MORAL VALUES
AND THE IDEA OF GOD
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THE GIFFORD LECTURES
DELIVERED IN THE UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN IN 1914 AND 1915

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1918
TO THE MEMORY OF

CHARLES HAMILTON SORLEY

ONE OF MANY THOUSANDS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FREELY IN A GREAT CAUSE

For they sought a country.

"Make Beauty and make Rest give place,
Mock Prudence loud—and she is gone,
Smite Satisfaction on the face,
And tread the ghost of Ease upon.
Light-tipped and singing press we hard
Over old earth which now is worn,
Triumphant, buffeted and scarred,
By billows howled at, tempest-torn,
Toward blue horizons far away."

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“Having been for many years deeply and firmly convinced that the true knowledge of God, that is, of the Being, Nature, and Attributes of the Infinite, of the All, of the First and the Only Cause, that is, the One and Only Substance and Being, and the true and felt knowledge (not mere nominal knowledge) of the relations of man and of the universe to Him, and of the true foundations of all ethics and morals, being, I say, convinced that this knowledge, when really felt and acted on, is the means of man’s highest well-being, and the security of his upward progress, I have resolved, from the ‘residue’ of my estate as aforesaid, to institute and found, in connection, if possible, with the Scottish Universities, lectureships or classes for the promotion of the study of said subjects, and for the teaching and diffusion of sound views regarding them....

“The lecturers appointed shall be subjected to no test of any kind, and shall not be required to take any oath, or to emit or subscribe any declaration of belief, or to make any promise of any kind; they may be of any denomination whatever, or of no denomination at all (and many earnest and high-minded men prefer to belong to no ecclesiastical denomination); they may be of any religion or way of thinking, or as is sometimes said, they may be of no religion, or they may be so-called sceptics or agnostics or freethinkers, provided only that the ‘patrons’ will use diligence to secure that they be able reverent men, true thinkers, sincere lovers of and earnest inquirers after truth....

“I wish the lecturers to treat their subject as a strictly natural science, the greatest of all possible sciences, indeed, in one sense,
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the only science, that of Infinite Being, without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation. The lecturers shall be under no restraint whatever in their treatment of their theme.

"The lectures shall be public and popular, that is, open not only to students of the Universities, but to the whole community without matriculation, as I think that the subject should be studied and known by all, whether receiving University instruction or not. I think such knowledge, if real, lies at the root of all well-being."

"And my desire and hope is that these lectureships and lectures may promote and advance among all classes of the community the true knowledge of Him Who is, and there is none and nothing besides Him, in Whom we live and move and have our being, and in Whom all things consist, and of man's real relationship to Him Whom truly to know is life everlasting." (From Lord Gifford's Will, dated 21 August, 1885.)
PREFACE

I have quoted some sentences from the remarkable document which instituted the Gifford Lectureships, for it contains matter of permanent interest. Lord Gifford was deeply convinced that the knowledge which he sought to promote was of importance for human well-being; he wished to make it accessible to those outside, as well as to those within, academic circles; he had confidence in reason and left his lecturers free to follow whithersoever the argument might lead; and he himself gave a description of the kind of knowledge which he had in view. In this description he coupled “the true foundations of all ethics and morals” with “the true knowledge of God.” The present work is concerned with the relation between these two topics. The point of view from which that relation is regarded is not the most common one; but neither is it by any means novel. Many philosophers have held that ethical ideas have a bearing on the view of the universe which we are justified in forming, and they have allowed their thinking to be influenced by these ideas. Since Kant proclaimed the primacy of the practical reason in a certain regard, this point of view has been adopted by thinkers of different schools, and reasons have been urged in its support.
Preface

But a systematic investigation of the validity of the procedure is still lacking. We must ask, What is the justification for using ethical ideas, or other ideas of value, in philosophical construction? In what way, if at all, can they be used legitimately? And what effect have they upon our final view of the world? A systematic investigation of these questions has been attempted in the present volume.

The lectures of which the book consists were delivered in the University of Aberdeen in the summer terms of 1914 and 1915. Although nearly a year elapsed between the tenth lecture and the eleventh, the whole is intended to be a continuous argument. In carrying out this argument, no attempt has been made to give a critical survey of contemporary thinking on the topics which arise for discussion. To have done so would have been to extend unduly the length of the book. And a survey of this kind has now been rendered unnecessary by the work of my friend and predecessor in the Gifford Lectureship, Professor Pringle-Pattison. Through criticism of recent philosophy he has elicited a view akin to that which I have reached in another way. Both the similarity and the difference are indicated by the title of my book.

A few days before my appointment to the Gifford Lectureship, I was honoured with an invitation to give a course of Hibbert Lectures on Metaphysics at Manchester College, Oxford. These lectures were delivered
Preface

in the winter of 1913–14, and for them the greater portion of the material now published was first drafted. This material was revised and enlarged before it was given at Aberdeen; and the whole has been again revised, with additions in some places and omissions in others, in preparation for the press. In present circumstances it is perhaps unnecessary to apologise for the delay in its appearance.

My obligations to other writers—not least to those from whom I differ—are too numerous to mention, and they are inadequately acknowledged in footnotes. In conclusion, I should like to express my gratitude to the Senatus of the University of Aberdeen for re-calling me to the University as a Gifford Lecturer. To many old friends in Aberdeen, and especially to Dr Davidson and Dr Baillie, the professors of philosophy, my thanks are due for much kindness and encouragement.

August 1918.

W. R. S.
CONTENTS

PAGE

 Preface  ix

I. THE PROBLEM

The problem of the bearing of ethical ideas upon the theory of ultimate reality  1

Criticism of the traditional methods of deriving ethics from a metaphysical theory  8

1. The method of rationalism  10

and that of naturalism  14

2. The dialectic method  15

The need of an independent enquiry into moral values as a preliminary towards forming a view of ultimate reality  20

II. VALUES

The attitude of science and the attitude of valuation  23

The kinds of value distinguished by their objects or ideals  26

1. Happiness  27

2. Intellectual Value, or Truth  30

3. Aesthetic Value, or Beauty  31

4. Moral Value, or Goodness  35

Formal distinctions between values  36

1. Intrinsic and Instrumental  36

Moral and economic values  37

2. Permanent and Transient  42

3. Catholic and Exclusive  45

The material conditions of value  46

4. Higher and Lower  50

The Scale of Values and the System of Values  51

III. THE MEANING OF VALUE

The psychological analysis of the moral consciousness as affecting its objective significance  54

1. The reduction of the moral consciousness to pleasure-pain  58

2. Its reduction to desire  61
xiv Contents

The social history of the moral consciousness as affecting its objective significance . 64
The facts of mental and social history and the question of validity . 68
Comparison of the appreciation of value with the scientific description of an object . 71
1. The view that value consists in the relation of an object to the state of the subject . 73
2. The view that it is a relation between objects . 74
3. The view that it is a quality of an object—a "tertiary quality" . 75
Value as a unique predicate with a definite bearing upon existence . 76

IV. THE CRITERIA OF MORAL VALUE

Comparison of value-judgments with scientific judgments as regards their reference to existence . 82
The moral consciousness as one aspect of the consciousness of reality . 86
The universal in morality, and the nature of moral intuition . 88
Results of the objectivity of moral judgments . 92
1. That they are universally valid, even although they may not be recognised . 92
2. That they can be systematised . 96
3. That different systems may be compared in respect of their comprehensiveness . 100
Applications of the criterion of comprehensiveness . 102
The permanent factor in morality . 106

V. VALUE AND PERSONALITY

The individual as the subject of value . 108
Distinction of intellectual interests according as they are centred in the universal or in the individual . 112
Value and the unique . 113
The question whether intrinsic value belongs to things which are not persons 117
The value of the moment and the value of the whole life . 126
How far independent value belongs to the community of persons . 129

VI. RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE VALUE

Relativity (that is, relation to the subject) not a characteristic of the moral judgment any more than of the scientific judgment . 133
Relativity (that is, relatedness within the objective whole) a characteristic of the moral judgment as a judgment about reality . 135
Contents

PAGE

Reasons for this view:

1. What is called good exists or is assumed to exist
   139
2. The assertion of goodness refers to the person’s attitude to his environment
   141
   Hence (a) diversity in applied morality
   142
   and (b) unity of principle or spirit in morality
   144
   The nature of this unity: the unconditional in morality
   147
3. The system of moral values as connected with the system of existing things
   153
The ethical absolute and the absolute reality
   157

VII. THE CONSERVATION OF VALUE

The conditions of the realisation of values
   159
The discovery of values
   161
The idea of value consequent upon experience of value
   161
The development of moral ideas
   164
The production or realisation of values as the fundamental postulate of the moral life
   165
The attitude of science and the attitude of morality
   168
The conservation of values
   170
How far this postulate may be valid apart from the postulate that the existing world is a moral order
   171
   (1) The law of compensation in nature
   173
   (2) The objective validity of values
   174
   (3) The independence of values
   175
The increase of values
   178
The mystical way and the way of practical morality
   181

VIII. VALUE AND REALITY

The connexion of the moral order with existence
   183
   (1) Ethical ideas as facts of the personal consciousness which determine character and modify the environment
   185
   (2) Ethical ideas as valid for reality
   189
Comparison of the validity of ethical ideas with that of physical principles
   191
The question thus raised concerning the knowledge of reality: Preliminary propositions
   192
   (1) That existence is given in the fact of knowledge
   192
   (2) That knowledge implies an object distinguished from the subject
   196
   (3) That the object is not an isolated unit or collection of isolated units
   198
   (4) That things and relations between things have equal objectivity in knowledge
   199
   (5) That knowledge of an object implies the possibility of knowledge of self
   201
## Contents

Supplementary Note on certain terms ........................................... 207

1. Existence ................................................................................. 207

2. Being ...................................................................................... 212

3. Reality .................................................................................... 214

4. Relations ............................................................................... 215

IX. The Division of Reality

The portions of reality which appear to have separate individuality ........ 219

1. The individuality of selves ..................................................... 219

2. The individuality of material things ......................................... 222

Modified view of the constituents of existing reality ...................... 227

The status of relations in reality .................................................. 229

The status of values in reality ...................................................... 233

The reference in value to personal life .......................................... 234

X. The Unity of Reality

The connectedness of apparently independent things ...................... 247

The problem of cognising reality as a whole .................................. 243

The method of analysis and synthesis .......................................... 243

Limits of analysis ...................................................................... 244

The knowledge of a whole, or synopsis ........................................ 251

Illustration from the method of art .............................................. 254

Attitude of philosophers to the question ..................................... 256

Bergson’s opposition of intuition to intellect ................................. 258

Vision and argument .................................................................. 261

Examples of synopsis .................................................................. 263

The intuition of self ................................................................... 267

The knowledge of other selves ................................................... 268

The view of reality as a whole ..................................................... 270

XI. The Interpretation of Reality

The distinction between description, explanation, and interpretation .... 273

Interpretation as a translation of meaning into better known terms .... 276

Berkeley’s theory of visual language and of meaning in nature ......... 278

This meaning not dependent on the absence of connexion, whether causal or by way of similarity, between the sign and the thing signified ...... 281

The discovery of meaning in the world, ....................................... 285

and the finding of this meaning in its values ................................ 287

The criteria for testing an interpretation of this kind ..................... 288

The objections taken to this method of interpretation .......... 292

(1) owing to its use of imagination ............................................ 292

(2) owing to the difficulty of verification .................................... 292
# Contents

## XII. The Theistic Arguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The reasons for the disfavour into which these arguments have fallen</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The historical origin of the idea of God, and the acceptance of that idea by philosophers</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The philosophical problem (to find the idea through which reality is intelligible) altered in the arguments to the question whether existence may be predicated of a given idea</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Ontological Argument</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anselm's argument and the criticism of it</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The significance of the argument</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Cosmological Argument</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume's objection</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The force of the argument</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Teleological Argument</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The objections to teleology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## XIII. The Moral Argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The insufficiency of the argument from morality alone</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting attitudes of Hume and Kant to the argument</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of a modified form of the argument</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The validity of the argument dependent upon the kind of moral order supposed to be exhibited in the world, whether as (1) a system for the production of greatest happiness</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or (2) a system for distributing happiness according to merit</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or (3) a medium for the attainment and realisation of goodness by free persons</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The argument from the moral ideal itself: that it must exist somewhere</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Validity and existence                                               | 355  |

## XIV. Pluralism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pluralism as offering an explanation (alternative to theism) of the natural and moral orders</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different forms of pluralism</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual pluralism</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency of the theory to solipsism, if interaction of monads excluded</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its account of the order of nature, if interaction of monads admitted</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its account of the order of values</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tendency of pluralism back to monism</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Contents

### XV. Monism

| The explanation of nature and morality on the view that all reality is one | 381 |
| Opposing tendencies to naturalism and to mysticism in monistic systems | 384 |
| The distinction of degrees of reality among particular things | 387 |
| The explanation of the moral order | 391 |
| The idea of purpose | 393 |
| The idea of freedom | 398 |
| The unfree world characterised | 399 |
| The religious side of monism | 403 |

### XVI. Purpose

| The contrast of purpose and mechanism | 405 |
| Mechanism, as an abstract scheme | 406 |
| Its limitation to the quantitative aspect of phenomena | 407 |
| Mechanism, in the wider sense of the term, as including empirical knowledge of material processes | 408 |
| Its application to life and mind | 410 |
| Purpose and the idea of an end | 413 |
| Unconscious purpose | 416 |
| The meaning of this conception | 418 |
| Conscious purpose | 421 |
| The conception of a universal purpose | 426 |

### XVII. Freedom

| Freedom and the causal law : different meanings of this law | 429 |
| (1) in its quantitative expression, not more relevant to free action than to conscious action generally | 432 |
| (2) as meaning uniformity | 437 |
| (3) as meaning efficiency | 438 |
| The nature of conscious activity and the theories of determinism and indeterminism | 439 |
| Kant's view of freedom | 443 |
| Conscious action and the time-span | 444 |
| Finite freedom : its nature and limits | 446 |

### XVIII. Theism

| Theism as an interpretation of the world, implying purpose and freedom | 453 |
| The theory of deism, as compared and contrasted with theism | 457 |
| The idea of a non-interfering God | 459 |
| The nature of rationalism | 462 |
| The world as interpreted by theism | 464 |
| The interpretation through values | 465 |
| The problem of evil | 469 |
| The unity of reality as an ethical unity | 473 |
Contents

XIX. The Idea of God

The two ways in which the idea of God is reached ........................................... 476
The mutual influence of philosophical ideas and religious experience .................. 479
Metaphysical difficulties in the idea of God which has been reached .................. 487
  The idea of infinity .................................................................................. 488
  The idea of the Absolute .......................................................................... 493
The positive idea of God ................................................................................. 495
  Is it anthropomorphic? ............................................................................. 496
How far it is analogical .................................................................................... 498
The relation of God and man ........................................................................... 499

XX. The Limits of Morality

Summary of the argument of the book .................................................................. 505
  1. The distinction between knowledge of the individual and knowledge of the universal ........................................... 505
  2. The individual as the bearer of value ....................................................... 506
  3. The order of values and the causal order ................................................ 507
  4. The objectivity of values ......................................................................... 507
  5. The relation of persons to the moral ideal ............................................... 508
  6. The factors in a synoptic view of reality ................................................. 509
  7. The problem due to the divergence between the order of existence and the moral order .......................................... 509
  8. The inability of naturalism, pluralism, and monism to explain the divergence ........................................................................... 510
  9. The conditions of a solution ..................................................................... 512
 10. The theistic conclusion ............................................................................ 513
The importance of the moral values in the argument ........................................... 514
The limits of morality ......................................................................................... 517
  The interdependence of all values ................................................................ 519
The connexion of morality with the time-process ............................................. 521

Index ................................................................................................................. 527