

XI

MONISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM

Journal

What is this chapter about? *The naive human being seeks to act morally in response to motives derived from without --from other persons or a Higher Being in whom he believes. At his highest level, the source of his motives is an inner voice. At this level, his conception of moral behavior becomes identical with that of Medaphysical Realism, which conceives of man's volition as impelled from an unknown source outside himself. Both conceptions preclude the possibility of inner freedom.*

What is its value? *The form of Monism presented in this book renders wholly tenable the conception of man as a potentially free spirit, willing partly in freedom during the lower stages of his development and capable of attaining ultimately to complete self-determinism on the basis of his own moral intuitions.*

Universal Nature of Cognitive Ideas and the Individual Nature of Moral Ideas

In forming a judgment about the argument of the two preceding chapters, a difficulty can arise in that one appears to be faced with a contradiction. On the one hand we have spoken of the experience of thinking, which is felt to have universal significance, equally valid for every human consciousness; on the other hand we have shown that the ideas which come to realization in the moral life, and are of the same kind as those elaborated in thinking, come to expression in each human consciousness in a quite individual way. If we cannot get beyond regarding this antithesis as a "contradiction", and if we do not see that in the living recognition of this actually existing antithesis a piece of man's essential nature reveals itself, then we shall be unable to see either the idea of knowledge or the idea of freedom in a true light. For those who think of their concepts as merely abstracted from the sense perceptible world and who do not allow intuition its rightful place, this thought, here claimed as a reality, must remain a "mere contradiction".

If we really understand how ideas are intuitively experienced in their self-sustaining essence, it becomes clear that in the act of knowing, man, on the edge of the world of ideas, lives his way into something which is the same for all men, but that when, from this world of ideas, he derives the intuitions for his acts of will, he individualizes a part of this world by the same activity that he practices as a universal human one in the spiritual ideal process of knowing.

What appears as a logical contradiction between the universal nature of cognitive ideas and the individual nature of moral ideas is the very thing that, when seen in its reality, becomes a living concept. It is a characteristic feature of the essential nature of man that what can be intuitively grasped swings to and fro within man, like a living pendulum, between universally valid knowledge and the individual experience of it. For those who cannot see the one half of the swing in its reality, thinking remains only a subjective human activity; for those who cannot grasp the other half, man's activity in thinking will seem to lose all individual life. For the first kind of thinker, it is the act of knowing that is an unintelligible fact; for the second kind, it is the moral life. Both will put forward all sorts of imagined ways of explaining the one or the other, all equally unfounded, either because they entirely fail to grasp that thinking can be actually experienced, or because they misunderstand it as a merely abstracting activity. -Rudolf Steiner, Addition

Study Topics

ethics of moral authority

11.0 Authoritative Moral Principles

The naïve man is ready to allow his basis for action to be dictated to him as commandments by any man whom he considers wiser or more powerful than himself, or whom he acknowledges for some other reason to be a power over him. In this way there arise, as moral principles, the authority of family, state, society, church and God.

11.1 Mechanical Necessity

If the hypothetically assumed entity is conceived as in itself unthinking, acting according to purely mechanical laws, as materialism would have it, then it must also produce out of itself, by purely mechanical necessity, the human individual with all his characteristic features. I believe myself free; but in fact all my actions are nothing but the result of the material processes which underlie my physical and mental organization.

11.2 Spiritual Force

Another possibility is that a man may picture the extra-human Absolute that lies behind the world of appearances as a spiritual being. In this case he will also seek the impulse for his actions in a corresponding spiritual force. To this kind of dualist the moral laws appear to be dictated by the Absolute, and all that man has to do is to use his intelligence to find out the decisions of the absolute being and then carry them out.

11.3 Inferring Without Experiencing The True Reality

As in materialism, so also in one-sided spiritualism, in fact in any kind of metaphysical realism inferring but not experiencing something extra-human as the true reality, freedom is out of the question.

11.4 Imposed Principles

Metaphysical as well as naïve realism, consistently followed out, must deny freedom for one and the same reason: they both see man as doing no more than putting into effect, or carrying out, principles forced (imposed) upon him by necessity.

11.5 Free When Follow Own Moral Intuition

Whoever is incapable of producing moral ideas through intuition must accept them from others. The idea can manifest itself only in human individuals. In so far as man obeys the impulses coming from this side he is free.

11.6 Free When Obey Self

If anyone asserts that the action of a fellow man is done unfreely, then he must identify the thing or the person or the institution within the perceptible world, that has caused the person to act.

11.7 Realization Of The Free Spirit Within

According to the monistic view, then, man's action is partly unfree, partly free. He finds himself to be unfree in the world of percepts, and he realizes within himself the free spirit.

11.8 Moral Laws Conceived By Individuals

The moral laws which the metaphysician who works by mere inference must regard as issuing from a higher power, are, for the adherent of monism, thoughts of men.

11.9 Freedom Stage Of Development

Monism sees in man a developing being, and asks whether, in the course of this development, the stage of the free spirit can be reached.

11.10 Discover Self

Monism knows that Nature does not send man forth from her arms ready made as a free spirit, but that she leads him up to a certain stage, from which he continues to develop still as an unfree being, until he comes to the point where he finds his own self.

11.11 Free Moral World Conception

Monism frees the truly moral world conception both from the mundane fetters of naïve moral maxims and from the transcendental moral maxims of the speculative metaphysician.

11.12 Humanist Morality

Morality is for the monist a specifically human quality, and freedom the human way of being moral.

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11.0 Authoritative Moral Principles

[1] THE naive man who acknowledges nothing as real except what he can see with his eyes and grasp with his hands, demands for his moral life, too, grounds of action which are perceptible to his senses. He wants some one who will impart to him these grounds of action in a manner that his senses can apprehend. He is ready to allow these grounds of action to be dictated to him as commands by anyone whom he considers wiser or more powerful than himself, or whom he acknowledges, for whatever reason, to be a power superior to himself. This accounts for the moral principles enumerated above, viz., the principles which rest on the authority of family, state, society, church, and God. The most narrow-

someone who is very narrow minded still puts his faith in some one person

minded man still submits to the authority of some single fellow-man.

He who is a little more progressive allows his moral conduct to be dictated by a majority (state, society). In every case he relies on some power which is present to his senses. When, at last, the conviction dawns on some one that his authorities are, at bottom, human beings just as weak as himself, then he seeks refuge with a higher power, with a Divine Being whom, in turn, he endows with qualities perceptible to the senses. He conceives this Being as communicating to him the ideal content of his moral life by way of his senses —believing, for example, that God appears in the flaming bush, or that He moves about among men in manifest human shape, and that their ears can hear His voice telling them what they are to do and what not to do.



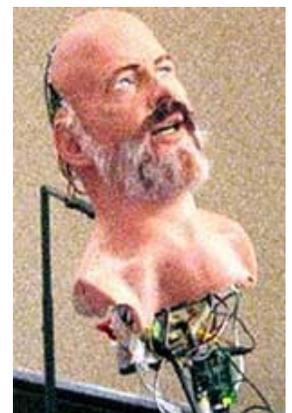
"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain," says the great and powerful Oz. The man has created a powerful public image of himself as Wizard of Oz. -1939 movie

[2] The highest stage of development which Naive Realism attains in the sphere of morality is that at which the moral law (the moral idea) is conceived as having no connection with any external being, but, hypothetically, as being an absolute power in one's own consciousness. What man first listened to as the voice of God, to that he now listens as an independent power in his own mind which he calls conscience.

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11.1 Mechanical Necessity

[3] This conception, however, takes us already beyond the level of the naive consciousness into the sphere where moral laws are treated as independent norms. They are there no longer made dependent on a human mind, but are turned into self-existent metaphysical entities. They are analogous to the visible-invisible forces of Metaphysical Realism. Hence also they appear always as a corollary of Metaphysical Realism. Metaphysical Realism, as we have seen, refers the world of percepts which is given to us, and the world of concepts which we think, to an external thing-in-itself. In this, its duplicate world, it must look also for the origin of morality. There are different possible views of its origin. If the thing-in-itself is unthinking and acts according to purely mechanical laws, as modern Materialism conceives that it does, then it must also produce out of itself, by purely mechanical necessity, the human individual and all that belongs to him. On that view the consciousness of freedom can be nothing more than an illusion. For whilst I consider myself the author of my action, it is the matter of which I am composed and the movements which are going on in it that determine me. I imagine myself free, but actually all my actions are nothing but the effects of the metabolism which is the basis of my physical and mental organization.



Unthinking actions according to purely mechanical laws.



It is only because we do not know the motives which compel us that we have the feeling of freedom. "We must emphasize that the feeling of freedom depends on the absence of external compelling motives." "Our actions are as much subject to necessity as our thoughts" (Ziehen, Leitfaden den Physiologischen Psychologie, pp. 207, ff.).

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11.2 Spiritual Force

[4] Another possibility is that some one will find in a spiritual being the Absolute lying behind all phenomena. If so, he will look for the spring of action in some kind of spiritual power. He will regard the moral principles which his reason contains as the manifestation of this spiritual being, which pursues in men its own special purposes. Moral laws appear to the Dualist, who holds this view, as dictated by the Absolute, and man's only task is discovering, by means of his reason, the decisions of the Absolute and carrying them out. For the Dualist the moral order of the world is the visible symbol of the higher order that lies behind it. Our human morality is a revelation of the divine world-order. It is not man who matters in this moral order but reality in itself, that is, God. Man ought to do what God wills. Eduard van Hartmann, who identifies reality, as such, with God, and who treats God's existence as a life of suffering, believes that the Divine Being has created the world in order to gain, by means of the world, release from his infinite suffering. Hence this philosopher regards the moral evolution of humanity as a process, the function of which is the redemption of God.



Moral laws dictated by the Absolute.



"Only through the building up of a moral world-order on the part of rational, self-conscious individuals is it possible for the world-process to approximate to its goal." "Real existence is the incarnation of God. The world-process is the passion of God who has become flesh, and at the same time the way of redemption for Him who was crucified in the flesh; and morality is our co-operation in the shortening of this process of suffering and redemption" (Hartmann, Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins, § 871).

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11.3 Inferring Without Experiencing The True Reality

On this view, man does not act because he wills, but he must act because it is God's will to be redeemed. Whereas the Materialistic Dualist turns man into an automaton, the action of which is nothing but the effect of causality according to purely mechanical laws, the Spiritualistic Dualist (i.e., he who treats the Absolute, the thing-in-itself, as spiritual) makes man the slave of the will of the Absolute. Neither Materialism nor Spiritualism nor generally any form of Metaphysical Realism, inferring but not experiencing something extra-human as the true reality, has any room for freedom.

neither Materialism nor Spiritualism has any room for freedom

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11.4 Imposed Principles

[5] Naive and Metaphysical Realism, if they are to be consistent, have to deny freedom for one and the same reason, viz., because for them man does nothing but carry out, or execute, principles necessarily imposed upon him. Naive Realism destroys freedom by subjecting man to authority, whether it be that of a perceptible being, or that of a being conceived on the analogy of perceptible beings, or, lastly, that of the abstract voice of conscience. The Metaphysician is unable to acknowledge freedom because, for him, man is determined, mechanically or morally, by a "thing-in-itself."

Naive and Metaphysical Realism have to deny freedom, for them man does nothing but carry out principles imposed upon him

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11.5 Free When Follow Own Moral Intuition

[6] Monism will have to admit the partial justification of Naive Realism, with which it agrees in admitting the part played by the world of percepts. He who is incapable of, producing moral ideas through intuition must receive them from others. In so far as a man receives his moral principles from without he is actually unfree. But Monism ascribes to the idea the same importance as to the percept. The idea can manifest itself only in human individuals. In so far as man obeys the impulses coming from this side he is free.



To receive moral principles from without is to be unfree.

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11.6 Free When Obey Self



If anyone asserts that the action of another is done unfreely, then he must identify the external compulsion.

But Monism denies all justification to Metaphysics, and consequently also to the impulses of action which are derived from so-called "things-in-themselves." According to the Monistic view, man's action is unfree when he obeys some perceptible external compulsion, it is free when he obeys none but himself. There is no room in Monism for any kind of unconscious compulsion hidden behind percept and concept. If anybody maintains of the action of a fellow-man that it has not been freely done, he is bound to produce within the visible world the thing or the person or the institution which has caused the agent to act. And if he supports his contention by an appeal to causes of action lying outside the real world of our percepts and thoughts, then Monism must decline to take account of such an assertion.

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11.7 Realization Of The Free Spirit Within

[7] According to the Monistic theory, then, man's action is partly free, partly unfree. He is conscious of himself as unfree in the world of percepts, and he realizes in himself the spirit which is free.

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11.8 Moral Laws Conceived By Individuals

[8] The moral laws which the Metaphysician is bound to regard as issuing from a higher power have, according to the upholder of Monism, been conceived by men themselves. To him the moral order is neither a mere picture of a purely mechanical order of nature nor of the divine government of the world, but through and through the free creation of men. It is not man's business to realize God's will in the world, but his own. He carries out his own decisions and intentions, not those of another being. Monism does not find behind human agents a ruler of the world, determining them to act according to his will. Men pursue only their own human ends. Moreover, each individual pursues his own private ends. For the world of ideas realizes itself, not in a community, but only in individual men. What appears as the common goal of a community is nothing but the result of the separate volitions of its individual members, and most commonly of a few outstanding men whom the rest follow as their leaders. Each one of us has it in him to be a free spirit, just as every rosebud is potentially a rose.



It is not the task of the individual to realize God's will in the world, but rather his own decisions and intentions.

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11.9 Freedom Stage Of Development



[9] Monism, then, is in the sphere of genuinely moral action the true philosophy of freedom. Being also a philosophy of reality, it rejects the metaphysical (unreal) restriction of the free spirit as emphatically as it acknowledges the physical and historical (naively real) restrictions of the naive man. Inasmuch as it does not look upon man as a finished product, exhibiting in every moment of his life his full nature, it considers idle the dispute whether man, as such, is free or not. It looks upon man as a developing being, and asks whether, in the course of this development, he can reach the stage of the free spirit.

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11.10 Discover Self

[10] Monism knows that Nature does not send forth man ready-made as a free spirit, but that she leads him up to a certain stage, from which he continues to develop still as an unfree being, until he reaches the point where he finds his own self.

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11.11 Free Moral World Conception

[11] Monism is not a denial of morality; it is the clear realization that a being acting under physical or moral compulsion cannot be truly moral. It regards the stages of automatic action (in accordance with natural impulses and instincts) and of obedient action (in accordance with moral norms) as necessary preparatory stages for morality, but it understands that it is possible for the free spirit to transcend both these transitory stages. Monism frees the truly moral world conception both from all the self-imposed fetters of the maxims of naive morality, and from all the externally imposed maxims of speculative Metaphysicians. The former Monism can as little eliminate from the world as it can eliminate percepts. The latter it rejects, because it looks for all principles of explanation of the phenomena of the world within that world and not outside it.

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11.12 Humanist Morality

Just as Monism refuses even to entertain the thought of cognitive principles other than those applicable to men (p. 81), so it rejects also the concept of moral maxims other than those originated by men. Human morality, like human knowledge, is conditioned by human nature, and just as beings of a higher order would probably mean by knowledge something very different from what we mean by it, so we may assume that other beings would have a very different morality. Possibly, even, the standpoint of morality would not apply to their actions at all. In short, to talk about such matters is from the point of view of Monism absurd. For Monists, morality is a specifically human quality, and freedom the human way of being moral.

