, like Herbert Spencer, when he is sent to sleep in a 'haunted' room.* In short, the uncanny, though it is officially repressed and disavowed and pretty successfully kept under, continues to stir beneath the surface of ordinary life, and remains a menace to the implicit beliefs of the sensible man.

In other respects, also, the sensible man does not find it quite easy to preserve consistency among his implicit beliefs. In fact, he sometimes appears to be hopelessly inconsistent in his attitude towards the same predicament in different portions of his natural *routine*. For example, he implicitly fears death—as is quite right and proper in a creature that means to live in so dangerous a world as ours. But he fears it, not because of the pains and penalties it may involve, but as the extinction of his individual being. Yet it would not appear to be extinction as such that he dreads; for he can face some forms of extinction with complete equanimity. Indeed, he rather looks forward to it every night, when he goes to sleep. And he fully expects to recover his consciousness as miraculously as he lost it, and to reknit the thread of his past life every morning, without any fusion or confusion with that of any one else. It is really

* *Autobiography* i., p. 480.

amazing that we should have acquired indifference to these periodical annihilations of our conscious existence, and go to bed without a qualm lest we should not wake again, or not awake with our own past properly resumed. The more so that the same persons, who think nothing of going to sleep, not infrequently have an instinctive horror of going to sleep under an anæsthetic, and give as their reason that it is the loss of consciousness that they dread!

The worst shock, however, to what is probably the strongest of the ordinary man's implicit beliefs arrives when anything happens that casts a doubt on the goodness and value of life itself. Now there is a fairly common social phenomenon which has this unfortunate effect. It is called suicide or 'self-murder,' and outrages the profoundest instincts of a human nature that is the product of æons of unremitting affirmation of the will to live and of heroic persistence in the struggle for existence. Our will to live, therefore, is intensely revolted by an act which calls in question its inmost essence, and yet tempts it by opening a way of escape from the manifold evils of life. Suicide in others, therefore, must be condemned, all the more because at times it feels only too reasonable to ourselves. And condemned it is, practically in all societies, at all times, and whatever beliefs are professed. The reasons for condemning it are very various and contradictory, and agree only in being (nearly always) bad, being merely 'rationalizations' of

an instinctive disapproval. Thus a moralist will represent suicide as a form of cowardice, forgetting that he has elsewhere called death, which the suicide chooses, the most fearful of all things.* Or he will censure suicide as desertion of a life divinely ordained, though he will not otherwise object to people interfering with this divine gift by killing or getting themselves killed. Or he may treat it as an injury to the State, even though the suicide may be relieving society of a burden and a nuisance. The amiable convention of British juries that a suicide (unless he is manifestly penniless) must always be insane, would, perhaps, be the absurdest way of affixing the social stigma, were it not so plainly intended as an evasion of the ferocities prescribed by the unrepealed old laws against the *felo de se*.

Even so rapid a survey of the field may have sufficed to elucidate the general character of implicit beliefs. They are clearly very strong, and enormously important; but they do not seem to be *rational*. They seem to be typically creations of what Prof. Santayana calls 'animal faith,' and such rationality as they exhibit is an adventitious adornment and a subsequent addition, and not the real reason for the belief; whoever demands real rationality of his beliefs must look elsewhere. He must pin his faith to beliefs which are in the habit of giving reasons, and, for this very reason, are essentially *debatable*.

* *Cf.* Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* iii. 7, 13 and 66.

Chapter IV — *Debatable Beliefs*

THESE are what we really mean by 'beliefs,' the beliefs *par excellence*, which we are conscious of holding and universally recognize as beliefs. They are the beliefs we talk about, write about, hear about, and (occasionally) think about.

We think about them because they demand thought, and cannot be thoughtlessly taken for granted. They demand thought because they demand support, because they have to contend *coram populo*, in the arena, with enemies and rivals. We proclaim them from the housetops in order to keep up our confidence in them. And they not only demand support, but get it. We take sides in the conflicts of ideas, and become champions of those which we believe, from time to time, to be true. We think it really matters which of them are believed, even where superficially they look like six of the one and half a dozen of the other. We profess willingness to die for our beliefs, and certainly show willingness to kill. The more they are attacked, the more attached we grow to them, and the more loyalty they evoke.

But though our affections may blind us to their weakness, and fill us with the most intense and pathetic trust in their truth, we cannot, in moments

of calm reflection, deny that they are *essentially doubtful.** Indeed, it is for this very reason that they appeal to our affections and that we think it so fine and heroic to exhibit faith in them. At any rate, undoubted and indubitable truths, like those of the Multiplication Table, or, *in these days*, of Copernican astronomy, leave us cold: no one would go out of his way to arrest or confute a crank who doubted whether 2 + 2 made 4 or denied that the Earth was round. But let someone differ from them about the abstruse metaphysics of the Athanasian Creed or the relative merits of two equally mendacious politicians, and multitudes will at once arise in their wrath to murder or to burn; and even a quite ordinary professor is capable of enduring martyrdom for the sake of his pet theory.

But after all the plainest and most convincing proof that beliefs of this sort are really doubtful lies in the fact that they are actually doubted, and exist habitually in an atmosphere of continual doubt. Debatable beliefs may be described as beliefs which have grown resistant to doubt, and been toughened by the shock of dissent; they may

* Some psychologists have seen this, as some logicians have seen the connection between truth and doubt. Prof. McDougall, for example, boldly says: "Belief, in the fullest sense of the word, must be preceded by doubt, by the questioning attitude which issues in judgment" (*Outline of Psychology*, p. 364).

be defined as beliefs which are believed by some and disbelieved by others. But experience shows that the disbelief does not damage the belief, but rather invigorates it. Debatable beliefs grow up and flourish in an atmosphere of controversy, doubt, and denial; and it is their nature so to do. They incur far greater dangers of destruction when they pass out of the turmoil of controversy into placid acquiescence; as appears when they pass either (1) into the realm of undisputed platitude, or (2) into that of conventional half-belief, which is 'too sacred' to be questioned and which it is 'bad form' to attack.

(1) A truth that ceases to be controversial, and is elevated into a truism, does not thereby gain in power and vitality. Rather, it naturally undergoes the sort of degeneration or degradation which overtakes a politician when he is raised to the peerage. *Sordet cognita veritas.* It no longer excites party spirit, and drops out of notice. It may perish of inanition or fatty degeneration for all that any one cares.

(2) Even more lamentable is apt to be the fate of a belief which well-meaning friends (or covert sceptics) try to exempt from the struggle for existence and rescue from the field of debate by pleading for it benefit of clergy. In many cases the belief which is made too sacred to be subjected to inquiry, and becomes too proud to fight, simply evanesces. At best it is degraded into a half-belief,

and joins the disreputable host of mendicants and frauds we shall meet again in Chapter V.

On the other hand, perpetual exposure to attack and constant readiness to fight for its existence have singularly little power to hurt a belief. They act rather as invigorating tonics, as any one can convince himself who reflects on the history of political opinion. It is a remarkable characteristic of political beliefs that they are almost universal, and almost universally partisan. Nearly every one has them, and has them strongly; and nearly every one is a party man. If he is a Liberal, he is convinced that the country is lost, unless it is speedily reformed from top to bottom; if he is a Conservative, he is no less sure that it goes irretrievably to the dogs if the least change is made in the institutions which the Liberals of the last generation formed out of their predecessors, to the dismay and disgust of the Conservatives of *their* time. There is practically no room for the moderate in politics, for the indifferent, or for the sage who stands above parties and has the coolness and courage to point out to both sides how wrong, and yet how indispensable, they both are, if ordered progress is to be achieved. For what could be more irritating than to point out to both parties what is the true posture of affairs? Yet should it not be enlightening to learn that the Conservative and the reformer differ only in temperament, and so in their attitude towards the debatable beliefs of their time? The one sees

the good in the actual and the dangers in scrapping it, the other the evil in the actual and the hopes of improving it. Moreover, this difference of attitude is itself a function of age. The ardent Radical of twenty-five normally cools down into a prudent Conservative by the time he is fifty, and, as his powers fail, becomes firmly convinced of the degeneration of man and the decrepitude of society as he realizes his own at, say, seventy-five. Again, there are *no* beliefs which are indelibly distinctive of Liberalism or of Conservatism. The 'abuses' of one age are often the 'reforms' of the next, and as neither party adheres pedantically to its beliefs for any length of time, one who obstinately clings to the same convictions, and will not opportunely change his beliefs, finds himself constrained to change his party not infrequently. If, therefore, we took such a person and, in imagination, travelled with him through the ages, we should find that his political denomination would vary according as he was projected into the future or taken back into the past. As we approached the changes of the probable future, his beliefs would rapidly grow antiquated, and, though he might have started as an 'advanced Radical,' he would soon have to be labelled a 'reactionary fossil': on the other hand, as he went back into the past his views (whatever they were) would assume a more and more Liberal complexion, and, in a few centuries, he would find himself a far ruddier revolutionary than could

ever have been tolerated at the time. Conversely, to hold the beliefs of a palæolithic Radical would nowadays be reckoned ultra-Toryism, while Moustierian reactionaries in their day, no doubt, lamented the loss of the 'good old times' before carnivorous 'food reformers' had corrupted table manners, and harked back to the Golden Age when 'men' were content to dwell in dignity among the snug recesses of the umbrageous forest, and had not yet taken to running about on the ground!

Thus what any 'Conservative' wishes to conserve, and any 'Liberal' to reform, is essentially relative to the date and the needs of their time. Both parties are wrong in claiming absolute truth for their actual convictions. On the merits of the several political controversies of the day it is probable that honours are about easy; each party may be wrong about half the time. But both parties are (nearly always) wrong when they prophesy disaster as the inevitable consequence of not following their advice; and both parties are right in believing in their opinions. For they are normal developments of human nature, and valuable examples of debatable beliefs. They are right, also, to fight for them; for only by so doing can they preserve their vigour.

Political beliefs are not, however, the best example to bring out of the nature and function of debatable beliefs. They are vastly inferior for this purpose to *scientific beliefs*, which, while exhibiting the same general features, far surpass

them in rationality. Scientific beliefs, like political, are subject to partisanship: in every science there is a Conservative party and a Liberal, though they are not often so highly organized, or so bitterly opposed, as in politics. In science, also, beliefs suffer from the illusions of finality and absolute truth, though not so severely as in politics. For the sciences have now become so progressive that the relativity of the beliefs held in them at any time to the state of knowledge and the development of the science is usually quite plain; so scientific workers have ceased to be ashamed of changing their opinions as their knowledge grows; and only laugh at the philosophers who try to infer from the frequent changes of scientific orthodoxy that scientific knowledge must be of a very unstable and inferior kind, and that if scientists only reflected on the knowledge they amass, they would be bound to turn sceptics. Actually, the reply to such *naivetés* is, of course, that scientific knowledge throughout is an affair, not of ascertaining once for all an absolute and immutable truth, but of selecting from a variegated crowd of probable opinions the claimants who appear, for the time being, to have the best credentials and the best case; while only grotesque ignorance of human psychology could suppose that the scientist's trust in the best truth available must be undermined by his hope of presently discovering something better still.

The superiority of scientific beliefs, however, is not merely due to their essential progressiveness.

It is due also to their constant appeal to the pragmatic test, and consequent immunity from the vagaries of merely arbitrary and subjective opinions. A scientific 'truth' must 'work'; it must be able to point to the problem of which it claims to be the best solution known, and to the evidence that substantiates its claim. A scientific believer, therefore, always has (*i.e.*, thinks he has) in principle a *rational* belief, grounded on evidence that can be produced and tested—for that is only another way of calling it debatable. Of course, it can also be contested; but that makes it all the better. For if it stands its tests, and is victorious in its contests, it is *verified*, that is 'made true.' Consequently, the development of scientific beliefs is something *more* than an idle play of successive opinions—which is all that the received accounts make of the history of metaphysics.

It is, therefore, in the case of scientific beliefs that the peculiar virtue and value of debatable beliefs reach their culmination, and show debatableness to be perfectly compatible with sincerity of belief, social importance, progressiveness, and rationality. In other subjects debatable beliefs all appear to be open to detraction on one or other of these grounds. Either they are not vitally important, like the fashions and the subjects of art and small talk—horribly Philistine and unsociable as this may sound—or they are unprogressive, and seriously infected with insincerity,

and open to the charge of irrationality, like the religions and philosophies.

Now, though philosophies are typically bodies of debatable beliefs, we need not here enter into their case at any length. Socially, they have little importance; because philosophers prefer the security of obscurity to the perils of social influence. Psychologically, also, they mostly do not seem to be intended seriously, being (nearly always) anxious to disclaim any direct bearing on life and action, and representing themselves as having the function rather of an abstruse game or pastime, devised for the entertainment of a few superior persons. And their philosophies seem to make so little difference to the actions of philosophers that observers are tempted to suspect that they are really only 'half-beliefs,' to be postponed to the next chapter. Lastly, they are certainly unprogressive, for else students of philosophy would not be obliged to wade through all the details of the dead philosophies from Thales on, and irrational, for they have never been able to agree either on a common doctrine or a common method, or even a common statement of their problems, and after several thousand years of philosophizing remain as individual as they were at the beginning. It may be that true philosophy could triumphantly rebut these charges, but the mere fact that they can be brought puts philosophy on a lower plane than science as a specimen of militant belief.

The case of religion is materially different. It is, indeed, pretty obvious that a religion is not a homogeneous body of belief, but rather a medley, to which various motives and attitudes, good, bad, and indifferent, have contributed. Thus a religion always has an institutional side, which is more or less rigid and hard to remodel. It always has a past, and a tradition arising out of it, which more or less hampers its spiritual development. It is always heavily infected with 'half-belief,' and hypocrisy and ritualism and other forms of insincerity, and corrupted by priestcraft. Its social importance is indisputable; but its rationality can always be called in question. The relations with mysticism which it cultivates would alone suffice to ensure its condemnation by the rationalist, and the infusion of an obvious element of irrationality into every religion is, perhaps, too plain to require elaborate proving.

I myself have never heard of any religion that could possibly be regarded as indisputable, unless it is the one referred to in the following account, taken from the now defunct *Standard* of July 15, 1904. It appears that the Commissioners who demarcated the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana discovered an Indian chief called Jeremiah, who 'had a church in which he conducted three times a day a curious service attended by all the Indians in the vicinity. Jeremiah, in his capacity of priest, robed himself in some ancient

European garments, but the worshippers were entirely nude. The service consisted of counting from one to ten and saying the alphabet in English, each being recited first by the priest and then repeated by the congregation. Both having been gone through ten times, the priest declaimed a lot of names, among which Jesus Christ and God frequently occurred, the congregation reverently repeating these also. Jeremiah cannot read or write, and teaches the people nothing more than this curious ritual. He possesses three wives and many children.'

That is probably as near as any religion has ever got to naked rationality and indisputable truth; and it does not seem to have proved attractive. There are no signs that the religion of the Prophet Jeremiah is destined to conquer the world.

Yet when all deductions have been made for these weaknesses of religious belief, there remains in religion a considerable residue which can hardly be denied the status of genuine belief. True, it is always debatable; but we have seen that opposition to a belief need not weaken either its intensity or its authority. And in spite of much discouragement, both from without and from within the religious world, this residue of sincere belief maintains itself, and reveals that religion is in truth an inherent ingredient in our nature, which can be stunted by social repression and perverted by social corruption, but will always

be developed afresh, when it is given a chance. So vigorous, indeed, is its spontaneous growth that it has probably been a bad blunder in tactics for religious leaders and apologists to have trusted it so little, and to have relied so much on coercion and protection for the safeguarding of religion. To quote two fine and wise remarks from Dr. L. P. Jacks: "Religion is one of those high things, and there are many such in life, which lose their meaning when they are over-defended or over-explained";* it is "rather that which defends us than that which we have to defend." If religion were always represented as something precious and attractive that responds to the needs of the human soul, it would (like truth) easily hold its own against the cavillings of sceptics and the logic-chopping of dialecticians.

To summarize: debatable beliefs are the most characteristic type of belief, and, for consciousness, the most important. For they are consciously held and can be intelligently defended; and when a reason is demanded from them, a real reason can be given. Hence, in the wider sense of the term, debatable beliefs are always *rational*. The conditions of belief to which we next turn, on the other hand, are fundamentally irrational, and must be regarded as essentially parasitic excrescences on this normal type of belief.

* *Religious Perplexities*, pp. 40, 43.

Chapter V — *Half-Beliefs*

THE debatable beliefs considered in the last chapter, whether right or wrong, were *genuine—i.e.*, indisputable as beliefs. This, however, is more than can be said of many states of mind which (often in good faith) pass for beliefs, and play a considerable part in the world of opinion. For it is quite easy for what was originally a genuine belief to pass into a condition in which it no longer functions as a full-blooded belief, though it does not wholly disappear, and to some extent and for some purposes it is still in being, and must be taken into account. Thus a belief may lose its practical hold over the mind, and gradually diminish in intensity and influence to an indefinite extent, without ever being explicitly discarded. To describe this process we may say it becomes a three-quarters belief, a half-belief, a quarter-belief, and, finally, a shadow and ghost of its former self. Historic loyalty may then continue to call it a belief, though it has long ceased to operate like one.

Of such possibilities we have only so far referred to a single case, that of a belief that has come to be taken for granted, and become 'implicit.' This

process, however, though it may involve a decline from the full strength of a fighting belief, does not produce what it is convenient to designate as a half-belief. For the decline may be largely apparent and due to the disappearance of opposition: if at any time such a belief should be called in question, it would promptly react and recover its pristine vigour. Moreover, as was shown in Chapter III., implicit beliefs, though we have ceased to be conscious of them, may continue to function, and to determine action with greater certainty than ever.

The evanescence which degrades a full belief into a half-belief, or less, proceeds rather from a loss of interest in the subject of a belief and a diversion of mental energy in other directions. As our interests naturally change as we grow older, it is a process which is always going on, slowly and silently for the most part, so that we do not realize what has happened until we are suddenly called upon to act on a belief which we once had, and think we still retain, when we find that it has gone, or has grown so weak that it no longer nerves us to the act required. A typical case, which must be of frequent occurrence in married life, is that of insensibly ceasing to love one with whom one has been in love: but the growth of Conservatism in ageing Liberals is probably a similar process.

Another common cause of half-belief is the habit of playing with beliefs: it so grows upon many highly cultured minds, especially when they

are rarely called upon to test their 'beliefs' by acting on them, that it leads to a state of general and total half-belief.

A further cause of half-belief arises from the tendency of the human mind to divide itself into separate compartments, and to act very variously and incongruously in the different relations of life. A cruel warrior may be a tender father. An unscrupulous politician may be a faithful husband and friend, and a loose liver the soul of honour in politics. It would be very precarious to argue from a man's profession to his hobbies, amusements, investments, or sense of humour. A pure mathematician may be devoted to oratorios or to 'the pictures.' An undertaker may be a jovial humorist, and a banker a collector of old Bradshaws or of prehistoric flints. A notable philanthropist may be a keen investor in sound brewery shares. No combination of incongruous interests seems incredible in actual life. The explanation of such anomalies doubtless is that the human intelligence, like the animal, has developed out of a series of responses to a variety of situations, and finds itself compelled to a systematic co-ordination of its beliefs only at a late stage of development. But in whatever way these discrepancies may have arisen, their effect is to produce masses of half-belief. For whenever either of two incongruous interests is aroused and determines action, the other is necessarily obscured, and sinks into half-belief.

Beliefs, however, do not degenerate into half-beliefs merely because of natural changes in the minds of their holders. Half-beliefs are often born not made—*i.e.*, conditioned by their mode of genesis and the causes which generate them. Thus beliefs accepted on authority, and not acquired by the believer's own efforts, are apt never to grow into anything more substantial than half-beliefs—for reasons that may readily be understood.

More interesting cases occur when the belief is essentially a response to a stimulus which acts intermittently, and so represents an adaptation to more or less exceptional circumstances. The belief will then exhibit marked seasonal variations: at times, when excited by its proper stimulus, it will be intense and active; at others it will lapse into half-belief and become quiescent, or even evanescent, when the occasion for it has passed.

This state of affairs, pilloried in the proverb about the devil's aspiration to sanctity when sick, is generally exemplified by the differences between the beliefs we have and act on when under strong emotional stress, such as fear, anger, bereavement, love, jealousy, hate, and our normal disposition. It is probable, indeed, that most of our beliefs are subject to a certain amount of seasonal variation, though 'moods' are more noticeable in some minds than in others. The satirist naturally scoffs at those of whom he can say that 'on Sundays they

were good, on weekdays they were minions,' and it is not difficult to observe that men's judgments on others vary appreciably in severity according as they are out of temper and hungry, or are placidly reposing after a generous meal.

Half-beliefs, then, may be encountered everywhere, though they are particularly frequent in certain quarters. They abound, of course, in the sphere of religion, which is full of phenomena hardly to be explained save by the extensive prevalence of half-beliefs. Thus the enormous discrepancies between religious profession and practice, though partly conditioned by other causes, are, no doubt, largely due to half-belief. They will have to be investigated further when we consider the relations between belief and action (Chapter X.). That religions should be extensively infected with half-belief is, moreover, a natural consequence of the great part played by authority in the transmission of religious belief, and of the prevalence of seasonal variation in the stimuli to religious emotion. For if, as modern psychology of religion has made clear, the primary and most potent, if not the only, impetus to religion comes from the craving for superhuman help, we can understand why men should repent them of their sins, and turn to their God, in seasons of distress and calamity, while they tend to 'forget God' in periods of humdrum prosperity, when they wax fat in the smooth *routine* of nature. The prosperous

man of affairs tends to be more than half a materialist who thinks little of God in his heart, though as prudent business man he is not averse from paying a little fire insurance to secure himself: it was the lifelong sinner who used to leave all his goods to the Church in his deathbed agony.

Perhaps the most instructive case, however, of a half-belief exhibiting great seasonal variation is supplied by the so-called 'belief in immortality'; and as it is one of the few subjects on which I may claim to be an authority at first hand, and as I have won my convictions about the character of belief generally in large measure through my study of this subject, I may be permitted to dwell on it even at what seems somewhat disproportionate length.

In the days when I was young, and had innocently allowed myself to be indoctrinated with the traditional illusions of philosophers about the rationality of man, I had naturally been shocked by the monstrous irrationality of men's collective attitude towards the prospect of death and the possibility of surviving it. From the merely logical point of view, which in those days was the only one philosophy would recognize, it seemed plain that here was a question of enormous vital importance, in which every one ought to take an intense personal interest. For, alike whether a man desired a continuance of his being after death, as all were popularly supposed to do, or preferred

to sleep well after life's fitful fever, as a few might be suspected of doing, it was not a question to be put aside as indifferent either to his feelings or to his conduct. It seemed incredible that any one should repudiate the duty of ascertaining the truth about his place in the cosmos and his future fate. These obvious philosophic considerations were further reinforced by the deliverances of the religions. They all with one accord asserted the reality of immortality, and attached the utmost importance to our *post-mortem* careers, of which they gave the most glowing accounts—for good and ill.

And yet, in spite of this combined pressure of reason and religion, what did one find men doing? Did their actions evince an assured belief in immortality? Perhaps, among the byways of history one may find, here and there, an incredible tale like that of the Druids who were willing to lend money on the security of an I O U to be cashed in the hereafter,* but such is certainly not the belief implied in the normal actions and transactions of men. For the most part they have lived, and continue to live, 'like the beasts that perish.' Somehow all the joys of Heaven and the pangs of Hell miss fire.

Yet it would be wrong to infer that men disbelieve in immortality. The vast majority have been, and are, quite willing to profess the belief,

* *Cf. Valerius Maximus* ii. 6, 10.

and not a few even to gush about 'the hope of immortality.' Only they do not usually behave as if they believed, or cared for their future.

Most remarkable of all, they do not seem to *wish* to *know*. When one went to the religions and asked for proof that the faith in immortality was based on facts, all one got was myths and fairy tales which, however edifying, were not evidence, and whenever more precise information was demanded, they all soon began to mutter about the 'impiety' of desiring to disperse the mystery which the Divine Wisdom had wrapped around man's fate. When one went to the philosophies and asked for proofs, one was mocked with crooked answers to straightforward questions, and was fobbed off with transparent sophisms and verbal quibbles, purporting to prove *a priori* an immortality of 'the' soul which was not even designed to refer to the inquirer's personal prospects.*

From neither of these authorities, then, could anything like verifiable scientific evidence be extracted. Yet, for all that, there was abundance of what looked like such evidence flying about.

* The philosophic 'proofs' are nearly all variants of Plato's. But Plato's metaphysical principles ruled out any ultimate plurality of souls in the realm of 'true reality.' Also, as he himself admits, he does not contend for the immortality of anything like the actual personality, but claims it only for a sort of rational extract, purged of all passions and interests. The rest of the soul is mortal. *Cf. Timæus* 69.

The common people, and the commoner and more 'superstitious' the better, were always ready to oblige with circumstantial tales which *prima facie* seemed to yield just the sort of evidence required. According to the 'superstitious,' the dead had by no means lost the power of returning to the world from which they had 'departed,' and of manifesting their continued existence. This belief in the activities of 'ghosts' and 'spirits' was universal, and of immemorial antiquity, much older, indeed, than any of the religions which had endeavoured to coop up the vagrant shades in Heaven, Hell, or Hades.

But upon examination it soon appeared that there was something seriously wrong about this evidence. It was largely hearsay. When, after many failures, any of it could be got at first hand, it seemed to be largely illusory. When one urged the witnesses of these supernormal happenings to compile contemporary records, and to commit their evidence to writing rather than leave it exposed to the vagaries of memory and imagination, one encountered a strange reluctance. It was, it seems, 'too sacred' to be recorded properly. And all scientific and sensible people, instead of playing the Good Samaritan to a good ghost story in distress, were strangely anxious to avert their gaze, and to give it the cold shoulder. They shrank from a ghost story much as believers shrank from a ghost.

By the time the plot had thickened to this extent, I had perceived the essential *crux*. Here was evidence bearing on a vital issue, and capable of scientific investigation, which had never been investigated, and which was not being investigated; because, apparently, the people willed to have it so. They loved to tell ghost stories, but would not let them be authenticated. Why? There must be some explanation of this queer social attitude.

So, despairing of investigating it single-handed, I joined the Society for Psychical Research, and in due course persuaded Richard Hodgson, the enterprising secretary of its American Branch, to inquire into the paradoxical condition of the human belief in immortality. So we produced a *Questionnaire** about the state of Human Sentiment, and collected some three thousand answers to it. I have read them, and, in consequence, feel competent to propound something like a solution of the mystery. I have not yet despaired of the S.P.R., but I realize that its path lies through a terrible complex of conflicting emotions. They may, perhaps, be unravelled somewhat in this wise:

(1) The belief in a future life is essentially a response to an intermittent stimulus, and is, accordingly, normally a half-belief. It may, however, rise into intense belief, or craving, and may

* For which, and some typical answers, see the Appendix to this chapter.

even become, for a time, all-absorbing. For to a soul bereaved, or in spiritual distress about the meaning of existence, the question of immortality becomes poignantly real. As, moreover, from the nature of things these paroxysms come, sooner or later, to every one, the belief is, in a sense, universal; it is universally admitted to be important, because all can (until sophisticated by philosophy) see its logical importance, and most have felt it also psychologically. But as the incandescence of the belief is relatively short-lived, there is not normally, in any society, a *preponderating* number of persons actively and intensely interested in the question of immortality.

(2) The *normal* condition of men is (of necessity) pretty complete absorption in the affairs of *this* life, and this suffices to reduce the average interest in any future life to a (rather faint) half-belief. This is the main reason why the 'Threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise' are so ineffective. Normally, the indifferent majority is strong enough to hold under the excited minority and to restrain, and baffle, their 'unhealthy' interest in subjects better left uninvestigated. Moreover, the indifferent have captured the religions, or their *personnel*. Religions are created by exceptional men for whom spiritual things are intensely real; but they soon get watered down, discounted, and adapted to the needs and outlook of the ordinary man for whom the spiritual

world is normally a half-belief. This is typically illustrated by the tale of the orthodox churchwarden, whom Frederic Myers pressed to tell him what he believed would happen to him after death, till finally he blurted out: 'I suppose I shall enter into everlasting bliss, but I do wish you would not talk about such depressing subjects.'

(3) The reason why in their normal condition men shrink from thinking about a future life is that athwart the approaches to the thought there lies the black shadow of a great *tabu*. It is not possible to think of a future life without thinking also of death; and to think of death is painful: so all sorts of devices are used to keep the thought of death out of consciousness, and to enable us to carry on. Thus any thought which involves the thought of death becomes repugnant to our nature.

(4) It is only when this barrier has been broken through by the actual presence or imminence of death that preoccupation with immortality can become natural and intense. There was no mistaking the genuineness and the demands of the 'bereavement sentiment' in the answers to the *questionnaire* mentioned above (*cf.* the Appendix to this chapter). It is *not* satisfied with a distant 'hope of immortality,' and a future life left as a shadowy object of 'faith.' It demands what it can accept as direct proof, from the departed, that their love is stronger than death, tokens of affection, assurances of happiness. It is definitely *necro-*

mantic in type. Hence the enormous vogue of spiritistic practices during and after the war; the bereavement sentiment had for once got the upper hand socially, and, for political reasons, those who did not share it judged it undesirable to pooh-pooh it with the considerations that usually curb it. This state of social sentiment has since died down again, as might have been expected, without leaving behind any great improvement in the attitude towards scientific inquiry; for the bereavement interest is essentially personal, emotional, and transitory, and *not* scientific. But that 'spiritualism' will permanently continue to attract believers, whose craving is for the sort of evidence it alone proffers, admits of little doubt.

(5) The practice of telling ghost stories and leaving them unverifiable may plausibly be explained as a skilful social compromise between taking the belief in immortality quite seriously and ignoring it altogether. For neither of the extreme views would do; the one would be too inconvenient, the other too bleak. Ghost stories, on the other hand, while confirming the faith of true believers, supply just the sort of evidence to titillate a half-belief. Even to unbelievers they open strange vistas of possibility, welcome in moments when they are weary of the dismal actualities of science. They can be taken just as seriously as any one pleases, and as they compromise neither their tellers nor their hearers

they may be entertained together with any 'orthodox' sort of religious belief. Above all, just because they do not attain to scientific stringency, we do not feel that we have to act on them, or to alter our accustomed modes of living. In short, they are admirably suited to keep a half-belief in immortality in being; and they perform this social function to perfection.

APPENDIX

For a further account of this *Questionnaire*, see my Report in S.P.R. *Proceedings*, Part 49, and *Humanism*, chapter xvii.

The questions, which were intended to test the actual state of human sentiment, ran as follows:

I. *Would you prefer* (*a*) *to live after death, or* (*b*) *not?* II. (*a*) *Do you desire a future life whatever the conditions might be?* (*b*) *If not, what would have to be its character to make the prospect seem tolerable? Would you*, e.g., *be content with a life more or less like your present life?* (*c*) *Can you say what elements in life* (*if any*) *are felt by you to call for its perpetuity?* III. *Can you state* WHY *you feel in this way as regards questions* I. *and* II.? IV. *Do you* NOW *feel the question of a future life to be of urgent importance to your mental comfort?* V. *Have your feelings on questions* I., II., *and* IV. *undergone change? If so, when and in what ways?* VI. *Would you like to know for certain about the future life, or would you prefer to leave it a matter of faith?*

It is obvious that the answers to such an inquiry would mostly come from those who thought it interesting and important, and that the sentiments of those who refused to answer, or who promised to answer but did not (a large percentage, as all the collectors discovered), would

have to be gathered from the reasons given for refusing, and from those who *only just* consented to answer. I will begin, therefore, by quoting some 'refusals.' An American clergyman (aged 85) pleaded '*lack of time to seriously consider them.*' A statistician (aged 27) thought it '*a waste of time to worry one's brain about such abstruse questions. Besides, I think that the majority of people really don't know their own minds.*' A Colonial Judge (aged 50) declines to answer, because '*if he allowed himself to think of such things he would go mad.*' A barrister (aged 50) confesses: '*I have examined myself, and to my utter surprise find I have nothing to say. I rather fancied I had lost the capacity for hope, but I am astonished to find I am also without desire.*' Similarly, a collector reports the refusal of a lady (an author, aged 39), who said the subject was '*too sacred,*' but immediately afterwards she honestly added: '*Besides, my feelings fluctuate too much: when I am ill or unhappy, I long for annihilation; when I am stronger and happier, I would prefer to live after death.*'

From the indifferent, who refuse to answer, there is an easy transition to the indifferent, who do. Thus an (American) engineer (aged 40) answers IV. negatively, but explains that it is because '*I have faith that God will do with me what is best;*' he chooses 'knowledge' in VI., '*but would not give up very much of wordly pleasure for the sake of finding out.*' His indifference evidently 'rationalizes' itself very similarly to that of the lady who thought the subject was 'too sacred.' Other indifferents are more self-conscious. Thus an (American) writer (aged 67) remarks about all the questions, '*Don't care a continental*' (cent) and is '*content to live or to be snuffed out.*' She answers to IV., '*Not at all.*' To V., '*Have never thought about it at all. Born and brought up in a religious family, I, of course, accepted, or, at least, never thought of disputing, the tenets held by those around me.*' An (American) graduate student (aged 27)

replies to I. that she feels '*absolutely indifferent*' because '*this life is so full*,' and she has '*little or no inclination to think of life after death.*' IV., '*No.*' V., '*Did want to know, but now indifferent; outgrew it.*' Similarly, an (American) married woman (aged 35) answers: I., '*Indifferent.*' II. (*b*), '*Yes, if every one is as happy as I.*' II. (*c*), '*Love and happiness.*' III., '*Death seems so far away, and rest, sleep, or extinction seems an uncomplicated ending, as desirable as any other.*' IV., '*No.*' V., '*Cared much when a Christian and when I lost an intimate friend. But when I ceased to be a Christian, and the memory of my friend grew vague, ceased to believe or care for a future life.*' VI., '*Take practically no interest in the question; am absorbed in the present.*' An eminent author (American, aged 57) answers: I., '*Find it quite impossible to commit myself to bring the thing down to the statement of a preference. Involves too painful, insurmountable an effort.*' IV., '*No! No!*' VI., '*By no means for certain—leave it!*' Hedonistic indifference is shown in the answers of a (non-European) merchant prince (aged 62): I., '*Yes, if agreeable.*' II. (*b*), '*Yes.*' II. (*c*), '*Too complicated to think it out.*' IV., '*Not at all.*' V., '*Never thought about it.*' VI., '*Now, my attention being drawn to it, would like to know.*' Remarks: '*Most useless and stupid inquiry.*' But indifference may also clothe itself in the garb of religion, as in the following. An American girl student (aged 22) answers: II. (*a*), '*Yes, trusting God.*' III., Because '*I have been taught to leave these questions, which are beyond our power to comprehend or to study, to Providence.*' V., 'No change.' '*I try not to think of these things, for fear that I may become sceptical.*' VI., '*Faith.*' A Congregationalist clergyman (aged 29) says: I., '*Varies, according to state of my health.*' II. (*b*), '*Complete break with the past, no reminiscence—in short, perfectly free opportunity for self-development and self-realization.*' III., '*No emotional preference, only intellectual curiosity.*

Once, on the point of dying, I had no sort of fear. . . . I really think that at bottom I am intellectually indifferent to the question, but, probably, this is only the swing of the pendulum away from the very orthodox anthropomorphic ideas which were originally given me.' IV., '*Not a bit.*' V., 'Changed by critical temper and study of philosophy.' No crisis, but came through '*a period of doubt and denial into the calmer waters of a more reasonable faith.*' VI., '*Would like to know the* FACT, *but to leave the* DETAILS *speculative.*' He remarks, further, that from inquiries he believes there is no natural instinct of a future existence, and comments on '*the hollowness and unreality of such beliefs,*' and quotes '*someone who said that "*99 *out of* 100 *men* SAY *they believe in a future life, and* 99 *out of* 100 ACT *as if there were none."*'

Variability of belief is also well exemplified by a lady (aged 29), who answers: I., '*Feeling depends on health, and varies from liking to come to an end (when run down) to going on for ever (when particularly well).*' IV., '*No, I train myself to live in the present life, and am almost greedy to make the most of it.*' V., '*Long after I gave up belief in the Christian religion I clung to a future life. I was miserable when I first doubted it and for some time after.*' She still has occasional regrets, '*because of the loneliness of it. It is a gulf that separates one in thought from many one loves.*' VI., Would prefer knowledge, if there is not '*something horrible.*' A clerk (aged 35) gives this excellent account of his variations and half-belief: I. to II. (*a*), '*Yes, but not Hell.*' II. (*c*), '*Conscious life itself seems to me to demand its own perpetuation. I dislike unconsciousness, and dread even nitrous oxide gas.*' Also good-byes, and so everlasting ones. Evil calls for redress. III., Extinction of life would be '*a terrific piece of waste.*' IV., '*Yes, at the moment, but it does not ordinarily fill my mind ten minutes in a month.*' V., '*Was brought up to believe in a Christian Heaven and*

Hell. At 10-12 I did half believe in them. Thought Heaven nearly as dreadful as Hell, from its dullness, but thought Hell the more likely for me. I did not, however, think very much on the subject. Was healthy myself, and never lost any intimate friend by death till I was over 30. When I was about 12, I contrived to believe partly in a highly sensual and Moslem-like heaven of my own manufacture. Its chief features were an endless river running at an enormous pace, but very smoothly, and a small boat. The boat was to contain myself, a few friends and brothers, and unlimited rhubarb tarts.'

In sharp contrast with the indifferent are the sentiments of the bereaved. A bereaved father (an American lawyer, aged 57) answers: I., '*Yes.*' II. (*b*), '*Yes.*' III., '*My strongest reason for desiring a future life is the hope that I may meet again my little girl* ($4\frac{1}{2}$), *who died on 5th March*, 1891.' IV., '*Yes, since* 1891. *Before that I was indifferent and disposed to think death was an eternal sleep.* VI., '*Knowledge.*'

A bereaved husband (American lawyer, aged 32) expresses himself thus: II. (*b*), '*Yes, with other spirits capable of human love.*' III., '*If the individual can be destroyed the universe is a fake, and I should fall back on Titanism, and curse the whole outfit.*' IV., '*Yes.*' V., Views strengthened, '*since I met my ideal woman and she died.*' VI., Knowledge. A bereaved friend, a woman teacher (American, aged 44), speaks thus: II. (*b*), '*Yes, if with my friend.*' II. (*c*), '*Love.*' III., Because '*my friend died and I cannot live without her. For four years I have had to "pretend" that her spirit lives and is with me. If that is true, then I must live after death to be with her. Total annihilation of both at the same moment is thinkable and endurable, but life together for ever is "far better."*' IV., '*Yes.*' V., '*Before my friend died I occasionally dwelt with some complacency on the idea of extinction, which seemed only like profound sleep, to which I do not object. After she*

died the thought of her extinction was the blackest horror, unless I shared it instantly. That I could not do. The only thing left was to cherish the hope of a spiritual communion now and for ever.' VI., Would like to know for certain '*if there is a future life. If not, I do not want to know there isn't.*' Lastly, a lady of rank (Swedish, aged 33) answers: I., '*Yes, else life worthless.*' II. (*a*), '*I know the conditions will be the best possible, and a future life is always tolerable if it affords means of progressing spiritually, morally, intellectually.*' II. (*c*), '*Love.*' III., Because '*I have suffered, and aimless suffering must be contrary to God's intention.*' IV., '*It makes all the difference between utter peace and hopeless wretchedness.*' V., '*Since 3 years my eyes are open.*' VI., '*I* DO *know, being in continual communication with my husband and child, who are* DEAD. *I am myself a medium, and very often* HEAR *and sometimes* SEE *things from the spirit world.*'

The above answer vividly brings out the consolations of spiritism. In an American lawyer (aged 70) these combine with a '*horror of annihilation,*' which is not infrequently mentioned. He says '*Yes*' to II. (*a*) on this account; but if he '*felt that death ends all, would commit suicide.*' Has '*no belief in revealed religion nor fear of Hell.*' IV., '*Would be desperate if he had no hope.*' V., '*Grown more intense. Up to* 30 *had no belief whatever. Then phenomena convinced him that mind operates at a distance from the body.*' A Unitarian clergyman (American, aged 65) feels even more strongly: I., '*The idea of extinction fills me with horror. It is positively intolerable. I even shrink painfully from temporary unconsciousness produced by anæsthetics.*' II. (*a*), '*Yes, because the future life cannot be worse than this.*' IV. to VI., Yet he thinks knowledge would be harmful, and prefers '*one world at a time.*' A preacher's declaration (American, 42), II. (*a*), that he '*would rather be a devil in Hell than not be at all,*' appears to be due to this

feeling rather than to theological orthodoxy of sentiment; for though the Divine institution of Hell can only be defended on the ground that annihilation is worse than Hell, hardly any clerics answer II. (*a*) affirmatively.

Besides the above types of sentiment one finds, of course, many others. The optimist and the pessimist are very distinct, and give good reasons for the faith that is in them. Some crave for absorption in the larger being of an Absolute, a sentiment which is heterodox in the West though orthodox in the East. In both these spiritual quarters, however, heretics may be found.

Perhaps the strongest position is occupied by those who rely on an immediate experience or intuition, which may be called 'mystical.' They are by no means rare, and are sometimes converted by 'dreams,' and convinced, also, of their pre-existence. Thus an American business man (aged 54) says: II. (*a*), '*Would prefer any sort of life to death or destruction.*' II. (*c*), Because of an inner consciousness, when 11 years old, '*I suddenly became conscious of a duality, or as if I were two existences in one . . . in a boyhood trance I saw this other life, and this vision has never faded from my memory. . . . I have come to regard it as my real self, and am assured that this life is perpetual.*' IV., '*Should be most unhappy if I did not believe in this continued existence.*' V., Doubted it 21 to 24, and was most unhappy. At 46 all his doubts were removed by spirit communications from his father. An American manufacturer (aged 41) declares (II. (*c*) to III.) that '*nothing can really kill me. I am alive, I live. Hence I will live,*' but finds it difficult to formulate proofs. '*I know it. Others may not live after death—poor things; probably they are so occupied with transitory matters that perhaps they don't deserve to live after death. . . . I live and know that I will live after the physical dissolution we call death . . . would like proof and think it not impossible, but when I am really myself it would not make much difference. I think the*

question transcends reason. It is a matter to be apprehended and known, not argued about.' IV., *'No, because it is settled.'* An Australian surveyor (aged 54) answers: II. (*a*), *'I do,'* because (II. *c*) *'I have always felt intuitively that an absolutely sure life in the future awaited me. This feeling is not the result of any religious or other teaching. I felt it as a boy.'* IV., *'Have got beyond feeling it as a question. I feel that future existence for me is a certainty, and also that my life in the next world will be higher and better than it is here. My ideal Heaven is a condition where I would have something practical to work out, fitting me for an even higher heaven.'* V., *'From boyhood, much the same as now. The parson never could scare me with the terrors of Hell, as I felt—contrary to all teaching—there was no such place.'* VI., *'I look upon it as a certainty.'* A lady (aged 33) thinks (I. to III.) *'immortality is an awesome gift and needs heroic courage to believe in,'* but *'I feel I have lived many times in past ages of struggle and pain, and, no doubt, have not yet advanced far enough not to have many more before me. . . . The only motive that can inspire that hero's courage is an immense pity and sympathy for others suffering still more, because still more ignorant and bound to the wheel of rebirth.'* IV., But *'have never felt in this incarnation any mental anxiety about a future life, because I have always known I was an immortal.'* V., *'Brought up to believe that spirit communion was not possible or right, I now know it is possible, and generally lawful and wise. Though educated in the narrowest orthodoxy, even as a child I turned from the dogmas taught me.'* VI., *'Would one live in a Fool's Paradise?'* This mystical belief certainly rings true, which is more than can be said for some of the other types of sentiment.

Chapter VI — *Dishonest Belief*

'I HONESTLY believe' is often used as a strong form of affirmation. It is a curious phrase. It implies that in addition to honest beliefs there exist dishonest ones. And how a *belief* can be dishonest is not at first sight clear. Dishonest *assertions*, indeed, are intelligible and common enough; but they are not normally products of dishonest belief. For they are only professed for a purpose, and with intent to deceive, and usually express anything but their assertors' real beliefs.

Again, dishonesty is popularly held to be a moral defect, whereas belief is conceived as a wholly intellectual affair. Hence, dishonest belief seems to be a monstrosity and paradox.

In reality, however, there is no reason why dishonesty, like cowardice, should not be intellectual as well as moral. Indeed, intellectual dishonesty may often *be* a form of intellectual cowardice. It is the man who shrinks from the path in which his beliefs would lead him who is tempted to corrupt their honesty, or to conjure up dishonest half-beliefs, and to deceive himself with the hope that he may some day come to believe them honestly. The dishonest belief, in such a

case, is meant primarily to deceive the believer himself, and is thereby conveniently distinguishable from the dishonest *assertion*. For the latter is primarily meant for export, and to deceive others. It is only in rare and extreme cases that it becomes capable of deceiving its maker, or, rather, of confusing him into a half-belief that it is no longer what he once knew it to be.

Dishonest assertions, therefore, like lies, which, indeed, are a form of them, are necessarily complex in their meaning and function. They mean one thing to their maker, and another (if they succeed) to those for whom they are intended. Their maker does not desire the belief of the latter to approximate to his own, as he would do in a *bona fide* expression of belief, but rather to diverge from it. And he uses the dishonest assertion for this purpose. But as he alone is aware of this, he alone knows what his assertion is to begin with. The rest can only call the assertion dishonest when it has *failed* to achieve its purpose, and been found out. The same is true of the lie; it passes as a truth until it is detected, and cannot strictly be called a 'lie' until then.

A dishonest assertion, then, is a demand for belief which has an aim other than the communication of truth; it is a truth-claim which has no truth-aim. If, then, truth is conceived as the aim of our intellectual functions, and the function of assertion is to *reveal* our thought, it is plain that

the dishonest assertion is a perversion, a misuse of assertion for an improper purpose. Yet from the merely intellectual standpoint it may have no other defect, and appears to be much superior to the dishonest belief. For unlike the latter it need not involve self-deception, and is compatible with clarity of thought. Its defects seem to be wholly moral.

Dishonest belief, on the other hand, always involves intellectual as well as moral defect. It implies intellectual confusion, even though in some cases this may be venial. It is very easy, and often unavoidable, for example, to mistake a half-belief for the full belief it once was, and very hard to determine exactly to what extent it has faded. Or, again, in the case of an intermittent belief with seasonal variations, it is easy to persuade oneself that its intensity is greater than it actually is. Both the intensity and the dishonesty of beliefs admit of infinite degrees, and intellectually it is easy to misjudge them. On the other hand, in extreme cases both the confusion and the dishonesty may become so great as to simulate genuine belief. It would have been instructive to have got a candid *apologia* out of the politician who appeared to his critics to have mastered the art of 'improvising the convictions of a lifetime.'

Dishonest belief and dishonest assertion, then, are psychologically quite distinct, and should be

distinguished from each other. Yet the former term is not uncommonly applied to what are properly cases of the latter. And from a social standpoint this usage is intelligible and defensible. For in considering a system of beliefs which has been built up with the aid of fraud and dishonesty, it is not always necessary to go into the actual psychological state of mind of the various people interested in it; it may be enough to call it a dishonest belief, whether or not all who profess it do so dishonestly, and whatever amount of belief, disbelief, or half-belief they may severally have. The actual believers will probably be a mixed multitude of dupes and deceivers; the belief as a whole, however, may justly be termed dishonest. Thus the system of prophetic augury which played such a part in Roman political procedure was, no doubt, a pretty completely dishonest belief in Cicero's time; but it must have passed gradually into the condition when two augurs could not speak about it with a straight face. And even they may genuinely have believed that it was a good system for the masses to believe, and not merely worth preserving for their own dignity and gain: they need not have attained the cynical candour of the Renaissance Pope who called Christianity 'that Jewish superstition which has been of such singular advantage to us Popes.' At the present day there is probably still a certain amount of honest belief in 'democracy,' even

among politicians, though the magnates of finance and of the Press must often chuckle when they hear 'the voice of the People' braying aloud the beliefs they have whispered into its receptive ears.

Yet even the manufacturers of the masses of dishonest belief now current in the world are not merely dishonest. They may honestly believe that they are doing the right thing and doing good. For does not the People will to be deceived? Could it bear to be told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Could any one? Is it not better, therefore, to tell them what it is good to believe, without troubling too meticulously about what is literally true? This conviction, that what the world needs is not the true but the good-to-believe, is productive of vast quantities of dishonest belief, and itself readily becomes a dishonest belief. Being so subtly corrupting, it is worth exploring further.

To begin with, it should be emphasized that it is a legitimate application to practice of the traditional theories of knowledge. These do not recognize any inherent or rational connexion between the true and the good-to-believe: they are disparate. Truth for them is one thing (what, they may find it difficult to explain!), and goodness another: so there is no reason why the true should be good, or the good true. Consequently, when a belief seems to them to be good, that is enough for action, which is quite independent of

theory. Considerations of a belief's truth or falsity, theoretical questions about the goodness of believing what is good-to-believe *but false*, simply do not arise. Having convinced himself that a belief is good-to-believe, the practical man can, with the applause of theory, proceed to lie boldly in order to make men believe it, and need not trouble about the theoretic subtlety that after all it has to be taught *as true*.

Consequently, it *is* taught without a scruple, and works havoc with the principles, moral and intellectual, both of teachers and of taught. The teachers teach what they do not believe to be true, because they believe it to be good; their pupils frequently discover this, and, taking 'good' in a sense of their own, profess to believe what their teachers and examiners have power to render good-to-believe. It suits all parties, moreover, to leave unspecified, unanalysed, and vague the ends and the persons for which it is good to believe the belief; hence there are no limits to the depths, both of confusion and of dishonesty, of thought which lie in this direction.

Consequently, all the great systems of authoritative belief, by which the world is controlled, are supported and pervaded by dishonesty, and perverted to serve the interests of those who manipulate them. Priestcraft and statecraft and pedantry poison the world with the arts of propaganda and suggestion, and flood it with dishonest beliefs.

Religion, politics, education, philosophy, morals, history, business, are all corrupted, and have nothing genuine in them but what can be, and is, undersold and undermined by spurious imitations. They have all to change their functions and to adapt themselves to alien purposes. Thus every religion professes to aim at the spiritual salvation of the believer; every religion soon sells itself to the rulers of this world, and becomes an instrument of government, undertaking to teach its votaries their station and its duties in return for a comfortable establishment. Nothing has been more striking of recent years than the decay of the universal religions and the pullulation of 'autocephalous' churches; this means that the modern State is rapidly ceasing to recognize any but its tribal god.

Politics, for the moment, still seems to be the art of fooling the people, rather than of bullying it, and of throwing sops to Cerberus when he becomes too ravenous; but the possibilities of concealment are increasing, so that it is becoming more and more difficult to discover who really brings about what happens. As the result of an unparalleled effort to make the world 'safe for democracy,' even the pretence of democracy is being dropped in many important countries, while the world has never been safer for the masters of the machine-gun or so safe for the princes of the powers of the air. It is ominous that the aeroplane

and the machine-gun have restored to the few their military supremacy over the many which they lost by the coming of gunpowder; and the populations being controlled by sheer force are to-day far greater and more important than fifty years ago. But so long as a hundred millions of Americans honestly believe that they are a free democracy this political illusion will persist, even though the logic of events is steadily demonstrating that tyranny is growing easier, and that 'freedom' and 'independence' are no longer either possible or desirable, either for nations or for individuals, under modern conditions. So democracy is becoming more and more of a sham, and belief in it more and more dishonest.

Great as is the vogue of humbug in politics, it is even greater in *education*. The essential function of education, which is never mentioned to those subjected to the process, is to fit members of a society for their life in that society. It is therefore necessarily 'vocational' in this wide sense. But education has also a wider human function; it is the apparatus whereby the knowledge and the traditions of the past are transmitted from generation to generation, and human society avoids the stagnation which human mortality would otherwise entail. Now the transmission of knowledge is a vital necessity for the society, just as adaptation to the social order is a necessity for the individual; but to transmit any particular social

tradition is never an unmixed benefit, because social tradition has everywhere been more or less corrupted in the interests of the dominant classes. Hence the existing systems of education, whether they profess to train for the business of life, or merely to cultivate the mind, are always to a large extent *caste-marks*, which impress a certain social stamp upon their victims. This stamp is highly valued, and may in consequence prove useful. How it is impressed does not matter; it is really of minimal importance what the subjects of instruction are said to be in an English Public School, and whether half-hearted attempts are made to teach boys Latin versification or Euclidean demonstration, a dead language or a modern, which is quite as dead so far as the art of speaking it goes. What really matters is that a man should have been a 'public schoolboy,' if possible at Eton. Whatever the intellectual and moral results of the 'best education,' neither the boys nor the parents, nor in their hearts the masters, really believe that anything is comparable in importance with turning out products that will pass muster as exemplifications of the social ideal of the 'English gentleman.' Moreover, so long as this ideal continues to be permeated by relics of the Greek snobbishness, which insisted that all work (except politics and fighting) was servile and soul-destroying ('banausic'), if it was not useless, it will continue to be socially valued and envied as a caste-mark, and it will

continue to be believed that a 'gentleman' is definable as a person who does not work for his living.

Hence the current belief in a 'liberal' education has become replete with dishonesty and cant. It overlooks or ignores the actual facts. (1) In maintaining that a truly liberal education should be 'useless,' it takes no account of the fact that any process which trains men really to use their brains cannot but be useful in the widest and most important sense, whatever its medium of instruction, while any education which trains them to perform the social functions imposed on them is useful in a narrower sense as well. (2) The classical education so much favoured was actually very useful for many purposes, professional as well as social, because dialectical skill and power over language were conditions of success in literature, law, journalism, etc. (3) Even in the most grossly commercial sense liberal education 'paid'; it was liberally endowed, and in moments of candour an academic dignitary like Dean Gaisford of Christ Church could recommend the writing of Latin verses as 'an elegant accomplishment which not infrequently leads to posts of considerable emolument in the Church,' while a Master of Balliol, like Jowett, could put the figure of £8,000 upon the cash value of a 'First' in 'Greats.'

Thus the cant of the traditional liberal education, being untrue to fact and false in its motivation, is

a clear case of dishonest belief, though, no doubt, confusion of thought has contributed as much as mere dishonesty to its vogue.

The subject of *History* lends itself to the systematic manufacture of dishonest belief. For every historical narrative is necessarily selective of its raw material, and imposes on it an order which is relative to the beliefs, bias, and purpose of the historian. Hence out of the same mass of data an indefinite plurality of histories may be compiled, though Procopius is probably the only one of the great historians who has proved that the same man may write both the official and the 'secret' history of his times. If the historian aims at impartiality, he is in danger of lapsing into indifference; if he has a bias, it is most dangerous when it is unavowed, and perhaps even unconscious.

At present, history has become one of the chief instruments of nationalist propaganda, and the more knowledge of the national past there exists in any country, the more intractable a people becomes and the greater the menace for the future. For every people is systematically taught to look back to the epoch of its greatest 'glory,' and to shape its policy and to formulate its claims accordingly.

In *Philosophy*, dishonest belief flourishes chiefly in connexion with schools which exploit the reputation of their master, and in philosophic interpretations which manipulate popular beliefs. But on

the whole, philosophies show their human weakness not so much in the shape of dishonesty as in the form of make-believe: they are not popular enough, nor believed in seriously enough, to generate much dishonest belief outside narrow academic circles. We may therefore postpone the consideration of philosophic shams to the next chapter.

That *Science* should be so immune from dishonest belief is mainly due to the nature of scientific method. In the first place, scientific beliefs are always being *tested* by their applications and extensions, and it is difficult to retain dishonestly a belief which is always being tested and failing in its tests. Secondly, scientific method has as it were *tamed* dishonesty and pressed it into its service under the name of *fiction*. The use of fictions is not only permitted; it has, in fact, become a regular part of scientific *technique*. They do no harm when they are avowed and their function is understood.

'*Superstitions*,' on the other hand, are very largely half-beliefs, infected with dishonesty. That is to say, they are able to determine frantic action under more or less abnormal circumstances, but are not ordinarily treated as if they were true, or, at least, are only acted on at a heavy discount from their face value. Thus an astrologer who has enough belief in his 'science' to spend much time on it, and is logical enough to see that if it were true

it would be financially profitable to apply it to life insurance, will, nevertheless, decline to risk *his own* money on the exploitation of his 'discoveries.'* Professor Carveth Read has very ably commented on and explained 'the unstable character of superstitions and their close alliance with play-beliefs' in his *Origin of Man*, chapter iii., §§ 1 and 8.

Evidently, then, there are great masses of dishonest belief current in the world. The mischief they make would be much greater than it is if those whom they are meant to dupe did not so often defend themselves, and retaliate in kind, by professing full belief where they believe little, if at all. Whereby the whole social transaction comes to resemble that of the knave who sold his pal a worthless share and received payment in a bad cheque. Moreover, like other forms of dishonesty, the manipulation of belief involves an unprofitable waste of energy and time, which seems destined to continue until the authorities that mould our beliefs can acquire a much deeper conviction than they have at present that it is good to speak the truth and shame the devil.

* I came across this case myself in consequence of having pointed out that the pragmatic test in its financial form was capable of testing the genuineness of many 'superstitions.' *Cf.* p. 146-9.

Chapter VII *Make-Believe and Fiction*

THAT make-believe and fiction do not involve full reality and complete belief is, presumably, familiar to all. But it does not follow that they have none of the characteristics of belief or of reality, and still less that they have no importance. In point of fact, they function as beliefs and realities for many purposes; they are good enough to act on and practically real; their recognition may not only be expedient, but may even be made compulsory, like the fiction of 'summer time,' by which the British people legally tricks itself into getting up one hour earlier every summer, or the legislation by which the University of Oxford for many years used to stipulate that 'for the purposes of this Statute' Easter and Trinity Term shall count as one, or that (*e.g.*, for purposes of 'residence') the summer Term shall count as two.* We use

* This was really to tamper with the Multiplication Table for the sake of academic convenience; it enacted that (in certain contexts) 2 should = 1 and 1 should = 2. The reason was, of course, historical. The two Terms had originally been distinct and had been separated by a vacation, which had disappeared. But conservatives still regret the recent obliteration of an ancient custom, and humanists that of a clear proof that man is the maker and master even of the Multiplication Table.

make-believe and fiction, therefore, not merely for fun or relaxation, but also to conduct many of the serious affairs of life. They are, in fact, very important, though not many may have reflected how very important they are. Without a proper amount of make-believe to smooth over its rough places social intercourse would be thorny and unpleasant; we should, moreover, have no play, no jokes, no art, and very little science. Without fiction we could hardly exercise our imagination, and should be deprived of the very useful applications of imagination to law and science which are called legal and scientific fictions. It is clear, also, that if fiction were banned on account of its lack of absolute truth, literature might suffer, even though most fiction is, literally, a 'pastime.'

By make-believe we may agree to understand the attitude towards an object of possible belief which we express in the phrase 'let's pretend.' Linguistically, this seems to carry two implications: (1) that the object of make-believe is not serious, and (2) that it is *known* to be unreal; but upon inspection of the facts, we may see reason to decline to limit the meaning of make-believe by these verbal implications. For in matters philosophical language is a good servant but a bad master: its testimony should always be heard, because it embodies the practice of actual thinking and cannot be suspected of having been designed to prove the point in dispute; but still, the verbal form in which a

meaning is expressed can never safely be taken as an adequate guide to the meaning actually intended. So in this case; it is simply not true that make-believe is never seriously intended, and is of no serious use. Child's play, no doubt, is not serious as a rule; but social conventions, which also are forms of make-believe, are often desperately serious. And even children not infrequently take their games too seriously and quarrel about them. As for the British schoolboy, it is known that he regards his games as *the* serious business of life, and is encouraged to do so by his elders, who, whether they golf or philander, heartily agree with him. It will, perhaps, be admitted that by the time a game has developed 'professionals' (as all games do) it has become a serious pursuit. As, however, no amount of verbal study of the form in which any sort of make-believe has found expression will enable us to ascertain whether it is intended seriously or not, and, if so, how seriously, we must not accept the verbal implication that make-believe is not serious: each case must be studied on its own merits.

So, too, we must set aside the verbal implication that, in order to 'pretend,' we must already know that our object is unreal. In some cases we may know this, in others we may suspect it; but it is not essential to the pretending. Moreover, the very process of pretending, as when boys play at 'Indians,' is apt to produce a sort of temporary

half-belief. What it is important to recognize is that the purpose of the pretending may precisely be to find out whether its object is real or not, as in the play with which Hamlet tries to 'catch the conscience of the king.' Hence it seems better to regard as open the question whether the object we feign to be real may not be real. After all, the history of the 'atom' conveys a serious warning: after being merely a counter for calculation for centuries, the atom appears now to have solidly established itself as a real entity in nature.

It is not true, then, that games cannot be serious nor feigned objects real. Nor is it true that games are useless. They have many uses. They exercise faculty. They prepare for serious life. They refresh after work, and relieve tension. Even at their lowest, they keep people out of more serious mischief. Lastly, they have great affinities with science. A game like chess exhibits 'necessary truths' in the deductions from its rules as obviously as any science, and reveals their nature even better. For the 'pure' sciences, in particular, always have many of the features of games, and tend to degenerate into mere play with abstractions just in proportion as their 'pure' votaries are allowed to play about with them as they please, and to develop such of their aspects as they find most amusing.*

* These are often the aspects most 'useless' in the eyes of a world which does not see that the more abstruse

Furthermore, all sciences are addicted to the use of *fictions*. Fictions are pretences, known to be false, which we feign to be true, or, rather, find to be *true enough*, for the purposes of scientific investigation, because they are more convenient to calculate with than the actual facts. Thus it is a fiction when a surveyor treats as a plane Euclidean surface the area he desires to map: he knows that it has a (not exactly calculable) curvature, because it is a portion of the earth's surface, and the earth is (more or less) round.* He knows, therefore, that he may always have to 'fake' his results in the end, in order to make up for the falsely simplified assumptions he has worked with.

Fictions, then, cannot be disavowed, as they would have to be if the aim of science were merely to describe reality: they must be treated in all seriousness as a valuable portion of scientific procedure. The actual method of science would appear to be the freest possible use of imaginative hypothesis, followed up by the most scrupulous and persevering experimentation. Now, in both these phases science shows itself akin to make-believe: for in all make-believe, whether sportive

a subject is made, the less possible is it to interfere with the 'authority' therein, and the more useful, consequently, is it *for him* to cultivate abstruseness, if he wishes to be left alone.

Its exact shape is so irregular that science has finally decided to call it 'geoid.'

or serious, our attitude is *hypothetical*—we suppose something which is either a pretence or, at least, is not known to be a fact. And we do so in order to see what happens next—*i.e.*, our supposition or hypothesis is *experimental* in its purpose. We do not imagine that we are merely recognizing fact, but imagine that we may cope with fact; thus we are as it were creating fact out of our own heads, and trying to find room in reality for the creatures of our imagination. It is astonishing that this procedure so often succeeds, and that our imaginings enable us to cope with fact. But the great systems of scientific fiction which we have invented—*e.g.*, those of mathematics—*do* apply to a reality which shows itself largely submissive to them. Even though the Pythagorean belief that *all things are numbers* is metaphysically false, it is true enough that for many purposes many things can be treated *as if* they were numbers. Similarly, though modern metageometries have shattered the Platonic faith that '*God always geometrizes*,' and the Euclidean system cannot even be used for calculating certain physical facts, like the motions of Mercury, it still remains true that 'geometry' has from the first solved the practical problems of land measurement it was invented to deal with.

We should modify, therefore, our prejudices that truth is necessarily stranger to fiction, and that the road to reality must start from the given,

and not from the postulated or the invented. The effective realities of the sciences are not *data* but *achievements*, developed by purposive manipulation out of the realities of common sense, which themselves were achievements reached by the human kind through long æons of biological experimentation and struggle with the conditions of its life. There is therefore no finality, either practical or 'theoretic,' about our present forms of 'scientific reality' and of our beliefs concerning them; the open-minded scientist will always be ready to reject and recast them whenever he sees a chance of transforming them into something *better*. And in this process he has every right to use all the resources he possesses; he need not shrink from fictions, and may make his make-believe 'come true.'

Chapter VIII — *The Logic of Belief*

OUR survey of the psychological varieties and shades of belief has been too rapid to do them justice. The topics of each of our chapters might well be expanded into a book. Nevertheless, our sketches may have sufficed to forewarn our readers not to be unduly impressed by the claims of ordinary beliefs to be based on logic. For we have seen that by far the larger number of our beliefs have by no means the character ascribed to logical beliefs, and are quite adequately accounted for by psychological causes. For the most part, beliefs do not rest on reasons, and still less on the reasons given for them: while even when they are most rational and most soundly reasoned, they remain debatable.

Nor, again, are our rational beliefs of a nature rationalism can approve. They are not the pure conclusions of a passionless reason, but the desired ends of a purposive thought. They are not eternal and stable, but temporary and variable. They are not certain and absolutely true, but possess one or other of the infinite degrees of probability. And, so far from being the inevitable consequence of

purely logical thinking, they seem to be products of whatever in our complex nature takes satisfaction in entertaining the belief.

It is so plain that even our rational beliefs do not conform to the ideals of rationalism that, if we are wise, we shall not insist on them, nor refuse to recognize the actual nature of our thinking. But even when we have scrapped our rationalistic prejudices, we have done but little to establish the rationality of our beliefs. So marked and so common, indeed, is this non-logical and merely psychological generation of beliefs that a question arises whether reason *ever* engenders belief, and whether any of our beliefs are really rational and capable of logical justification.

At first we are disposed to affirm this, even though we admit, in a general way, that most of the beliefs of all, and all the beliefs of most, are caused psychologically, and can hardly sustain their claims to rationality under critical examination. But we feel very sure about the rationality of some of our beliefs. The beliefs which at any time we hold strongly always seem to us rational, just because *ex hypothesi* we believe that our reasons for holding them are good. This experience, however, would be more convincing if it were not so common; we can observe our neighbours believing, as confidently as ourselves, what seem to us manifest absurdities; we can recall (though, as a rule, we do not care to) the vicissitudes of our own

beliefs. The stock example in literature of this condition of belief is that of the amourist who is always in love (though not with the same person), and always convinced that this time his affection is the genuine article, and destined to endure.

Hence, if we are honest with ourselves, we cannot accept the mere *feeling* of rationality as an adequate *proof* of rationality. And yet, if we do not, what other clue have we to logical rationality? The difficulty is one which always crops up whenever we try to come to close quarters with logic, and to discriminate the logical from the psychological. The logical has no separate existence. It is not, as Plato would persuade us, the superior denizen of a supercelestial world. It always inhabits a mind, and has to be caught and identified within it. And in that company it is always liable to be corrupted by its psychological associates. So we may always make the mistake of regarding as logical what turns out to be only some particularly insistent or blatant form of the psychological, or even an idiosyncrasy of our own. The truth is that our decision that some element in our set of beliefs is 'logical' (and *a fortiori* that it is 'universal' and 'valid' and 'eternal'), and not 'merely psychological,' is only a value-judgment of our own, and fully as 'subjective' and risky as other value-judgments are reputed to be. The only proper and prudent attitude towards it is

not, however, to shrink from making it, but to make it with our eyes and our mind open. That is, we should recognize that it is risky, and be willing to revise it, whenever reasons for so doing may arise.

In principle, therefore, the distinction between 'rational' and 'merely psychological' belief cannot be made absolute. It is a useful distinction only if we recognize it as relative and fallible and corrigible. For it is always disputable, and when it is disputed we must always be prepared to show that *in this case* it holds. But, even where we can do this, our demonstration can never be taken as final. It always remains possible that what we took to be rational beliefs, and were justified by the then state of our knowledge in so taking, may subsequently turn out to have been generated in ways which cast a doubt, or even a slur, on their rationality. For example, we may have a belief which seems completely rational, self-evident, and intuitively certain; yet it may owe its logical superiority simply and solely to its survival-value, which has preserved only those who contrived to feel about it as we do. We shall have an arduous struggle with this suggestion in Chapter XII; meantime, we must not assume that the belief that some of our beliefs are rational is itself rational. It may be right, but it is a debatable belief, and hitherto logicians have not given any good reasons for it. Indeed, they hardly seem to have realized

any of the difficulties involved in their conception of rationality, and have been content to take a very superficial view of it.

The superficiality of what passes for 'logic' arises, here as elsewhere, from neglect of psychology, which logicians have thought it possible to short-circuit. They supposed that they could determine the logical meaning of 'propositions' without going into the infinite complexities of the psychological meaning a proposition might actually convey in suitable contexts; so they gaily abstracted from psychological meaning, without observing that they were thereby abstracting from real meaning, and dooming themselves to mere verbalism. Had they been willing to take into account the psychological side of thought and the real meaning of those who did the thinking, it is not credible that they should not have realized the futility of trying to determine the value (and even the 'validity'!) of an argument, without ascertaining its meaning, purpose, and context, from a mere inspection of its verbal form. For such inspection offers no guarantee whatever that the meaning in use has been, or can be, ascertained, and to base logical doctrines upon such verbalism is to build on a quicksand. The result is that any argument which does not obviously defy certain verbal conventions is allowed to pass as 'logical,' even though the logician has not the foggiest notion of the motives, aims, circumstances, and

causes that brought it into being and determine its actual meaning and effective use.

His treatment of the 'illogical' is no less shallow, and, indeed, the disastrous consequences of ignoring psychological meaning here come out even more clearly. To abstract from psychological meaning forces the logical doctrine of 'contradiction' to ignore the distinction between real and verbal contradiction, or, rather, to take the latter as proof of the former* and as convincing evidence of 'illogicality.' A logical discussion of contradiction will, in consequence, nearly always be found to contain in rapid succession the following assumptions: (1) That contradiction is impossible, (2) that it is a sure criterion of error, (3) that it is real, (4) that it is only 'appearance,' because nothing real can contradict itself, (5) that (nevertheless) we contradict ourselves, (6) that we can only contradict others.

If, now, to this sufficiently contradictory and illogical medley of assumptions we apply the distinction between verbal and real contradiction, we soon discover that 'logical' contradiction is essentially verbal, and that the evidence of its occurrence is entirely verbal. That two propositions, say 'A is young' and 'A is not young,' have the sort of incompatibility called 'contradiction' is a purely verbal fact. Whether as a fact

* This is the trick, *e.g.*, on which Mr. F. H. Bradley has built the whole metaphysic of *Appearance and Reality*.

they are incompatible depends on circumstances—*e.g.*, on the time to which the two statements refer. Consequently, verbal evidence may always be insufficient to prove real contradiction.

On the other hand, the fact on which the whole logical objection to 'contradiction' rests is plainly of a psychological order; it consists of the incompatibility, or, rather, antagonism, between the attitudes of affirmation and denial. It would appear to be a psychical fact that we cannot without mental distress both affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same sense. But logic cannot really make any capital out of this psychical fact. For the moment after we have affirmed we can, without fatal 'contradiction,' 'change our mind,' and deny what we affirmed, and the slightest distinction between the cases, the least difference in the circumstances, the briefest lapse of time, may be used to justify the change. If we do not pride ourselves on a rigid, verbal, and unteachable consistency, such avowals will cost us nothing; nay, they transmute the evidence of 'self-contradiction' into proof of intellectual progress. It is practically impossible, therefore, to convict any one of self-contradiction against his will: if he chooses to dispute the charge, and to say that, when all the circumstances of the case are taken into account, the 'contradiction' disappears, nothing can be proved against him.

Moreover, even if he had allowed himself to be

convicted of self-contradiction, he would not have been convicted of error or deprived of many means of self-defence. At most he might plead guilty of having made statements that contradicted each other verbally. Now this is *prima facie* an offence only against the verbal conventions about the meaning of terms which are presupposed in the use of words for the conveyance of meaning. It is an offence which may be justified by a variety of reasons, but these reasons may be demanded. For verbally two 'contradictory' statements cancel out, and leave no assertion standing. Consequently, we do not know what their assertor meant. We have, therefore, a right to ask him to explain himself further. But he can do so in various ways. Thus (1) he can explain that the contradiction was merely verbal. It did not convey his real meaning, either because he expressed himself badly, or because we did not look beyond the words and so failed to understand him. Or (2), while still declaring the contradiction verbal, he might interpret it by a distinction which would 'really' remove it. (3) He might withdraw one or other of the conflicting statements, not necessarily as 'false,' but as liable to be misunderstood. (4) He could cancel both for similar reasons, and start again with a fresh statement. Lastly (5), he could then justify his previous 'contradiction' as a stimulating paradox, which had expressed his real meaning more effectively than he could otherwise

have done, and led up to a better statement, which without it would not have been understood. And, seeing that 'always pregnant' Irish bulls are notoriously neither ineffective nor unintelligible, this defence would have to be allowed.

Self-contradiction, then, would hardly appear to be the essence of logical contradiction. But even to contradict others is not as easy as it looks. All that we can be sure of achieving by contradicting others is a certain measure of rudeness: if we are right on the facts, it will be a sort of rude justice; if not, just rudeness. And the logical situation we create is merely a difference of opinion. Even this is not certain. For though it is easy enough, no doubt, to contradict what others *say*, that again is a matter of words, and we may not succeed in contradicting what they *mean*, especially when their actual meaning is not identical with the ordinary meaning of the words they use. Here, again, the psychological question of meaning takes precedence over the logical question of contradiction, and we get an assurance of the reality of the contradiction only from a consensus of the parties to it. The real evidence for it is psychological, and the logician's evidence, being merely verbal, may be irrelevant.

On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to go into the psychical facts, instead of trusting to the crude dogmas of a pre-scientific 'logic,' we may have no difficulty in apprehending how self-

contradiction occurs and what it means. The logical doctrine that a mind cannot contradict itself rests on an assumption which is psychologically false of (probably) all actual minds. It is deduced from the assumption that the mind is a coherent and consistent whole and that all its parts are in continuous and harmonious logical interaction. But as a fact all minds are full of internal friction and conflict, of which the 'self-contradiction' is a symptom; they are divided into more or less separate departments, and are capable of different attitudes, between which there need be little or no logical connexion. Thus the judgment we pass on a course of conduct may differ widely according as the conduct is our own or another's, that of a friend or of a foe. Our action in a rage or in a panic or in love may differ widely from our normal behaviour. We not infrequently fall a prey to conflicting passions; we feel *odi et amo*, or are 'willing to wound and yet afraid to strike.'

Why, then, should not such conflicts occur also in our intellectual activities? Surely here, too, we may pursue incompatible aims and make incompatible demands. Here, too, we may desire to eat our cake and to have it too. Here, too, we may forget one aim while pursuing another, and when reminded of their conflict may, nevertheless, refuse to give up either, protest against the 'one-sidedness' of choosing between logical contra-

dictories, and profess belief in a 'higher synthesis' not yet discerned.

It is notorious that such have always been the tactics of the religions when taxed with the great 'contradictions' which pervade the religious life. These contradictions are never the products of passionless logical reflection. They are intelligible only as emotional postulates. God must be just, because the world is so unjust; yet He is also merciful, because infinite mercy alone could save the likes of us from the Divine justice. God must be strong, because we are so weak; nay, He must be *omnipotent*, for how else could He be trusted to be strong enough for all our needs? Yet if He can do anything, why does He not annihilate the evils that force us to cry out for a God? Because, unfortunately, He is not good? No; that were blasphemy. It is no less essential that God be *good*, for else His strength would not help *us*, and He could not be trusted at all. If these two natural demands are tactlessly juxtaposed, there arises, of course, a 'contradiction'; but, if we have faith, let us trust God for a solution of the 'problem of evil' which no mortal eye has ever seen. The 'problem' is plainly manufactured by the clash in our desires, and the logical contradiction is psychologically unfelt, because the conflicting desires are not felt *simultaneously*, nor are the trains of thought which lead to the incompatible demands entertained together. A logic,

therefore, which consents to recognize the volitional inspiration of our thinking has no difficulty in understanding the situation.

But 'contradictions' are not confined to religious beliefs. The ordinary progress of a science may generate them also in our scientific beliefs. In fact, they *must* arise, just because scientific thought *is* progressive. For not merely does it freely sanction the use of *fictions*, which may be just as contradictory as is found convenient, but it follows from the nature of scientific progress that scientific conceptions cannot be immutable, and may easily become 'contradictory.' For they *must* assimilate new truth when and as it is discovered; they may not reject it on the plea that it modifies their original meaning, nor may they pretend to be infallible and incorrigible. Hence they may often be led to 'contradict' their original meaning; and at any given time a percentage of scientific conceptions, being engaged in such transformations, will suffer from incomplete assimilation of the new knowledge; so they will appear (technically and verbally) 'self-contradictory' and paradoxical. But it will in no wise follow that therefore they are *false*. Thus the conception of the 'atom' has not lost, but gained, in scientific value by sacrificing the 'indivisibility' asserted in its name, and transforming itself into a system of negative 'electrons' revolving round a positive 'nucleus'; if the logician is pedantic

enough to object to the verbal contradiction thus arrived at, he must be told that he has not understood the nature of scientific method.

And that, perhaps, should teach him a lesson in pure logic. It should force him to reflect that every real judgment, every judgment that is worth making and is actually made, must be made in order to convey *information*, and so must have in it something *new*. It must always, therefore, modify the meaning of the terms it uses. Until it was made, it was not known about the particular '*S is P*' that the subject about which it is made accepted the predicate asserted of it; but henceforth S has the meaning '*S-of-which-P-is-predicable*,' and P the meaning '*P-predicable-of-S*.' But *ex hypothesi* these are *new* meanings, more or less in conflict with the old. True, the logician never uses real judgments to illustrate his doctrines, but only verbal forms ('propositions'), which may conceivably be used for judging; even so, he has not really made out any case for his dogma that verbal contradiction can be used as an infallible criterion of error. Still less can he show that real contradiction is essentially logical, and not a pale reflexion of a psychological conflict that devastates the soul. One must not, therefore, overlook the significance of a belief simply because it happens to array itself in a 'contradictory' garb. It may be all the more instructive and important for this very reason.

Chapter IX — *The Will to Believe*

RATIONALISTS have for ages endeavoured to persuade themselves and others that belief is wholly an affair of the intellect, in which desires and volitions play no part. They have loved to represent belief as involuntary, forced upon us from without, as a 'necessity of thought,' by the objective nature of things, and themselves as humbly submissive to the dictates of a reality which determined all their beliefs for them. Only so, they proclaimed, could beliefs be rational and their objects valuable. Anything like volitional activity in the formation of beliefs was pernicious and immoral; any exercise of selection or choice, any preference or bias, was bound to vitiate a cognitive process. These beliefs were inspired by solicitude for the dignity and rationality of human nature rather than by study of the actual facts. Rationalists, moreover, are great 'rationalizers,' and loth to carry too deep the analysis of their own motives. So they do not often catch a glimpse of the prejudices and desires that actuate even themselves.

At any rate, their account is, even intellectually, very defective. It does not represent truly the procedure of the human reason. (1) It omits to

record that our reason everywhere demands the stimulus of interest, the prospect of a desired end, intelligent choice in the selection of the means to that end, and persevering efforts to attain it. (2) It cannot explain the function of faith in religion, and the *rôle* played in scientific knowing by postulates, hypotheses, fictions, interpretations, and other cognitive operations in which the first move seems to lie with man. (3) Neither does it account for the fact that the real is by no means as dictatorial in determining our beliefs as the theory requires. Actually, it behaves ambiguously, and shows considerable amounts of *indetermination; i.e.*, its behaviour is compatible with a number of alternatives. Indeed, in the last resort it appears always to be indeterminate towards our final interpretations; thus there is no known fact which is not capable of being taken optimistically, or again pessimistically. In the sequel (Chapter XII.) this will be found to be a fact of great significance. (4) If its perversely masochistic attitude towards the real were consistently carried through, it would discourage experiment and discredit the discoveries we owe to the happy audacities of our experimenters. (5) It renders similarly unintelligible the normal facts of co-operation between 'theory' and practice, and the possibility of inventions which reveal that the real may become plastic to our demands. (6) It does not attempt to show that even the more extreme and perilous

manifestations of activity which accompany our knowing, hopes, fears, and other emotions, love, hate, and partisan zeal, are necessarily and always productive only of failure, error, and illusion; still less that the passionless indifference towards an object of inquiry, which is (vainly) recommended, would be likely to elicit truth.

Nevertheless, this intellectualist theory of human belief contrived to maintain itself as orthodoxy until William James assailed it, and scandalized academic philosophy by pointing not only to the undeniable existence of a Will to believe as a psychical fact, but also to the logical possibilities of drawing conclusions by its aid. He encountered a storm of obloquy and misrepresentation—in itself a sufficient proof that the intellectualist theory of belief was far from being the pure product of dispassionate reason it claimed to be; but intellectualism has had to keep to the defensive ever since.

For it is now clear that there *is* a voluntarist alternative, which accounts with ease for many facts which had previously to be hushed up or condemned. It still stands in need, however, of a simple and comprehensive statement of its psychological and logical advantages. Such a statement should begin by pointing out that all belief is a more or less volitional affair, simply because it is an *act* of our total personality, and because a reason that is pure, a desire that is blind, and a will that

is mere, are all fictitious abstractions. They explain nothing, because how and why a man reasons, and what he desires, wills, and believes, always depend on the man he is, and nothing connected with him can be *presumed** to be irrelevant to the conclusions he arrives at.

In other words, the Will to believe is an indubitable fact. So equally is the will to disbelieve, the will to doubt, the will to suspend belief, the will to play with beliefs; for the same reason in each case. We all assume these attitudes towards the various objects of belief which we encounter, and which of them we believe and which we disbelieve, etc., is characteristic of our personality. All these attitudes, moreover, are common, and play important parts in determining our systems of belief; they all have drawbacks and advantages, and it should be the function of psychology to recognize and consider both. Psychology indisputably has the duty of marshalling the relevant data before ethics passes judgment on the value of any part of our equipment, and the will to believe is not to be condemned until we have learnt what it does, and can do, for good or evil. Only so shall

* This is not, of course, to deny that in a context and for a purpose some of his interests may be mutually irrelevant. For example, the connexion between a man's tastes in metaphysics and in wines might be hard to trace, and the attempts to show that innovators in science or philosophy must be revolutionaries in politics have not been very successful.

we discover, *e.g.*, whether the will to believe or the will to disbelieve is more of an aid or of an obstacle to the will to know; only so will the final status of both depend, not on the prejudices with which we begin by regarding them, but on the value of their services.

It does not follow, of course, that our beliefs are *wholly* volitional and that we can believe what we will by sheer force of will; still less that we can change our beliefs instantaneously and at will. Sometimes, indeed, one meets with persons who appear to be able to believe what they please; but when these cases are inquired into it usually appears that the art of doing so with complete assurance of rightness is mastered only by a few, and only as the fruit of severe discipline, an elaborate *technique*, and much practice. Of the ordinary man it seems truer to say, with Professor Ward,* that he 'may wish to believe; he cannot, strictly speaking, will to believe,' adding only that the wish may in due course become father to the thought, if one wills systematically to entertain the desired belief and the considerations favouring it, while repressing thoughts that would impede it. If, therefore, it is to be maintained that in the last resort all our beliefs imply a volitional factor, they must be traced further back. They are all aids (or obstacles) to living. They must be conceived in their biological setting as vital reactions and

* *Psychological Principles*, p. 355.

means of adjustment to the conditions of life. We must say, for example, that we have eyes and see colours, and cannot but see them as we do, because we did not choose to live like moles or cave-fish. So, conceiving them, we may say that all our beliefs were chosen once, and preferred to alternatives which (rightly or wrongly) were rejected; their present involuntariness is a secondary consequence, and only means that once committed to a habit of reaction we cannot change it on the whim of the moment.

On the other hand, the doctrine that our beliefs are wholly forced upon us by an external necessity is wholly false, and not quite honest. It often suits us, in persuading others, to pretend that we are 'necessitated to believe' and 'cannot help thinking,' when we are desirous that *they* should believe as we do. Such phrases are meant to impress and coerce others, and to save their *amour propre* by representing all parties as yielding to the irresistible force of reason. But they do not describe our own feelings. The truths to which we are conveyed by an unimpeded flow of thought involve no feeling of necessity. A train of thought follows its natural course, until it is arrested by some obstacle; at every point it seems natural and proper and evidently true. But when its inherent impetus has dashed it against an obstruction, it feels thwarted; it *must* have its way, and so there arises a 'necessity of thought' which will hardly yield

even to an impossibility of fact. But it would be a mistake on this account to regard the secondary necessity so generated as the essential feature of our thought, and to define truth as 'what we are *constrained* to think.'

This association of necessity with truth is, however, a slur on truth and a slander on the human mind. It represents truth as essentially *repulsive* and the mind as essentially *reluctant* to receive it. Truth, instead of being something which the mind naturally prefers and welcomes, is made into something which it will acknowledge only under compulsion. Thus the witness of the mind to truth, like the testimony of the ancient slave, is allowed to have value only when it has been extracted under torture. But to conceive the mind as naturally disposed to welcome truth, and its operations as naturally conducting thereto, is surely the better alternative.

Moreover, this atrocious claim to coerce us by necessities of thought cannot really be sustained. Such necessities can never constrain us unless we will, or unless we secretly *need* them. They are the greatest bogies in the whole logical bag of tricks. In the first place, absolute necessity does not exist, involving as it does an implicit contradiction. For to become 'absolute' a necessity must emancipate itself from dependence on all conditions; but were it to succeed it would become just fact, and its 'necessity' would dis-

appear. Ordinary 'logical' necessity, therefore, always involves dependence, and remains conditional upon the premisses from which it is deduced. Now these may always be questioned, and if they are successfully contested, the 'necessity' of the conclusions drawn from them vanishes. If they are to be established, they must be derived from premisses not yet questioned. Yet these again may be questioned in their turn. So the game of 'proving' principles can go on merrily, until their champions are exhausted and want to stop. They must then do one of two things: either they must claim that the principles at which they stop are 'self-evident' and need no proof; or they are driven to admit that in reality principles are not proved *a priori*, by derivation from ever higher principles, at all, but only empirically by the value of the consequences to which they lead. In the former case the claim to 'necessity' drops at once, for 'self-evidence' is an appeal to psychical fact, and there is no coercing one who does not see or feel the self-evidence; if he doesn't, he doesn't, and that is all. In the latter case a new criterion ('value') is admitted, which admits of more and less, positive and negative, and can never be 'absolute,' because beyond the greatest value known a greater can always be conceived. Moreover, the logical method of verification by consequences can never lead to absolute proof. The necessity which attends systematic coherence is

only a special case of logical necessity: the angles of a triangle must equal two right-angles if we have adopted the Euclidean definitions about space; if we prefer those of Riemann or of Lobachevsky, it will follow no less glibly that they must be greater or less than two right-angles. Thus the 'logical' necessity of a scientific system does not differ in kind from that resulting from the rules of a game; a 'checkmate' is just as 'necessary' as any truth of arithmetic.

About psychological necessity it seems sufficient to say that although the feeling of necessitation is common enough, and often *feels* quite 'absolute' —*i.e.*, unconditional—its logical status is always open to question. The feeling in itself cannot be regarded as valid. It is primarily a psychic fact about the person who feels it, and its value varies indefinitely in different cases; nor is it found to be most trustworthy in those (lunatics and ladies) in whom it is most easily aroused and whose 'intuitions' are most plentiful and clearest.

We arrive, then, at the conclusion that the Will to believe cannot be argued out of existence. It is an all-pervasive psychic fact in all minds, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, whether they resist it or abandon themselves to it, whether its operations are beneficial or not, whether its activity is openly avowed or disguised and 'rationalized.' The theoretic inference from this state of affairs is that psychologies and theories of

knowledge which close their eyes to the existence of a will to believe, etc., must be scrapped. The practical inference is that we must make the best of this, as of our other habits and endowments, which are capable of use and misuse, accepting its aid where we can, exploiting its advantages, guarding ourselves as far as we can against its risks, and discounting its illusions.

No other attitude towards the volitional presuppositions of belief is either sensible or practicable. For the wholesale condemnation of the will to believe and all its works, simply as such, was really foolish and unreasonable. A moment's reflection shows that the fact that a conclusion seems to us desirable is *not* a reason for thinking it untrue, though it is a reason for suspecting that it may be unproved. It is primarily a reason for trying to prove it, and the more desirable it is, the more pertinaciously should we try. It is a reason also, no doubt, for being cautious and critical of the reasons we accept for its truth. But the fact that we may deceive ourselves is no reason for despairing of guarding ourselves.

Similarly, the fact that a conclusion is unpalatable is not only a motive but also a reason for avoiding it if we can. It challenges our ingenuity to disprove it. In either case, the forces inclining us in the direction we desire stimulate us to activity, to experimentation, to discovery, and are so far good. It is, of course, desirable that they should

be aided and steadied by a keen *will to know*—that is, a will to believe only 'truths' which have been tested and can be trusted, which will predict correctly the course of events, and by a will to learn from experience; but in most matters—religions and philosophies form partial exceptions—the long-continued lessons of experience have hammered sufficient docility into us. It is well, therefore, to remind ourselves that the primary requirement in every cognitive situation is an effort and activity on our part, and that fears can dupe as well as hopes, and 'nothing venture nothing have.' Risks of self-deception by hopes and fears, of error, of failure, must be run in every enterprise. As William James pointed out from the first in his carefully-guarded plea for the *right* to believe which he based on the existence of the *will* to believe, we cannot avoid risk by shrinking from action and doing nothing.* We thereby take the risk of missing a valuable truth.

Since then we take risks whatever the attitude we assume, and since a policy of passively awaiting the course of events is the least likely, effective, and expeditious way of acquiring knowledge, how are

* *Cf. Will to Believe*, especially pp. 19, 21, 26-31. The fact that his critics, one and all, ignored his reservations and restrictions is not, of course, a proof that James did not make them, but merely an (involuntary) illustration of the power of prejudice to blind itself to what it does not wish to see, and so really a confirmation of James's contention.

we to direct and utilize our various active tendencies so as to produce the best results? Clearly, they should be so disposed as both to support and to control each other. We should cultivate a will to believe, but should correlate it with the will to know. And this means that we should cultivate *also* critical sobriety, a readiness to hope for the best and also a fear of credulity, a willingness to test beliefs by action and also a capacity to suspend belief where action is not urgent and more evidence seems attainable, vagrant curiosity and also intense concentration on the essential point; we should exhibit loyalty towards our well-tried ancient truths, but also open-mindedness towards new discoveries; we should deliberate well before acting, but not too long; and, once we have decided, we should act resolutely and without hesitation, even though we remain aware that we are acting only on a balance of probabilities, or perhaps on an off-chance that promises salvation. In the abstract these requirements seem incompatible enough; but in practice, though they may conflict, they are not irreconcilable. Their reconciliation will in general be most successfully achieved by those who combine zeal for knowledge with extensive experience of actual knowing, and are broad-minded enough not to expect psychological impossibilities from the human intellect.

Chapter X — *Belief and Action*

IT is generally recognized that beliefs tend to express themselves in action, and that men's acts are affected by their beliefs. Hence it becomes possible to use action as a test of the force and genuineness of a belief. A belief that is not strong enough to affect action can hardly be more than a half-belief. A belief that is professed but not acted on is, very likely, spurious. The test which action provides of the genuineness of a belief appears to be so valuable that in the case of a discrepancy between what a man says and what he does we usually regard his acts as more significant than his professions of belief. For the latter are often false, intentionally or unintentionally, and as it is harder to act a lie than to utter one, when his acts give the lie to his 'beliefs,' it is legitimate to question the sincerity of the beliefs. Observing this, some writers have supposed that in the action following upon the belief they had secured a complete criterion for distinguishing a genuine from a spurious belief. Alexander Bain, for example, holding (rightly enough) that 'belief is essentially related to action,' inferred that willingness to act

upon what was affirmed was 'the sole, the genuine, the unmistakable criterion of belief.'*

Unfortunately, this is an exaggeration. The complexities of human nature are not probed so easily. Bain's advice to watch a man's acts when his professions of belief are suspect, and we think he is either deceiving himself or trying to deceive us, is excellent so far as it goes. It supplies an easily applicable test of the sincerity and genuineness of a belief, and one, moreover, which yields trustworthy results in a great number of cases. But before we apply it, we must have satisfied ourselves that our case is not one of quite a number of exceptions, in which no correspondence between belief and action can properly be expected.

We must also make quite clear what may be expected of a 'criterion.' Philosophers are apt to conceive a criterion as an absolute, universal, foolproof, and infallible means of discriminating truth from falsity, and, of course, have never found one. Such an absolute criterion is equally unknown to science, which regards it as an *ignis fatuus*. The criteria in scientific use are none of them infallible, and all of them relative to definite problems and stages of knowing. Their function is, not to jump to an absolute truth, inerrant and incapable of further improvement, but progressively to reduce the likelihood and dimensions of error.

* *Cf. The Emotions and the Will*, 3rd ed., 1875, pp. 505-538.

Scientific criteria have *value*, but do not pretend to *validity*.

If, therefore, we insist, as logicians often do, that nothing shall be called a 'criterion' that falls short of an absolute guarantee of inerrancy, it must be confessed that no criterion of truth is known or can be conceived. At any rate, the testing of beliefs by action is no such absolute criterion. It is a valuable test, which throws much light upon the nature of beliefs, but it manifestly fails to apply directly to a number of cases which it is imperative to consider.

(1) It is obvious, for example, that lying is not confined to words. Our acts can lie and mislead as cleverly as our words. They can be intended to deceive, and may succeed. Persons whose acts do not correspond with their real beliefs, and are meant to deceive us about the latter, are called 'hypocrites.' They flourish in all ages and in all societies; for it is never safe to wear one's heart upon one's sleeve, and social conventions force a certain measure of hypocrisy upon us all. Consequently, a discrepancy between a man's words and his deeds admits of alternative interpretations. When he says one thing and does the opposite, he may, no doubt, let out in his act what he believes at heart; but he may also blurt out what he really believes while continuing to conform his behaviour to the customs of his fellows. Hence it is sometimes the word, and sometimes the deed, that

reveals his real nature. Nor is it impossible that neither should do so. He may not inwardly believe either in what he says or in what he does. He may be in doubt both as to the truth of the beliefs he professes and as to the wisdom of the life he is leading. Clearly, a crude application of the test of action will not cope with the subtleties of such a situation.

(2) Acts, like words, need not be intended seriously. A joke may be enacted as well as uttered. And to profess beliefs they do not hold, to express emotions they do not feel, to enact situations which are not real and may be foreign to their nature, is the business of those who belong to 'the Profession' *par excellence*. Neither from the words nor from the acts of actors can we safely infer their actual feelings and beliefs; the better they can 'act,' the more various will be the parts they can play and the more complete the illusion they can produce. It may be true that most actors are bad; but, on the other hand, we can all act a little and play a part upon occasion. It has often been contended that to play a part an actor must to some extent feel the part, and imagine himself as the character he is depicting; but though make-believe may often generate half-belief (or more), there seems to be no psychological necessity why it should not remain fully conscious. A Rachel appears to have felt nothing of the tragic passions she acted so superbly, and a Bottomley nothing of

the patriotism and piety he expressed so plausibly, and exploited so profitably. As his intimate and biographer, Mr. R. P. Houston, O.B.E., declares,* when he was at last laid low by his Victory Bond frauds, he told the jury: '"You have got to find that Horatio Bottomley, the editor of *John Bull*, Member of Parliament, the man who spoke throughout the War with the sole object of inspiring the troops, keeping up the *morale* of the country, went out to the Front to do his best to cheer the lads—you have got to find that that man intended to steal the money. God forbid! I wish you could realize what the last three years have been to me. It is a marvel I am standing here. I tell you there are times," he continued, bursting into tears, "in the silent hours of the night, when I think of all I have endeavoured to do to wipe out my sordid past, to justify the confidence of the fighting men, moments when the trouble has been overwhelming." All that was Horatio Bottomley the actor trying his best to fool the law with emotional eloquence. He did it so well that he harrowed himself; and it was a genuine surprise to him when the hard facts of the case triumphed over the arts of the "spell binder." When that failed all was lost. Horatio Bottomley became a gaolbird, because his deeds spoke louder than his words.'

This case shows that actors can deceive and be

* *The Real Horatio Bottomley*, p. 148.

'hypocrites' in intention as well as in etymology; but this is not normally their aim. Their function is not to deceive but to amuse, and acting is essentially a form of play, and not a serious form of deception. If, and in so far as, it produces an illusion, it is one which the victims crave for and assent to, and so they do not resent the deception.

(3) Self-deception, on the other hand, is a much more serious affair, and, indeed, an essential requisite of human life. For the ordinary man could hardly carry on, could he not delude himself into the belief that, in some ways at least, he was more than ordinary. A certain amount of self-deception, therefore, is universal and salutary; but many carry it to incredible heights. Now it is obvious that our self-deception may concern our beliefs; we may persuade ourselves that we 'really believe' the beliefs we do not (or do) act on, and honestly mean the acts we perform to be representative of our inner feelings. The depths of hypocrisy cease to be conscious of their own depravity, and a combination of hypocrisy and self-deception can scarcely be fathomed by the test of action.

(4) The discrepancies between professed beliefs and actions which arise from the prevalence of half-belief, insincerity, inconsistency, muddle-headedness, confusion of thought, and selfishness, abound in such infinite variety that they can receive only summary mention. But it is easy to see that half-

beliefs may not be strong enough to determine action, or may not be strong enough at all times, or that two contrary half-beliefs may take it in turns to guide (or misguide) action, which will then appear inconsistent, whimsical, and incalculable. Again, in the confused thought of the muddle-headed there need be no rational connexion between their beliefs and their acts, because there is none between their premisses and their conclusions. It is worth noting, also, that highly-developed selfishness appears to produce a peculiar form of inconsequence. There are those who profess the loftiest principles and display the noblest sentiments and the correctest judgment in considering the acts of others. But the moment their own interests are affected, all their principles and morals appear to evaporate and to be forgotten. They act with ruthless 'selfishness,' and that apparently with a good conscience and no sense of incongruity. The intellectual explanation of such cases appears to be that (often quite unconsciously) they draw a very sharp line between themselves and others, and that it never occurs to them that a situation affecting *their* interests could possibly be treated as morally on a par with one that only concerns others. So they may surprise us by combining leniency towards delinquents in general with implacability towards an offender against themselves.

(5) Aside from these extreme cases there is,

moreover, a vast amount of apparent discrepancy between (professed) beliefs and (overt) acts produced by lack of understanding. It is only to a very limited extent that we can either see ourselves as others see us, or enter into the feelings of others and understand their thoughts. Could we do this better, many of the discrepancies which shock us would disappear. We should see that the act which offended the spectator by its incongruity with the agent's (supposed) character and principles was really, from his own standpoint, the most natural thing in the world. Only his previous acts and professions had not succeeded in conveying to others, in a manner comprehensible to them, what he really was, and what he really meant. So his act seemed incongruous, because they had not understood him. Conversely, many an agent would not have acted as he did, if he had been able to anticipate the reactions his act would provoke in others. Such discrepancies, therefore, must be regarded as apparent only.

(6) We should beware of concluding from the facts that beliefs do not always determine action, that half-beliefs are often impotent, and that conflicting beliefs lead to inconsistent action, that no action can ensue. This would merely show that we were still under the spell of the intellectualist illusion that an intellectual process is the necessary presupposition of every act, and completely inverts

the order of nature. Throughout nature action is the primary fact, and reflection appears as a secondary, subsequent, and special development. Only a few living beings are capable of it, whereas all are constructed to act, and to react without thinking. Even man starts life fully equipped with *impulses* adequate to incite him to perform all the essential life-preserving actions, and with *habits* sufficient to regulate the ordinary *routine* of his behaviour. Even man conducts by far the greater part of his life without reflection, and *thinks* only when he must. Now he needs to think only in emergencies, when guidance by habit and impulse has broken down. He needs his 'reason,' he employs the great mass of his 'brains,' only in a special situation, in which it 'pays' to 'stop to think,' because by so doing it is possible to innovate and improve upon habitual action, and to modify his traditional reaction in a salutary and superior manner. Thus man's 'rationality' is not an original endowment, but an achievement and an acquisition, and (perhaps) the presage of a greater efflorescence in the future.

Consequently, it should not surprise us that the rational control of human action should as yet be inchoate and decidedly precarious. It can be diminished and broken down by disease. It disappears in delirium or insanity. It is overpowered by passions (rage, greed, hate, lust, envy, etc.). It may be baffled by mere laziness. It succumbs

to temptations of every sort and kind. We are so accustomed to these facts, and so ready to take them as normal, that we hardly trouble to ask what they mean and how, theoretically, they can be at all.

If we did, we should speedily discover that their theoretic explanation has baffled moralists from the beginning. Socrates started in by assuming that it was impossible to 'sin against knowledge,' and all Greek ethics were forced, reluctantly, to the conclusion that in ultimate analysis Socrates was right. Real 'incontinence' (ἀκρασία), fully conscious of wrong-doing while doing it, could not occur. Moralists ever since have oscillated between the futile explanation which ascribed 'incontinence' to 'weakness of will' and the puerile policy of closing their eyes to its existence, without the Greek excuse.

They could make no headway in explaining 'unreasonable action,' because they had not perceived that they had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. They had assumed that reasonable action was normal and moral personality original, and needed no explaining. Also that the soul was one and harmonious, and acted as a unit. Had they realized what a great and difficult achievement was the starting-point they had glibly assumed, they would have been more willing to appreciate the vital value of moral personality, and would have had no trouble with the theory of 'incontinence.'

For once we question the assumption that the psychic structure of the organism must be conceived as a completely consolidated whole, congenitally consecrated to unitary and harmonious functioning, we can see that the very opposite of this assumption is far more probable and practicable. If the biological function of intelligence is to adapt animal action to the stimulations of the environment, it is evident that the simplest, easiest, and most original developments of mind will take the form of more or less regular and stereotyped responses to frequently recurrent and vitally important stimuli. The animal must learn to run from its foe and to rush at its prey, to be startled by the abnormal and to enjoy the normal, to live in the present and to eat, drink, and breed, regardless of the future. Now the psychic organization befitting this sort of life will be a mind composed of a series of impulses, each of them engrossing the mind while it lasts. And this is precisely the state of mind indicated by the behaviour of the higher animals and of the lower and more childish members of the human race. It is only when life has somehow grown more complicated that it becomes imperative to think ahead, to take long views, to abstain from present indulgence from fear of future consequences, to amass riches, to take thought for a morrow that is calculable, and generally to work upon a coherent plan of life. This is what it really means to 'live

according to reason.' It means the inhibition of impulsive action, the rational, reflective control of impulse, when guidance by impulse has become too rash, undiscriminating, and dangerous. It also means that the intelligence acquires the power of criticizing and undermining old habits, of devising salutary innovations and changes.

It is clear that if such are the respective parts of impulse and reason in the conduct of life, there is no difficulty in perceiving their several advantages, nor any special mystery about unreasonable action. Impulsive action has the advantage of greater promptitude, and in a crisis this may be all-important. Nor is impulse always wrong when it conflicts with reason. The man who ruins his health by overwork at the behest of his (mistaken) reason would have done better to yield to his craving for a holiday. Nevertheless, guidance by impulse is on the whole inferior. It is less coherent, far-seeing, and adaptable. Its adaptations to particular situations or problems are rougher and less accurate. It sees life as a series of episodes, not steadily and as a whole, and meets its crises by a disjointed succession of spasmodic efforts. The philosophers who vaunted 'reason' erred not in preferring it, but in misconceiving it as an original datum, and not as an (incomplete) achievement.

It is the incompleteness of the achievement that accounts for unreasonable action. For the birth of

reason does not mean the destruction of impulse and the abolition of habit. Nor does the inferiority of impulse and habit instantaneously entail their loss of strength. They remain potent forces that continue to control by far the greater part of conduct. It is only in cases where their inadequacy is too flagrant that reason can effectively intervene. But even there it is no wonder that it often fails to stop unreasonable action. For the inertia of habit, the momentum of *routine*, are hard to overcome, even when reflection has inhibited the rush of impulse. Reason alone and unaided could hardly prevail; but there grows up in us a desire to act 'reasonably.' Nevertheless, it is common and natural enough for the traditional way of reaction to be continued, though it is condemned as unreasonable.

It should be noted that this psychological explanation of unreasonable action is not confined to moral conflicts and failures to control the 'passions.' It applies no less to the preference for traditional beliefs, and to the obstacles which our nature opposes to the intellectual reception of new and better truths. They, too, are more easily assimilated in theory than in practice. So we may think we have radically broken with old habits of thought and systems of belief, while they still continue to determine our conduct. New truth always requires time and sustained effort to take root, and to outgrow the old prejudices that cumber

the ground; if we relax our vigilance, we flop back into our old habits of belief.

Here, then, we get an important case of discrepancy between belief and action. Our belief may be a real and genuine belief, and yet not strong enough to overthrow an ingrained habit of action. So we cannot safely argue in this case that because the belief is not acted on, it is not genuine. In practice the case will create no perplexity, for a little inquiry will usually ascertain whether the case is that of a hypocrite who feigns belief, or of a sinner who believes, sins, and repents.

(7) Theoretically, however, the recognition of genuine incontinence and fully conscious wrong-doing involves an important implication. A soul in this condition cannot be a harmonious whole. It must be divided against itself, and not at one with itself but at war.

We need not hesitate to accept this consequence. Modern psychology has accumulated overwhelming evidence of the intense reality of mental conflicts in hysteria, psychasthenia, and numerous neuroses and 'dissociations' of personality; it would be absurd to sacrifice this mass of good observations to a mere metaphysical prejudice about the unity of the soul. It is for the metaphysicians to accommodate their conceptions of soul to the facts; and if, instead of rehearsing ancient formulas, they would devote a little original reflection to the matter, it should not prove too difficult.

For psychologists and moralists, on the other hand, these cases should present no difficulty at all. They are plainly continuous with ordinary and normal cases of continence, incontinence, and distraction by temptation. Thus from the normal man who likes his wine, to the man to whom drink is a temptation, to the man who yields to it upon occasion, to the habitual drunkard, to James's dipsomaniac who chopped off his hand just to get a drink of rum,* there extends an unbroken development, of which every stage may be abundantly illustrated by examples. At the one end of the series there is normal mentality, at the other indisputable abnormality. But if we dub the latter 'dissociation,' we must also confess that whosoever distinguishes between his 'higher' and a 'lower' self, and feels a moral conflict, is 'dissociated' likewise.

We should add, however, that the term 'dissociation' is unfortunate. It implies that the soul which is now distracted and divided was united once, and has *lost* its original unity. But we have seen reason to doubt whether this is the normal case. Historically speaking, the soul's unity, such as it is, appears to arise out of a conflation, co-ordination, and subordination of what were once separate impulses; its unity and harmony therefore is an ideal not yet fully attained, rather than an original gift which has been foolishly squandered.

* *Principles of Psychology* ii., p. 543.

However this may be, it stands to reason that these more or less 'morbid' cases of dissociation will exhibit even less congruity between beliefs and acts than is shown in the milder dissociations implied in moral conflicts.

(8) One more difficulty remains before we can use the test of action. What is to be done about beliefs which we cannot test, because we can do nothing that will form a practical test of their truth, or which seem to be intrinsically such as to have no practical consequences at all? Yet such beliefs certainly seem to exist. If some one comes and tells me he believes the moon is made of green cheese, I shall no doubt suspect him of joking; but if he insists that he is serious, and I am not able to contest his sanity, what can I do that will decisively confute his belief? I can, of course, challenge him to say what reasons he has for believing such a manifest absurdity, and refuse to believe it myself; but if he pleads an 'intuition,' or a mystical vision, or a revelation in a marvellously vivid dream, shall I not be driven to acknowledge that there are unshareable experiences, upon which beliefs may be based, which elude all testing by the acts of others? My lunatic, of course, could test the value of his 'intuition' (or whatever it was) by acting upon the assumption of its truth, if he could bethink himself of any act deducible from his belief; and if he were self-critical, he might modify his belief in accordance with the

consequences of his action. But this implies that some action *can* be taken by some one, and does not solve the difficulty about beliefs in virtue of which *no* action at all can be taken. Yet, as has already been remarked, they appear to exist in considerable numbers. Is the world infinite in space? And in time? Is there a totality of reality? Does life exist on the planets of other suns? Is there an atmosphere in the cavities of the moon's interior? Who was the Man in the Iron Mask or Kaspar Hauser, or, in general, what is the truth about any past event of which the history is lost or in dispute? All these are questions we can do nothing to answer, at all events at present; yet many persons profess beliefs about them, and even seem to hold them strongly.

Perhaps it may be suggested that, in spite of appearances, such beliefs (except when they are disputed by others and so rendered debatable) must sink into half-beliefs; for the inability to do anything to affirm and exercise a belief must have a debilitating effect upon it. And with a further suggestion that questions of this sort would seem to be proper subjects for suspense of belief, we may perhaps dismiss them.

There remains the case of beliefs which profess to have no practical consequences at all, by which they could be tested. They claim to concern 'purely theoretic' truths, which make no practical difference to any one or anything, and so can

neither be acted on, nor in any way tested by action. This way of conceiving the relation between belief and action is that which follows from the position assigned to pure theory by a complete intellectualism. It breaks down the connexion between belief and action altogether. Any (theoretic) belief may accompany any action, while action may avail itself of any device, absurdity, or fiction that comes handy, without demanding any intellectual status or theoretic belief for its 'practical makeshifts.' As no logical inference holds any longer from belief to action, or *vice versa*, and as the normal test of the meaning and value of a belief is abrogated, the logical consequences become highly anomalous. Both actions and beliefs become irresponsible, and upset all calculations. Action picks up its 'practical makeshift' regardless of truth or probability. Beliefs, having repudiated the duty of guiding action, run riot. However futile, fantastic, and pernicious they may be, they can now be held with impunity. For though they might be fatal *if acted on*, yet since they are *not* acted on, they can persist and flourish, and their holders with them. Truth not only becomes independent of value, but even antithetical to it.

Naturally, this amazing claim arouses suspicion. Do such beliefs really exist? Are they really as devoid of practical value and practical consequences as they profess to be? May not their 'purely

theoretic' character be deceptive *camouflage*, in order surreptitiously to gain positions that could not be won by open argument? Let us see.

We must begin by admitting that beliefs which disclaim any verifiable consequences appear to be held. In most subjects they are rare, though not unheard of. In theology, transubstantiation perhaps amounts to such a belief—if we venture to pooh-pooh the copious stories of miracles wrought by the transubstantiated sacrament. In science, the 'Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction,' to account for the Michelson-Morley experiment, was an excellent case in point; for *ex hypothesi* no empirical evidence of its existence could ever be obtained: fortunately, it was soon superseded by the alternative explanation provided by Einstein's theory of Relativity. It is only in philosophy that beliefs of the sort we are investigating are abundant—so much so, indeed, that many philosophies appear to be made up entirely of dogmas which are wholly insusceptible of any practical test. We may instance and examine a few.

(1) Kant's Categorical Imperative claims to be the supreme Law of Duty, the sum and substance of morality. But, practically, it is null and void. It has no content. Nothing is deducible from it. If we try to deduce practical consequences from it, we find that heroic virtue and atrocious wickedness are equally deducible. But in either case the deduction is fallacious. For we can judge right

whatever we please, without hindrance from the Categorical Imperative's stipulation that our judgment shall be capable of being 'universalized.' Whatever action is taken in any case can be universalized with perfect impunity. For in its complete uniqueness it *never* recurs; so we can formally affirm that what we did was right, and should be done in all cases, knowing full well that there will never be another such case. The truth, then, is that the Categorical Imperative is impotent to guide action in any way. It shouts, '*Do your Duty!*' but refuses to tell us what our duty is, or how we may distinguish right from wrong. Is there a queerer aberration, even in philosophy, than this way of enforcing respect for the moral law? It is only when we go into its historical antecedents, and the motives of its maker, that we discover why such an impotent monstrosity was ever desired and devised. Moralists had laboured fruitlessly for ages to formulate a moral law which should be fool-proof and applicable to *all* cases, but had succeeded only in compiling systems of casuistry which were compendia of putrid immorality. So it struck Kant as a bright idea to conceive a Moral Law which simply abstracted from application altogether. Then it could never be corrupted, nor could any case, however hard, upset it. It could never be convicted of failure to work, because it could never be required to work at all. Nay, it could glory in its uselessness, and conceive it as

the proof of its immaculate purity. So the Categorical Imperative was made inapplicable, to conceal a collapse of moral theory.*

(2) The conception of absolute truth in logic is worthy of ranking with the Categorical Imperative in ethics. It is to the full as incapable of application. That is to say, it cannot be used to distinguish truth from error. Nor can it be exemplified. Of *no* truth can it legitimately be asserted that it holds absolutely—*i.e.*, irrespectively of the conditions under which it was generated. Every known truth, nay, every knowable truth, that could conceivably enter a human head, is relative. It is relative to the problem to which it propounds a solution, to the knowledge it takes for granted, to the principles from which it starts, to the assumptions which it presupposes, to the hypotheses on which it proceeds, to the premisses from which it argues, to the intelligence to which it appeals, in short, to the general cognitive situation of the time in which it flourishes. The doctrine of absolute truth airily disregards all these conditions, though failure to satisfy any one of them may suffice to disestablish any 'truth.' It has no practical relation, therefore, to the problems of actual knowing.

* Kant himself never grew fully conscious of what he was doing. He makes perfunctory attempts to show that the concrete duties usually recognized may, in fact, be derived from his Categorical Imperative. But the results are grotesque, and the deductions are invariably fallacious.

If, to complete its discomfiture, we scrutinize the genesis of the belief in absolute truth, we find that it owes its being to one arbitrary and one false assumption, and a fallacious deduction. The arbitrary assumption is that absolute truth must be assumed, because absoluteness is implied in the meaning of truth. The false assumption is that it alone can account for the truths that are current. And the fallacious deduction is that the current truths, seeing that they are *not* absolute, must 'approximate to the ideal' of absolute truth. But, seeing that in genesis, function, and meaning they are wholly different from absolute truth, surely the right inference is that they can have no logical connexion with it. The belief in absolute truth, then, remains something of a psychological mystery.

(3) In philosophies, however, which somehow attach value to this belief, it is often connected with, or at any rate followed by, another excellent example of an inapplicable belief, that in the distinction of knowledge and opinion. This asserts that knowledge is infallible, and that opinion alone can err. But unfortunately this tells us nothing. The doctrine is quite inapplicable, because none of its votaries can say when a belief is 'knowledge,' and when it is 'opinion.' And even if the distinction between knowledge and opinion could be drawn in practice, it would not be cogent: for it has no answer to the retort that it is itself a matter of opinion, and both fallible and false.

(4) As a last example we may consider the deifying of the universe, or equating of the totality of reality with 'God.' To some philosophers this pantheistic doctrine appears self-evident, to others it seems a most important truth; but it is not easy to see why. How does it make the world any better to call it 'God'? How does it improve anything in it to conceive it as part of God? No doubt it seems to make its defects less assailable by throwing the Divine protection over them; but at the cost of making God a being that tolerates, or enjoys, its badness. And unless we (illegitimately) suppose ourselves to know all about God already, apart from his manifestations in the world, it merely makes God the sort of being that expresses itself in the world such as it is. And whether we call it God or not, the world and all things in it remain just what they were. Nothing happens to anything in consequence of the truth of pantheism; it makes no difference to anything or anybody. Once more the belief seems to lead to nothing, and the value attaching to it seems a mystery.

Now pragmatic logic has a short way with such mysteries. It simply declares that assertions which carry no consequences, distinctions which make no difference, 'truths' which cannot be applied, truth-claims which cannot be tested, are all *unmeaning*. If, therefore, it is true that these beliefs have no applications, and make no difference either to those who believe them or to any one else, they are simply

meaningless, and it is folly to puzzle any longer over such nonsense.

But, perhaps, this judgment is unduly harsh. It is, no doubt, true that, owing to the prevalence of intellectual dishonesty and confusion of thought, there are current many beliefs which are really unmeaning; they seem to have a meaning at first sight, but it disappears, or transforms itself into something else, when it is questioned. In view, however, of the acumen shown by many of the advocates of these inapplicable beliefs, it does not seem very probable that they really meant nothing at all. It is more probable, and quite possible, that they did not mean what they said, and had reasons of their own for not saying what they meant. If so, the beliefs in question will not really be unmeaning and inapplicable, and may even be of great practical importance. This alternative suggestion yields a valuable clue for their analysis.

If we follow it up, we soon arrive at positive results. All the philosophic doctrines under discussion have plenty of meaning, though it is not expressed in so many words. They all entail practical consequences, and conduce to practical attitudes, though they may not be altogether desirable consequences and attitudes.

Thus (1) the Categorical Imperative, as has already been hinted, meant (logically) an attempt of the moralists to escape from casuistry, even at the cost of renouncing the duty of giving practical

guidance. And that obviously is a result of great practical value, for a professor of ethics desirous of leading a quiet life. For Kant and his followers it also meant, psychologically, a variety of other things which need not be specified. Among its practical consequences may be mentioned an exhilarating, though conveniently vague, attitude of moral enthusiasm, and a refusal to be troubled by the sordid details of moral problems. That these consequences were illogical, unwarranted, and due to a failure to perceive the real drift of the Categorical Imperative, did not render them psychologically ineffective.

(2) Much the same is true of the beliefs in absolute truth and the infallibility of knowledge. Both mean, very definitely, a dislike (however emotional and unreasonable) of the conception of an ever-changing and growing truth, even more than a failure to apprehend the logical objections to the absolutist notion of truth, and a failure to understand the meaning of pragmatism. Both are meant to justify disparagement of our actual truths as 'practical makeshifts'; both entail as a consequence contempt and indifference towards the processes of scientific knowing, because they do not claim to be infallible nor to attain to absolute truth, even when they do not carry their implied depreciation of human truth to its logical culmination in total scepticism.

(3) The meaning of the pantheistic conception

of the universe is the appropriation of the valuable term 'God,' with its wealth of emotional associations. Its capture, and transfer to their camp, is a highly desirable object for philosophers who, until then, were open to a charge of 'atheism.' To escape from this charge, by the simple device of changing the meaning of 'God,' is a great and indisputable gain. Moreover, if 'God' = the universe, not only does a certain type of sentiment, common among philosophers, secure immunity from attack and acquire a superior status and a theological halo, but it also satisfies its secret craving. It craves for 'unity,' and apparently for nothing else, raising no question about the quality of the unity, and the value of the union, it desiderates. It would be indiscreet to inquire whether in addition there is not also often a subtle gratification of personal vanity in thinking oneself a part of 'God'; but if this audacity occurs as a psychological fact, it is intelligible that it should shrink from too outspoken expression. Similarly we need not enter into the question whether the whole argument is logically as legitimate as it claims to be. For even if it can neither be taken for granted nor proved that 'the universe' exists—*i.e.*, that that portion of 'phenomena' (in the widest sense and inclusive of all appearances and illusions) which we dignify with the honorific title of 'reality' will in fact conform its behaviour to our notions of a 'totality'—the title of 'God' can be bestowed upon whatever

any one is willing to worship as divine. It is just this attitude of adoration which practically follows from the appellation 'God.' Which is why the human race has worshipped so many, and such queer, gods, and why Professor Alexander can attribute 'deity' to any not yet intelligible novelty that 'emerges' from the matrix of 'Space-Time.' The unity of the universe, therefore, can be called 'God' too, if it suits us. To call it 'God' only means that we wish to worship it, or wish others to do so. But we can only call it 'God,' if we can attribute value, real or imaginary, to the process. This value is the practical meaning of the belief, and the deification of the universe, therefore, is neither an unmeaning nor a practically void belief.

After this laborious examination of the exceptions to the rule that action tests belief, we may permit ourselves to realize what a very severe test of belief action is. It is far more searching than creeds, oaths, and the most solemn affirmations. Any one can rehearse a creed, but few have the strength of conviction to act upon it steadfastly through life. The tale of the Scotchman who was ready to take his oath, his dying oath, to the truth of his assertions, but shrank from betting 'saxpence,' is hardly an exaggeration. Willingness to act not only reveals the genuineness or otherwise of our beliefs to others, but also to ourselves. It makes deadly havoc of the half-beliefs which we

have played with, and cherished, and supposed ourselves to hold with full conviction.

I may illustrate this observation by an experience of my own, which will be more illuminating than lengthy argument. When the *Occult Review* was started in 1905, I was asked by the editor to contribute an article to the first number. I felt a little shy, but finally decided that it might be a good opportunity to point out to the believers in the occult the essential difficulty of their position, and how it might be overcome. The public they were trying to convince was composed of ordinary people, who would not believe in what had no direct practical value, and of academic personages, who would not believe in any subject that could not support a professor. Now it was a fact that if occultist beliefs were true, many of them *were* capable of direct application to human life and of profitable exploitation. Much money could, for example, be made out of a thoroughly trustworthy working system of telepathic thought-reading. I exhorted the occultists, therefore, to aim at developing methods by which their disputed knowledge could be applied on a commercial scale. Having thereby made much money, they should use some of it to endow professors of the occult sciences, who would then proceed to prove to the other professors that that was possible which was actually in successful operation.

This little bombshell, which was nothing at

bottom but a proposal to subject the belief in the occult to the pragmatic test of truth, I called *A Commercial View of Occultism*, and awaited the reaction. As I had expected, there followed protests trouncing me for my coarse and sordid way of approaching the delicacies of spiritual truth. The most precious among them came from a gentleman of considerable attainments, who assured me that, though my logic was hopelessly wrong, I was right in thinking that occult knowledge might be put to practical use. For he himself was an astrologer, who had devised such important improvements in the ancient methods of this science that he could now, if given the exact date of a man's birth, calculate astrologically to within a year, in nine cases out of ten, when that man was doomed to die. It struck him that his discoveries might be utilized, and fruitfully applied to the life-insurance business, and when he went into it, sure enough, he found that capital invested in the purchase of selected life policies would yield a return of 150 per cent. *per annum*. Nevertheless, when he went into the City and tried to form a small syndicate among his friends to work his invention, would I believe it, he could not get the money subscribed! Whence he inferred it was necessary to prove an invention theoretically first, before trying to put it to commercial use.*

* The facts here appear to be against my astrologer. Water-finding by the divining rod *is* practised on a com-

I replied that 150 per cent. *per annum* was a fine return on capital, and that I thought I could help him. Let him send me, say a dozen, astrological predictions, to come true within the next year. If they did, I thought I could get him a certificate from the Council of the Society for Psychical Research attesting the fact. On the strength of this, he would easily get the money subscribed. I should myself be willing to invest all my spare cash. My astrologer, however, would not accept this suggestion. He sent me instead a long narrative of successful predictions he had made in the past, and when I pointed out to him that this was not what was needed, I heard from him no more.

Now the analysis of this case is very instructive. My astrological friend was evidently not aware that his belief in astrology, and in his own discoveries therein, fell short of full conviction. Yet his action showed that it did. For it is clear that if he had fully believed in the reality of his discoveries, he would have been willing to risk *his own* capital, and to make the 150 per cent. himself. As it was, he believed enough in astrology to face the ridicule of scoffers, to spend much time upon it, to write books about it (which were probably not remunerative), and to be willing that *his friends* should risk

mercial scale, though no one professes to understand its theory. It is, however, the only branch of the 'occult' which at present can be said to stand the pragmatic test.

their money; but he did not believe quite enough in it to put up his own!*

In conclusion, then, we may lay it down that any discrepancy between belief and action warrants suspicion and demands investigation. It is not the sign of a normal and healthy state of affairs. It may, as has been shown, arise in a variety of ways; but *prima facie* it casts a doubt upon the genuineness of the belief. If a man's professed beliefs are not supported by his acts, he should always be required to explain himself. And he will be lucky if he escapes a slur either on his morals or on his intellect.

* The case is instructive also in another way. It makes a good test of the difference between the apriorists and the empirically minded. If one asks a number of people whether, if the predictions had actually and indisputably come true in adequate quantities, they would have taken shares in the astrological syndicate, in spite of their having no theory of how the fact was possible, one finds that some will say *yes* and others *no*. The former are natural empiricists, the latter have an apriorist bias, and abstractly it cannot be decided which is right.

WE are now approaching the culminating crux of our inquiry. We have to weave together a number of diverse threads of argument into a texture that will display the whole significance of belief in a final panorama. The propositions, by combining which we may hope to reach our final conclusion, are—(1) the essential and indestructible connexion between belief and action, as described in the last chapter, (2) the effect of belief on survival, (3) the connexion between belief and truth-value, and between truth-value and survival-value, (4) a claim, which seems to emerge on behalf of survival-value, that it is the most ultimate form of value, and the ultimate determinant of all belief and action.

There would seem, moreover, to be two series of connexions to be correlated. On the one hand, belief leads to action, and action to survival (or destruction). Belief, therefore, is a factor in survival. On the other hand, belief claims truth, and is acceptance of a truth-claim; truth is a form of value, and truth-value is related to survival-value. Belief, therefore, is logically connected with survival-value. Now that the two series are connected it is plain; for beliefs can exist only in minds, and share their fortunes. So it would seem that they

must flourish, or perish, with the minds that harbour them.

Consequently, there are two ways of extirpating a belief. It may be attacked directly in the mind that entertains it, or indirectly through the body through which mind finds expression. Hence we may either persuade all minds who entertained it to abandon it, or we may kill or otherwise persecute those who will not abandon the obnoxious belief. Historically the latter method has usually been held to be the most congenial, expeditious, and effective way of changing beliefs, and the notion of persecuting beliefs, or rather of persecuting people on account of the beliefs they hold, or are suspected of holding, still commends itself to the great mass of mankind. Even religious persecution, against which there is a widespread prejudice, is by no means extinct, while persecution of unpopular or unorthodox views in politics, economics, morals, philosophy, etc., flourishes more or less everywhere, even though it rarely rises to the height of homicide, except in politics. Majorities, however, habitually oppress minorities, partly because they like the exercise of power, partly because they believe in force rather than in reason. That nonconformity of belief survives at all must be set down to the fatuity of the force, and the feebleness of the reason, employed to repress it. But fortunately for human freedom and progress the spectacle of persecution is so far from attractive that it repels, and acts upon many minds as the most powerful

propaganda for the persecuted belief. So, though its believers may continue to be killed, they become 'martyrs,' whose blood testifies, and makes proselytes on behalf of the belief for which they suffered, while the belief itself is not killed, but spreads into other minds, survives, and may even finally triumph. The stock example of this impotence of persecution is afforded by the failure of the Roman Empire to suppress the Christian religion; but the latter's history will illustrate also that persecution need not always fail—else had not Protestantism been extirpated in many Catholic countries, and Christianity itself in Japan. So it is not safe to lay down a general rule about the efficacy of persecution. Spectacular persecution often fails; so if it is desired to persecute opinions, it had better be done covertly. But whatever form persecution takes, its price has always to be paid, in social bitterness and friction, and in obstruction to rational discussion, freedom to research, and improvement of beliefs.

It would seem, then, that the remark that beliefs flourish and perish with their believers has to be qualified. The case of religious persecution shows that a belief may survive, even though it proves fatal to those who hold it, because it can migrate from mind to mind, as an infectious disease can pass from body to body. Indeed, beliefs must normally have other means of propagating themselves in addition to preserving their believers; the mortality of man would be fatal to their survival, if

they could not continually seize upon fresh minds. Thus they become, in a sense, independent of the individual mind that entertains them; the question of their survival becomes distinguishable from that of their believers. They can be conceived as competing with each other for believers, and as having intrinsic survival-value, which can be considered apart from the survival-value they display by preserving their believers. But to do justice to this dual survival-value of beliefs, we must next inquire more closely into the notion of *survival-value*.

As it is a fact (the significance of which will be considered later) that existence is generally desired while extinction is feared, the continued existence of anything is conceived as a *value;* it may be called survival-value. As, moreover, the term 'value' is ambiguous, and is habitually used both for the generic attribute resulting from a valuation-process, and (specifically) for the two sorts of result at which a valuation may arrive—viz., approval and disapproval—it will follow that, like the other values, survival-value will occur in two forms, *positive* and *negative*. Positive survival-value will be attributed to whatever tends to preserve or promote the existence of a thing; negative survival-value to whatever tends to extinguish or destroy it. It is clear, further, that not only persons and things, but also beliefs and ideas, may have survival-value, positive or negative, in a higher or lower degree. They may have, that is

to say, more or less power to persist and to preserve themselves. They may also have beneficial or detrimental influence on the survival of those who entertain them, and, as we have seen, these two aspects are to some extent distinguishable, even though in the last resort beliefs cannot exist *in vacuo*, and always must inhabit minds.

It will be best to consider first the connexion between belief and survival-value in the latter case, because there it is more direct and obvious. Here the middle term that mediates between belief and survival is, of course, action. A belief that is acted on conduces to our weal or woe. If it is salutary and invigorating, it increases our prospects of success in life. Thus belief in oneself, in one's competence, in one's power to attain one's ends, very often verifies itself. *Possunt quia posse videntur.* We deserve success by commanding success. On the other hand, the doubts and fears of diffidence are often fatal to success. A depressing belief, say some form of pessimism, by lowering our vitality and inhibiting our energy, may become a factor in the failure of every undertaking. Thus, in their higher degrees of survival-value, beliefs may save or kill: the optimist, who will never say die, may extricate himself from the most desperate straits; the pessimist, who throws up the sponge and allows himself to dwell on the horrors of all the possibilities, may be frightened into suicide.

Before proceeding further we have, however,

to meet the objections based on the existence of beliefs that are not acted on, and so seem incapable of developing survival-value. We discussed their nature somewhat fully in the last chapter, and our discussion should now stand us in good stead. At first sight it seems evident that a belief that is not acted on cannot claim survival-value. However salutary it may be, it will not save, however pernicious, it will not hurt, a man who does not act on it. As well expect a man to be saved by a remedy, or to be killed by a poison, that he does not take. All this, no doubt, is true; but it does not put the test of survival-value out of action. For, even though a belief may not be acted on, it may yet be strong enough to inhibit action upon a more noxious belief, and in the conflicts of belief from which men suffer this may be of great importance. For example, though men do not appear to act according to the precepts of the religions they profess, there is no saying how much worse their action might not be if they discarded their religions altogether. Moreover, to say that the particular belief which is not acted on cannot determine survival, is not to show that *other* beliefs cannot both move to action and determine survival, even though they may be disavowed. For action must go on, and the refusal or incapacity to act on a belief does not *ipso facto* suspend or paralyse it; only, of course, action has to proceed upon some other principle. For example, the man who forgets his temperance

principles and breaks his pledge, is not merely exemplying the impotence of his principles; he is simultaneously acting on his intimate conviction of the irresistible pleasantness of drink, and, against his better judgment, bearing witness to its negative survival-value.

The same explanation applies also to the case of the alleged 'purely theoretic' beliefs, which cannot be acted on at all. On their own showing, if *they* disclaim the control of action, they simply leave it to *other* beliefs, viz., to the 'practical make-shifts' which they foolishly despise, to determine action. Again, if, as we objected, they are strictly meaningless, they can hardly count as beliefs at all, and it stands to reason that they cannot be expected to determine action; while if, as we found reason to suspect, they are not really meaningless, and, though expressed in unmeaning propositions, are really covert ways of expressing *other* meanings, it is clear that they are not so devoid of practical consequences as they pretended, and may very well test the survival-value of the concealed beliefs they really intend. If lastly, as we suggested, the proper attitude in some of these cases is suspense of belief, must we not admit that the refusal to take action upon the suspended belief is itself a form of action? If I refuse to take a share in a dubious gamble, because I cannot make up my mind that it is legitimate, I lose, no doubt, a chance of gain; but I also ensure that I shall incur no loss, and if

enough others follow my example, I may bring about the failure of the scheme. Thus, whether we act, or abstain from acting, on some theory, and whatever theory we act on, consciously or unconsciously, life is ever testing our attitude towards life; our attitude has survival-value, positive or negative; it selects or eliminates us.

Moreover, a belief which has positive survival-value for its believers, tends to have it also for itself. If they act on it, they increase and multiply. Hence the belief also grows more common and more dominant, and the thought presents itself that the beliefs which are generally accepted as true may be merely the beliefs which have commended themselves to the types of mind which have been successful in surviving. This important suggestion, which has far-reaching consequences on the conception of truth and the theory of knowledge, though it has not been altogether overlooked, deserves far more study than it has yet received.

For the method of propagating beliefs by the natural selection of those who hold them has *prima facie no* claim whatever to be called rational. It implies no real reason for the belief, no real guarantee that it is *intellectually* true; for example, the fact that the Roman Catholics everywhere have a higher rate of increase than the adherents of other beliefs, while it indicates that the Roman Church has perceived the possibilities of this *biological*

method of establishing its truth and reconquering the world, hardly seems an *argument* for the truth of Catholicism.

Hence the biological truth resulting from survival-value, of which the existence is thus implied, threatens to render untenable the very notion of intellectual truth as an independent and ultimate conception. At any rate, the method by which a biologically valuable truth commends itself to possible believers differs very markedly from the ordinary procedure of rational conviction, as it is usually represented. It presupposes nothing but a sort of congeniality or attractiveness which the belief has for its believers, by dint of which it insinuates itself into the mind. Once firmly lodged therein, it allies itself with a variety of emotions, and puts on an infinite variety of rational disguises, which deceive the innocent and often the very elect. Its attractiveness appears as a 'reason' for its 'truth,' its sophistications as 'cogent'; its difficulties are overlooked, postponed, or ignored, its incoherencies pass unobserved, its absurdities, when others call attention to them, are dismissed with angry scorn.

Tactics of this kind are extremely effective. They are so effective that they are extensively used in the defence of beliefs of all sorts, even of the most rational. For even these are tempted to rely on their authority and attractiveness rather than on rational argument. The scientific man does not usually argue with the scientific heretic;

he merely calls him a crank, and says that his views are unscientific and unsound, and that it is kindest to say no more about them. Very similar treatment is meted out to philosophic issues, whatever their theoretic merits, which arouse strong emotional repulsions. Thus the question of solipsism is never seriously argued; solipsism is used merely as a term of abuse, and figures only as a *reductio ad absurdum*. The reason is that the rejection of solipsism is universal; no one, however thoroughgoing in his idealism, is willing to believe that he alone is truly real, and all the rest are but the fleeting shadows of his dreams. And it is true that the arguments to which solipsism owes its plausibility are probably unsound; but, like the arguments which lead to idealism and to its logical culmination in solipsism, the objections to solipsism are philosophic, disputable, and in part abstruse and fallacious. They are not such that any one can appreciate their force; so they cannot account for the unanimity with which we all reject solipsism. The real reason for our rejection is something much simpler. We are all much too social to *wish* to be solipsists; we believe in the reality of others, because it is a belief congenial with our nature. So only the philosopher in his most paradoxical moments contemplates the possibility of solipsism; every one else contemptuously rejects it as repulsive and absurd.

Still more clearly is the superior potency of the appeal to bias illustrated by the controversy between

optimism and pessimism. This seems at first sight a scientific, and purely theoretic, question. That is, it should conceivably be possible to determine scientifically whether life is worth living—*i.e.*, whether its value, as measured by *whatever* standard of value is adopted, is positive or negative, and in what degree. And if a mind could be found capable of contemplating existence, its own included, with perfect calmness and impartiality, without congenital bias, passion or *parti pris*, and without lapsing into indifference, no doubt the verdict of such a mind upon the question should carry weight, however vehemently it were rejected by the sort of mind we actually possess. Actually, however, no living mind can stand outside life to contemplate it thus; so rational discussion of the value of life is rarely attempted. When the question arises, the arguments on both sides are usually appeals to congenital bias and emotional preference, and their effect is merely to confirm beliefs already cherished, without carrying conviction to those who are steeled against them by the opposite bias. Rationally the controversy seems as insoluble as it is interminable.

But is it not rather a clash of temperaments? Are not men *born* pessimists and optimists; and usually the latter? Do not the same events elicit different valuations from their opposed temperaments, and thereupon figure indifferently as 'proofs' of their antagonistic interpretations of

life? Here at least the suspicion grows irresistible that the real grounds of belief are not rational, and that the 'reasons' professed on both sides are merely *camouflage* to hide them. We are optimists or pessimists, not because the facts of life force either interpretation on us with rational necessity, but because we are congenitally disposed to be optimists or pessimists, and can always force the facts into conformity with the interpretation congenial with ourselves. Nothing so good can happen to some favourite of fortune, but it will fill some anxious pessimist with forebodings of impending evils, and urge some Amasis to warn his friend Polykrates against the envy of the gods; nothing so bad, but optimistic faith will imagine some retribution, compensation, or reward that will transmute it into a signal exemplification of Divine justice and mercy.

The suspicion, moreover, that the grounds of belief are not really rational must be faced, not only in this flagrant case of optimism and pessimism, but in the end in all. It may well be that the logical reasons given for a belief are *always* secondary and illusory creations of our will-to-believe, while the real reasons are always psychological in the first instance, and ultimately biological, and reducible to the survival-value of the belief. We may have to agree with Mr. H. G. Wells that the human mind is 'essentially a food-seeking system, and no more necessarily a truth-

finding apparatus than the snout of a pig.'* If so, the truth-value of a belief—*i.e.*, the fact that it appears to us true—will be merely an index to its survival-value. A belief that is universally regarded as 'true,' will be one we cannot live *without;* a 'false' belief will be one we cannot live *with;* a disputed belief will be one whose survival-value is variable or uncertain.

This suggestion, however, which will have to be fully explored in the next chapter, is at first sight open to a serious objection, which arises from the undeniable existence of beliefs with negative survival-value; for if such a belief eliminates those who act upon it, will it not eliminate those who incline to regard it as credible, and so must it not in the end disappear itself? It becomes a problem therefore how pernicious beliefs, that have negative survival-value, can survive themselves.

'They survive by being true,' cry some, 'and simply because they are true!' This answer is simple-minded rather than simple, as will appear when we examine the complex relations of truth to survival-value; but it will have to be considered carefully in the next chapter. Meantime let us point out some alternative possibilities.

(1) Undoubtedly the safest way of entertaining and preserving pernicious beliefs is by abstaining from acting on them. If they can really be left matters of 'pure theory,' they will do no harm,

* In J. H. Robinson's *The Mind in the Making*, p. 9.

however fatal they might otherwise be, and they will survive, however absurd would be the consequences of acting on them, and however certainly the test of action would eliminate them. Now such cases appear to be quite common. Most of the atrocious nonsense current in the world of beliefs may be thus accounted for. It clearly applies also to the impracticable 'counsels of perfection' which are so characteristic of many 'moral ideals.' For example, if the celibacy which is preached by so many religions were really acted on, and allowed to extinguish those who practised what they preached, it would evidently eliminate both the celibates and the belief in celibacy. The latter survives, because 'theoretic' advocates of celibacy do not practise it. It may, of course, be contended that, just because they do not practise it, they do not really believe it. And it is doubtless true that the belief rarely grows strong enough to withstand any severe strain of temptation; it is one of the beliefs which are peculiarly subject to 'incontinence' (*cf.* p. 128 *ff.*). Still, there are, no doubt, some who believe it fully, and act on it; with the absurd result that they eliminate themselves, and promote the recruiting of the human race from those who are not to be lured into such self-frustrating action. Of the rest, some, no doubt, have a half-belief in celibacy; in others it is a dishonest belief which they profess, and recommend to others, but have no intention of practising themselves. In some such way many 'theoretic'

beliefs of great absurdity and perniciousness may contrive to maintain themselves, at all events on paper.

(2) The elimination, like the formation, of a belief is a process that takes time. It may take a long time in a number of cases—*e.g.*, if the perniciousness is not very intense, or not immediately fatal, like a slow poison. Or, again, the pernicious belief may be of great antiquity and deeply ingrained, or intrinsically attractive and capable of easily regenerating itself out of the conditions of life. For example, the beliefs that alcohol is a food, and that pleasure is the one thing worth living for, are not likely to die out rapidly, even though voluptuaries are continually coming to grief, and drunkards drinking themselves to death. Well-meaning but unintelligent social interference, moreover, is probably retarding the natural self-elimination of these pernicious beliefs, by protecting those prone to them against themselves, and so preventing the growth of natural immunity. It is clear, then, that the world may still be full of pernicious beliefs whose elimination is not yet completed.

(3) But however slow the process of elimination, this condition of things would plainly be impossible if the perniciousness, or otherwise, of a belief were fixed and unchanging. This, however, is not the case—it varies with the conditions of life. A belief which has now grown pernicious, such as that a 'quiverful' of children is a man's best security, may have had positive survival-value formerly, and

as the change may have been too recent for human nature to have adapted itself to the new conditions, the old values may still prevail in minds that are slow to change. Thus a love of hunting and fishing was once a valuable asset, and a belief in its value, by making men do with zest and conviction what was essential to their livelihood, had positive survival-value; now, however, that men no longer get their living mainly by hunting and fishing, it has lost the survival-value it had. Indeed, it has become a drawback, and is a considerable source of expense, if it is indulged in. But as the drawback is usually not serious, and as a certain number can afford to gratify their passion for the chase, this survival of primitive mentality will probably persist.

(4) A belief may be pernicious or salutary, according to the circumstances of each case in which action is required. As proverbial wisdom recognizes, there are times when second thoughts are best and others when he who hesitates is lost, occasions when it is best to grasp the nettle firmly and when discretion is the better part of valour. Here the choice of the right belief for the occasion must of necessity be left to the judgment of the agent; yet in the abstract the right belief and the wrong belief may seem equally salutary, and even in the actual case the choice may be extremely difficult. It may none the less be momentous and decisive of our weal or woe, and may make all the difference to our survival. Such choices, more-

over, are exceedingly common. In ordinary business transactions they are perpetually occurring, and making the difference between gain and loss, fortune and ruin. To a statesman they present themselves in the form of alternative policies, with, say, decisions as to war or peace. To the human race in general they are involved in its attitude towards its impulses and habits. For example, it is a question whether on the whole the belief in war and the love of fighting have been salutary or pernicious. On the one hand, it is not easy to conceive how human development could have proceeded without them; yet it is plain that they must normally have brought destruction upon the losing party to the fray, and not infrequently upon the victor as well. On the whole we may perhaps regard as zero the variable survival-value of beliefs whose application depends on the circumstances: for on the average they will be salutary as often as pernicious. If so, however, it follows that they will maintain themselves; there is no longer any reason why natural selection should eliminate them. Or, if they are worsted in competition with beliefs whose survival-value is more definitely positive, they will, at any rate, wane very slowly.

(5) A similar fate is the most that can be predicted for beliefs whose survival-value, though ordinarily negative, is upon occasion positive. The occasions may be frequent and important enough to keep the belief in being. This may partially explain the survival of pessimistic beliefs. For

though it can hardly be disputed that normally their value is negative, yet there are occasions when fears are better counsellors than hopes, and when the course of events confirms the prescience of the prophets of evil. Consequently, 'bears' as well as 'bulls' may flourish on the Stock Exchange, and the dwellers in Fools' Paradises, who persuade themselves of whatever they wish to believe and will not believe unpleasant truths, do not always prosper. Hence an appreciable minority of pessimistic temperaments may continue to be found among the children of men.

(6) Especially if, as seems empirically to be the case, there exists a natural connexion between the pessimistic temperament and other qualities which frequently have positive survival-value. It appears to be naturally allied to caution, thoughtfulness, and self-criticism, and to presuppose a higher degree of mental development than the shallow optimism of the unreflecting masses. So not only are well-marked streaks of pessimism found in all the more capacious and comprehensive minds, but the adequacy of an optimism may be gauged by the depth of the pessimisms it has encountered, assimilated, and transcended.

(7) This suggestion implies, of course, that the pessimistic bias has a basis in reality and is in some respects better adapted to the nature of life. Pushing this a little further, we may finally suggest that a main reason for the survival of pessimism is to be found in the hydra-headed character of evil.

For while it is true that the evils and disharmonies of life are continually being overcome and abolished, or fitted into a tolerable scheme, or accepted as normal and inevitable, so that they cease to affront the faith of optimism, it is also true that in this process evil is continually regenerating itself. New dissonances arise, which shock the human soul afresh and generate and justify a new outburst of pessimism. Thus, though the actual grounds of pessimism may change, the pessimistic reaction upon the nature of experience may persist. At first sight this suggestion may seem to amount to an admission that pessimism is true, and so to the doctrine of which we decided to postpone the discussion, that truth is independent of survival-value; but it should be noted that nothing is claimed for pessimism that could not be claimed to an equal or greater extent for optimism. It, too, is supported by the nature of things, and obtains a response from reality to its demands. In neither case, however, does the 'truth' thus obtained conform to the rationalist ideal: it is conceived in biological terms and ultimately means nothing but survival-value.

It would appear, then, that in a considerable variety of ways pernicious beliefs with negative survival-value can remain in being, to an extent quite sufficient to render unsafe the inference from the general currency of a belief to its goodness and truth.

Chapter XII *Truth and Survival-Value*

THAT truth is one of the values is beginning to be recognized. This is indicated, not only by the fact that men normally desire truth and judge it to be good and desirable (at least if it interests them), whereas they avoid and condemn its counterpart 'error,' but also by the way they use the attributions 'true' and 'false' as terms of approbation and disapprobation, that is, as positive and negative values, and treat all the values as interchangeable, and transferable, by a more or less conscious metaphor, from one department of valuation to another. This is why they do not scruple to call arguments 'good' and 'beautiful,' and art and friends 'true.' Nor is there any great difficulty in determining what sort of value 'truth' claims; it is easy to perceive that 'truth' is the positive value properly aimed at in the cognitive operations of the mind, and 'falsity' or 'error' the negative value which too commonly results therefrom. Finally, it will readily be admitted that if truth is a kind of the genus 'value,' it must be conceived as comparable, in principle, with the other values.

So soon, however, as we try to determine more precisely how the various kinds of value are related

inter se complications begin. If they are interchangeable on what principle (if any) are their interchanges regulated? At what rate are they interchangeable, and how is the par of exchange, at which values of one kind are convertible into those of another, arrived at? Are all the values equal, and is each supreme in its own department? If so, what happens when they conflict on common ground, which may be valued variously? Or are some values intrinsically higher than others and capable of disciplining and subordinating them? Is there a supreme value? If so, is it Goodness, Truth, or Beauty? Or, perchance, Pleasure or Life? And if men differ about this, how are disputes to be decided? Fully granting that Truth, Goodness, and Beauty are akin as values, and valuable in their own right, have we not still to ask how much of each is worth how much of the other? In a case of conflict or incompatibility, how much truth may be sacrificed to how much goodness, say, or how much goodness to how much beauty? And what about questions in which all the values are involved on both sides, though in different degrees? How much superiority in beauty and goodness will make up for how great a defect in truth? More precisely, in comparing two rival theories, may we believe, and ought we to prefer, the more beautiful and attractive but less probable, or the more probable but less attractive?

It is plain that such questions may grow infinitely

complicated and extremely subtle and searching, and may impinge on every fibre of our being. It will not do to adopt a merely intransigent attitude towards them, and to pin our whole faith on a single value. We cannot put our trust in goodness and consign truth to perdition, or adore beauty without regard to goodness.

It is equally vain to answer that the non-cognitive attractiveness of a doctrine, resting on its ethical or æsthetical merits, should not be allowed to count at all. It always *does* count in determining our beliefs, and usually counts too much and to a greater extent than we ourselves realize. For the non-cognitive grounds of belief insinuate themselves into the mind in all sorts of subtle disguises, ally themselves with its most reputable impulses, and finally permeate it so completely that they can no longer be disentangled from what we take to be the purely cognitive grounds of belief. Even (and perhaps *especially!*) among philosophers the 'rationality' of a theory, when honestly examined, is found to consist largely in the appeal it makes to their taste, their sense of fitness and harmony, and in its consonance with their convictions about the non-cognitive values.

Thus the 'elegance' and 'simplicity,' which dispose us to accept a theory, involve æsthetic motives which would hardly commend themselves to a mind sufficiently capacious and competent to revel in ruggedness and infinite complexity, while

the 'principle of parcimony' is plainly a magniloquent appeal to human convenience and indolence. To appeal to 'usefulness' or 'fruitfulness' as a criterion of truths is covertly to claim that human ends (or 'goods') are entitled to lord it over the realm of truth. The claim to *a priori* knowledge has the secret aim of emancipating us from dependence on experience, and giving us a consoling assurance that the course of events will never disappoint our expectations. The more we probe into the actual use to which philosophic principles are put, and study the psychological idiosyncrasies of their advocates, the clearer it becomes that their 'rationality' is always an (ethical) value-judgment, relative and reducible to their consonance with the aims and purposes of their makers.

Nor is the infusion of non-cognitive motives confined to matters of method. The popularity or otherwise of many philosophic doctrines is quite clearly traceable to non-cognitive motives, and they are neither discussed nor judged on their merely cognitive merits. For example, it is hardly conceivable that the claims of hedonism should ever find an unbiassed hearing. Its advocates will always be predisposed to it by a high appreciation of pleasure-value, and will often be committed to it also by their manner of life; while the anti-hedonists will be those who are either dominated, like Plato, by an ascetic fear of their own propen-

sities, or are unwilling to listen to argument because they are so impressed by the moral turpitude of the doctrine it supports. Similarly, the case for scepticism is never judged in a coldly intellectual way; it always encounters warm reprobation of the supposed subversive consequences of so 'dangerous' a doctrine. The favourite objection which rationalism urges against pragmatism is that it is so 'vulgar'; and Nietzsche also was fond of recommending his 'master-morality' by an appeal to human snobbishness. We saw in the last chapter (p. 159) that the really insuperable objection to solipsism consisted in the loneliness to which it doomed its votaries, and that what rendered pessimism incredible to the majority of men was its depressing character and negative survival-value.

It is, moreover, futile to urge that, though non-cognitive value-judgments are in common use and actually go far to determine our estimates of credibility and truth, yet they ought not to do so, if in point of fact no one can be found who can be pronounced wholly free from bias and emotional prejudice. The more so that, after all, the attempt to make the truth-value of a doctrine the *sole* criterion of its credibility seems in the end to refute itself. It disputes the value of guidance by emotion, and yet in the end itself relies upon it. For if truth is cognitive *value*, is it not still in ultimate analysis valued in an emotional attitude?

Does not the believer in truth-value *desire* truth, as others desire goodness or beauty? He simply puts it above all other values, and refuses to take them into account, because they are not able to stir him to such ecstasies as 'truth.' He is willing to sacrifice all the other values to his passion for truth. But is he necessarily right? It is not self-evident that the single passion for truth must be the sole legitimate determinant of belief. Why should we not follow the guidance rather of our passion for justice, or of our love for beauty, in the selection of our beliefs?

The claim, then, of our ideal of cognitive value absolutely and autocratically to determine our whole equipment of beliefs must, it seems, be given up. What actually determines our beliefs is never mere truth-value. What claims to be truth-value is never really pure, but always adulterated with infiltrations and infusions from the other values. Even if it could be got pure, it would only be one value competing with others, and we should have a right, and, indeed, a duty, to choose between them. We must therefore consent to a compromise. We must allow that it is possible, legitimate, and, in point of fact, universal, for mixtures of values, variously compounded of truth, beauty, goodness, and even of pleasure, to determine our systems of belief. A system of beliefs, as actually propounded to us, will embody much truth, some goodness, and a tinge of beauty,

or, alternatively, ideal justice, great beauty, and a little truth. Yet in each case the system as a whole claims 'truth' (and, incidentally, goodness and beauty as well!), and thereby adds a further, and *not purely cognitive* sense to the ambiguities of this much-enduring word. It is plain that systems of belief so compounded, and all *prima facie* claiming truth, may exist in unlimited numbers. In point of fact there are many current. Men choose among them according to their temperaments and tastes, when they are not compelled to profess allegiance to some established creed; and find them all about equally satisfactory.

How, then, shall we reduce this plurality to unity, discard the false pretences, and extract *the* Truth? Amid the seething turmoil of opinions, the clash of competing beliefs, and the contentions of their advocates, the triumph of Truth can hardly be expected, unless we allow experiments to try out values, and also time to bring them to fruition and to enable men to be instructed by their outcome. Then in the end, a very distant end as things appear at present, all may perhaps agree upon a mixture of values which all who survive will welcome as 'the truth.' Only thus can we conceive the achievement of any real uniformity of belief, if we are not pluralists enough to admit that the truth for one man may differ from the truth for another, without entailing any negation of truth, because each man's standpoint, from

which he views the truth, and the organs with which he apprehends it, are of necessity his own.

It should, however, be observed that the policy of recognizing the plurality of beliefs at once brings upon the scene a new principle of evaluation. If systems of beliefs are all compounded of various values in various proportions, and attract various persons in various degrees, and wax or wane according as they cater more or less successfully for the demands men make upon their systems of belief, it becomes clear that they, too, are subject to natural selection. And is not this to say that the supreme value, the value which in the end embraces and subordinates all others, is survival-value? What else can regulate the conflicting claims of our sciences, our arts, our religions, our ethics, our metaphysics? They are all alike systems of beliefs which have arisen in our minds from their dealings with reality, and as they all influence our actions more or less, they imply ways of living of which the progress of life is continually testing the value. Thus they are all in ultimate analysis instruments of survival. The only value which they *must* possess, and in the last resort *do* possess, is survival-value. If they have not this, they lose their value, they perish and pass away; if they have it, all the other values will be added to them in our eyes. So they persist, however strange or absurd they may have seemed at first from any alien point of view. We come to think

them beautiful and good and true. We had better be quick to do so; for if we refuse, we are wiped out. Does not this simple and straightforward doctrine dispose in principle of all the varieties and conflicts of beliefs, and yield us our criterion of truth?

Perhaps; but before we can declare the doctrine satisfactory we shall have to deal with protests from several quarters. The most pretentious, but least effective, of these will come from the rationalists. They will protest against the indignity of reducing truth to survival-value, and descant on the supreme value of Truth. Truth survives, they will declare, in virtue of its own majesty; because it is *true*, not because it has survival-value.

In reply to this protest, which can be backed, of course, by copious rhetoric, it will suffice to point out two things. In the first place, recent discussion should by now have made it quite clear that rationalism, in all its forms, is constitutionally incapable of assigning any meaning to 'truth,' such that it can either be attained by us, or be distinguished from error. If it tries to conceive truth as correspondence with reality, its conception evaporates, because it is impossible to give any applicable meaning to the 'correspondence.' If it tries to conceive truth as 'coherence,' and indulges in irrelevant dreams of an absolute coherence inaccessible (by definition) to human minds, it amounts to complete scepticism as

regards human knowledge. Moreover, it lapses into self-contradiction and incoherence, because it fails to observe that the selective process by which human systems are rendered coherent is directly *reversed* by the 'absolute' system, which has *ex officio* to include everything, and may not select; thus the two conceptions of 'coherence' are diametrically opposed, while the human 'truths,' from which it tries to ascend to its 'ideal' of 'absolute' truth, are repudiated as false in this very process, and cannot therefore yield valid premisses for its conclusion. If it tries to rest truth on intuitions of self-evidence, it finds that it cannot distinguish 'rational' intuitions from irrational, true from false. Being thus unable to assign any real meaning to truth, it is manifestly not in a position to deny that truth may be survival-value.

Secondly, even if it could give a meaning to truth, that would not help it. For even if truth meant one thing and survival another, this would give no clue to the nature of the process whereby truth emancipates itself from survival-value, and manages to survive. It would still seem undeniable that if a truth were so pernicious as to kill all who believed it, there would presently be no one left to believe it a 'truth,' while if an 'error' became essential to survival, it would presently win universal recognition as a 'truth.' Until, then, rationalism deigns to consider how

truth may, in fact and in practice and not merely in verbal definition, be distinguished from error, and how it contrives to lead an independent existence, its protest must be dismissed.

The protest of pessimism against the attempt to make survival the ultimate criterion of value is more formidable, and more fertile in consequences. The pessimist can forcibly and justly point out that it involves an assumption which is not valid from his point of view, and to which he cannot assent. To make conduciveness to life the ultimate standard of value presupposes that life itself is indisputably good and valuable. If this assumption is false, the criterion fails to work. Now actually its truth is in dispute. For his part he denies the goodness of life and the value of existence. He holds that its value is negative, and that not-being is preferable to being. Hence, for him, the system of evaluation which rests upon survival-value is not true, and arguments from survival-value carry no conviction. They are not rational argument, but brutal appeals to the blind instinct of the will to live, and nauseating glorifications of a success which in the end is always an illusion.

Now what reply can be made to this protest? Evidently some of its contentions will have to be admitted. It must be admitted that all argument from survival-value does presuppose that life has positive value; as also that, however effective, the

argument from survival-value is not rational. And how effective precisely is it? For even on this point the pessimist may join issue. No doubt, *if* all belief in pessimism had become extinct, owing to the elimination of all pessimists, pessimism would no longer seem a credible belief, and the scheme of values based on survival would reign supreme, with no one to dispute it; but, then, this is not the actual situation. It may be that pessimism, being a pernicious belief detrimental to survival, is destined to extinction; but this is prophecy, not fact. Nor need the prospect daunt the pessimist. He may justly reply that the elimination prophesied may or may not come about; meanwhile it is a fact that he and his views are *not* extinct, and have somehow or other managed to survive. So, by the very test of survival, he, too, may claim a hearing and a *raison d'être*. He may even suggest that just because he survives there must be some truth in pessimism, something in the nature of reality that supports him and his view.

But even if the optimist's optimistic prophecy should come true, and pessimists should go to join the dodos and the dinosaurs, would that be any reason for declaring pessimism false? No, for throughout the process of his extinction no pessimist would encounter anything that could induce in him rational conviction of the erroneousness of his beliefs. It would simply seem to him

that truth was practically useless and hopelessly deficient in survival-value, and the more it was argued that the very constitution of things rendered it impossible for his beliefs to maintain themselves in being, the more fiendish would he think it. It would seem to him the final revelation of the world's worthlessness, the supreme illustration of life's irrationality, the strongest confirmation of his condemnation of existence, to find that the world was so constructed that the truth about it could not be recognized. He would go down to the House of Hades therefore (like the rest) fortified in his beliefs and comforted by the conviction that, though he perished, so did truth. And if his pessimism were really complete, he might add that, personally, he did not regret this incompatibility between truth and existence, and that it did not shake him in his preference for the former. For though he quite realized that by clinging to the truth he was renouncing existence, yet as the existence he was sacrificing was essentially worthless, he was well out of it, and better off than those who had, vainly, tied themselves to the Ixion-wheel of Life. It is clear, then, that logically the pessimist need not accept the standard of survival-value.

Nor does he stand alone. The logical impropriety of trying by the test of survival-value a doctrine which repudiates this test occurs also in other cases. If the survival meant has reference

to this world, it occurs in all doctrines whose appeal is ultimately to another world. It is no use proving against such doctrines that they are less adapted to this world and less conducive to prosperity therein; they have the simple retort that the value put upon such prosperity is negligible in comparison with the soul's eternal salvation hereafter, and that the worldly standards used are inadequate or wrong. This issue not infrequently comes up in discussions about the relative merits of Protestantism and Catholicism. The Protestant is prone to argue that, from a social point of view, his is the better religion, because Protestant countries are more progressive and prosperous; whereupon the Catholic, if he understands his position, will repudiate his opponent's standard of value in the aforesaid manner. It is clear, therefore, that, unless both parties to a dispute accept the same standard, no decision can be reached.

And this would appear to be the case here. Truth cannot be reduced to survival-value, unless all the believers in truth can be induced or constrained to accept survival-value as their ultimate meaning and ultimate standard. And this cannot be done in all cases. The rationalists, indeed, having proved quite unable to explain how truth-value could become independent of survival-value, may be constrained to accept the latter. The pessimists, however, though they failed equally to

prove their doctrine true for all, succeeded in showing that it might remain true for them; they succeeded also in impugning the rationality of the argument from survival-value from their standpoint, and in showing that it must always fail to convince them. On the other hand, they could not deny that for optimists, who *had* accepted its presuppositions, the argument from survival-value might be true and valid, and that eventually, if optimist prophecies came true, the truth of pessimism might pass away.

The logical situation which results seems distinctly curious. There exist two systems of truth, one for optimism, another for pessimism; but there exists no common measure between them, and no ultimate or absolute truth. Each system forms, in theory at least, a perfectly coherent and complete interpretation of life, from which a consistent scheme of values is deducible. But neither side could prove more than this; so long as any representatives of either side survived, the issue of pessimism *versus* optimism remained a live one, and survival-value could not boast of having succeeded in assimilating and absorbing truth. The mere existence of pessimism, nay, even of a pessimistic mood in any one, vetoes the reduction of truth to survival-value. Whether pessimism is right or wrong, and whatever right and wrong may mean in this context, it means that survival-value is *not* undisputed truth. Or, alternatively,

it means that pessimism, inasmuch as it survives, has itself survival-value, and is so far true. Or, perhaps, that the test of survival-value is divided against itself and contradicts itself; it fails to yield us unambiguous truth. For if optimists and pessimists can both manage to survive, how can survival-value alone be truth?

Thus ultimately truth is Janus-faced; the only ultimate truth is the necessity of choice between the two alternatives. And seeing that *ex hypothesi both* interpretations may be complete and able to account for all the facts, the choice between the alternatives must be left *to us*, and cannot be determined for us by the 'objective' nature of things. In other words, it must be 'subjective'—that is, a human *act*. Now this result will be highly unpalatable to those who perhorresce human intervention in the affairs of the cosmos and prefer brute fact to human enterprise. They should, however, realize that *their* preference, too, is a human choice, and that occasions for such choices are by no means rare. The case of pessimism is far from unique, though it is extreme, and so particularly obvious. There are a large number of questions which the appeal to survival-value cannot settle; their discussion leaves us with a choice between alternatives, simply because each has the same, or about the same, survival-value. Moreover, in some of these cases our choice seems to be itself a potent factor

in the survival of the belief adopted, and a condition of its developing survival-value; our attitude towards it seems to determine its 'truth.' It may even be the decisive factor. For once it is adopted, the facts may bear it out. It may further be that *they* would have shown themselves equally complaisant towards the other alternative, had *we* chosen to adopt it. That is, the facts may be intrinsically *neutral*, and fit with amiable passivity into either interpretation. Wherever this occurs, 'fact' behaves as plastic 'matter,' to be formed according to our fancy, and it is precisely the ultimate issues of philosophy which illustrate this curious situation best. Let us therefore examine a few cases.

The clearest case of all, perhaps, occurs in the dispute about the reality of 'free will.' Here all conceivable facts are amenable to either interpretation. We can either hold that every event is fully determined by necessary and unchanging 'laws,' and is in principle calculable and predictable; or declare that 'laws' are at bottom only habits which may, under sufficient provocation or pressure, be broken down and renovated, so that nothing is calculable *absolutely*, and the countenance of every fact glows with a halo of 'freedom' and indetermination. Now actually some of our predictions succeed and others fail. The determinist claims the former as proofs of his theory, but does not allow the latter to count against it; he explains

them away by the defects of his knowledge. The indeterminist ascribes the latter to the incalculable 'freedom' he acknowledges, and explains the former as due to the stability of 'habits.' Each uses *part* of the facts to support his theory, and explains away the rest. But in practice *both* theories are needed, and *neither* uses his own exclusively; each does homage to the truth in his opponent's view. For both have to act alike, though they give different reasons for so doing. Both wish to predict as much as possible, so that the indeterminist treats as determined as many events as he can, while the determinist, as he knows no more than the indeterminist, is as little able to predict everything. But instead of supposing that unpredictable events may be 'free,' he consoles himself with the idea that he *could* predict them all, if only he knew more. Thus he *has* to treat them *as if* they were 'free,' just as the indeterminist wishes to treat 'free' acts as if they were determined. Whether, in spite of this theoretical proof, the determinist and the indeterminist *do* act quite alike may be doubted, and investigated further; but there is no doubt that the former, at any rate, is debarred from holding that *his* action can be altered by any 'arbitrary' change of belief.

Another clear case may be found in the controversy between causal and teleological explanation, and its attribution to chance or design.

Whenever we select any sequence of events A—B for contemplation, it is open to us to say either 'A was, so B had to be; A *caused* B,' or 'A had to be in order that B might be; A was the *means* to B, and *aimed* at it.' That either of these interpretations is intrinsically and in the abstract more 'valid' and 'scientific,' and less 'anthropomorphic,' than the other is an illusion; every portion of our procedure, not only the connexion postulated between the events 'A' and 'B,' but their selection out of the total flow of change, and their interpretation as causal or teleological, is equally an interference of human thought with a course of happening which in itself seems equally compatible with 'chance' and with 'design.' For if we are bent upon it, *any* course of events, however purposive it may appear in trend and coincidence, can be conceived as fortuitous; it is possible to calculate chances that a dealer should deal himself a hand of thirteen trumps, or that ten thousand letters flung into the air at random should fall down a perfect sonnet. Conversely, any order, however fortuitous it may seem, *can* have a hidden purpose read into it; the slightest deviation from the most probable distribution can be regarded as significant, and set down to design; even if the worst came to the worst and no such deviation could be detected at all, it would only be necessary to suggest that the intelligence of which the operation was suspected might aim at a *pseudo-fortuitous result*, in order to conceal its

existence from us—for unknown reasons of its own. In this case, however, there ought plainly to be a difference in the actions determined by the rival beliefs; it does not appear to be anything like so great in fact as it ought to be in theory, perhaps because teleologists, who assume a purpose but declare it to be 'inscrutable,' come very near to a practical denial of purposiveness altogether.

Thus we appear to have a very free hand with regard to many important questions: we can choose from a number of definite alternatives the belief we prefer, and thereupon get nature to ratify, or at least not to confute, our choice. These questions, then, are not to be answered 'objectively' by 'the nature of things'; it is neutral or ambiguous, and declines to impose beliefs on us or to determine our choice. Thus the responsibility for what we hail as 'truth' remains with us, and truth in such cases will be our choice, and not a mere product of survival-value.

This freedom of choice is very important, alike for practice and for 'theory.' It enables us to some extent not only to affect the course of events and to steer our own through their flow, but also to render efficacious our conceptions of value and truth by embodying them in actual fact. They no longer figure merely as products of nature fortuitously thrown up by the cosmic welter, but themselves become factors in determining reality.

On a very minute scale, but in a very real sense, our preferences and our acts are contributing to the shaping of the world, and sharing in the unceasing process of creation, which did not come to an end 5,928 years ago, but is continuously manifested in the all-pervasive creativeness which engenders more or less momentous novelties in every region of the universe, and thereby renders unpredictable and irreversible its history.*

In this way, and in this way alone, it seems, can truth preserve its distinction from survival-value, and retain a certain independence. Were it merely a result of natural selection and a record of survival-value, its 'discovery' or apprehension would be in the end as mechanical a process as the falling of a stone appears to be. But to enable sheer survival-value to determine truth, there must be no ambiguity, indefiniteness, or alternation about the trend of nature. It must be definitely *fated*. It must not be indifferently compatible with a number of alternatives. It must not allow our interventions to affect or thwart it, and to divert it from its predestined course. Now this possibility cannot be excluded. It *is* possible to believe in such a constitution of reality, and in the human impotence thereby entailed; but the belief is optional and a matter of choice. We can believe

* For a study of the metaphysical significance of 'Novelty' see the Presidential Address in the *Proceedings* of the Aristotelian Society for 1921-2.

it *if we please*. But we need not, and whether we believe it or not, we do it to please ourselves. We have a right, then, to believe the equally tenable alternative. We are therefore free to believe the humanist interpretation. If so, we shall believe that we are not merely insignificant pawns in the cosmic game, but also *players*, who contribute, however little, to its outcome.

Of course, after we have made our choice, we must take the consequences. The 'truths' we adopt must not be fatally 'pernicious,' and *must* develop survival-value enough to remain in being. But this necessity is of the nature of a condition *sine qua non*, without being *adequate* to account for truth. Nor is it an originating force. Natural selection is not a *creative* principle in matters of belief any more than in the variations of living organisms. It merely weeds out the unsuitable *after* they have arrived upon the scene (we know not whence!), and rules out those which are impracticably incompatible with the conditions of existence. This fact will at once suggest to the humanist that natural selection is not an adequate explanation of anything at all; it is best interpreted as a mechanism in the full sense of the word—viz., as a *means* of adjusting an adaptation (or a 'truth'), already in being, to the continuous changes of reality. A 'truth,' when first conceived, is the *best* way known to man of dealing with the real so far revealed to him. But this is not enough

to enable it to remain a 'truth.' It has to *remain* the 'best,' in face of the growth of knowledge and of the changes of the real. So it has at intervals to transform its meaning, in order to remain a 'truth,' even where it is allowed to preserve its verbal identity, and is not discarded as an 'error.' And the pressure which induces us so to transform it is precisely that of the changing survival-value of the belief. So soon as it ceases to be the 'best' belief, it had better be changed. Thus survival-value is the force that keeps our truths related to the needs of our life, and so far from confuting the humanist conception of truth, becomes its strongest attestation.

If Humanism, then, is right, human agency is *not* the illusion it is so tempting to make it. Truth may be, like the other values, like our moral and æsthetic ideals, a real contribution to reality, which the real might not possess* unless we had made it. If Humanism is wrong, it does not greatly matter whether Naturalism or Absolutism be right. For to the one, truth is swallowed up in survival-value, to the other, it is the exclusive monopoly of an Absolute that cannot really care for anything 'finite'; to both, therefore, human values are illusory and human agency is null and void. The choice, then, between these alternatives is as

* Whether it would or not, would depend on whether the real contained other beings capable of appreciating the ideal of Truth.

momentous as any we can make. And as free. For, as Plato's famous dictum warns us, the responsibility is the chooser's, and no God relieves us of the blame!

In this way, then, we are free to steer our course, to shape our beliefs, and, by enacting them, to take our humble share in the making of the world. It is not true that Necessity, inscrutable and irresistible, determines every move within an immutable Whole. It is true only that we may not transgress the orbits of the possible. But the real is not wholly rigid, and *the way we take it* makes a difference. We need not take as final truth a reality that seems utterly revolting. So at the core of being there is always found a human *value-judgment*, which approves the reality it acknowledges. It forms the axis on which our life revolves, and we can make, withhold, or vary it. It is never mere acceptance of a 'given,' but always an interpretation, which selects, and rejects, 'appearances.' And its intention is prophetic. It is justified, or falsified, by the consequences it entails. Thus the all-pervasive presence of a final act of Faith may never be omitted from a survey of beliefs.

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