

XIV

THE VALUE OF LIFE

(Optimism and Pessimism)

Journal

What is this chapter about? *The human being's nature is such that he seeks primarily, not for happiness, but for the realization of his ideals. And, when he has risen to the level of moral intuition, he wills and acts in complete freedom without primary regard to happiness or suffering.*

What is its value? *If freedom is to be realized, the will in human nature must be sustained by intuitions that give the strength to overcome all resistance. Moral action consists, not in the eradication of one's individual will, but in the fullest development of human nature. The ethical individualist determines the value of life by measuring his achievements against his aims.*

Intuitively Determined Will

The argument of this chapter will be misunderstood if one is caught by the apparent objection that the will, as such, is the irrational factor in man and that once this irrationality is made clear to him he will see that the goal of his ethical striving must lie in ultimate emancipation from the will. An apparent objection of exactly this kind was brought against me from a reputable quarter in that I was told that it is the business of the philosopher to make good just what lack of thought leads animals and most men to neglect, namely, to strike a proper balance of life's account. But this objection just misses the main point.

If freedom is to be realized, the will in human nature must be sustained by intuitive thinking; at the same time, however, we find that an act of will may also be determined by factors other than intuition, though only in the free realization of intuitions issuing from man's essential nature do we find morality and its value. Ethical individualism is well able to present morality in its full dignity, for it sees true morality not in what brings about the agreement of an act of will with an external standard of behavior, but in what arises in man when he develops his moral will as an integral part of his whole being so that to do what is not moral appears to him as a stunting and crippling of his nature. -Rudolf Steiner addition

Study Topics

ethics of life's value

14.0 Good World Or Miserable Life

One view says that this world is the best that could conceivably exist, and that to live and to act in it is a blessing of untold value. The other view maintains that life is full of misery and want; everywhere pain outweighs pleasure, sorrow outweighs joy.

14.1 Best Possible World (cooperative participation)

The world is the best of all possible worlds. A better world is impossible for God is good and wise. From this optimistic standpoint, then, life is worth living. It must stimulate us to co-operative participation.

14.2 Pain Of Striving (universal idleness)

Eternal striving, ceaseless craving for satisfaction which is ever beyond reach, this is the fundamental characteristic of all active will. For no sooner is one goal attained, than a fresh need springs up, and so on. Schopenhauer's pessimism leads to complete inactivity; his moral aim is universal idleness.

14.3 Pain Outweighs Pleasure (unselfish service)

The human being has to permeate his whole being with the recognition that the pursuit of individual satisfaction (egoism) is a folly, and that he ought to be guided solely by the task of dedicating himself to the progress of the world. Hartmann's pessimism leads us to activity devoted to a sublime task.

14.4 Pleasure Of Striving (future goal)

Striving (desiring) in itself gives pleasure. Who does not know the enjoyment given by the hope of a remote but intensely desired goal?

14.5 Quantity Of Pleasure (rational estimation of feeling)

What is the right method for comparing the sum of pleasure to pain? Eduard von Hartmann believes that it is reason that holds the scales.

14.6 Quality Of Pleasure (critical examination of feeling)

If we strike out feelings from the pleasure side of the balance on the ground that they are attached to objects which turn out to have been illusory, we make the value of life dependent not on the quantity but on the quality of pleasure, and this, in turn, on the value of the objects which cause the pleasure.

14.7 Pursuit Of Pleasure (hopelessness of egotism)

If the quantity of pain in a person's life became at any time so great that no hope of future pleasure (credit) could help him to get over the pain, then the bankruptcy of life's business would inevitably follow.

14.8 Value Of Pleasure (satisfaction of needs)

The magnitude of pleasure is related to the degree of my need. If I am hungry enough for two pieces of bread and can only get one, the pleasure I derive from it had only half the value it would have had if the eating of it has satisfied my hunger.

14.9 Will For Pleasure (intensity of desire)

The question is not at all whether there is a surplus of pleasure or of pain, but whether the will is strong enough to overcome the pain.

14.10 Magnitude Of Pleasure (amusement)

If it is only a question whether, after the day's work, I am to amuse myself by a game or by light conversation, and if I am totally indifferent to what I do as long as it serves the purpose, then I simply ask myself: What gives me the greatest surplus of pleasure?

14.11 Highest Pleasure (realization of moral ideals)

Moral ideals spring from the moral imagination of man. They are his intuitions, the driving forces which his spirit harnesses; he wants them, because their realization is his highest pleasure.

14.12 Joy Of Achievement (measure achievement against aims)

He acts as he wants to act, that is, in accordance with the standard of his ethical intuitions; and he finds in the achievement of what he wants the true enjoyment of life. He determines the value of life by measuring achievements against aims.

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14.0 Good World Or Miserable Life

[1] A COUNTERPART of the question concerning the purpose and function of life (cp. p. 111) is the question concerning its value. We meet here with two mutually opposed views, and between them with all conceivable attempts at compromise. One view says that this world is the best conceivable which could exist at all, and that to live and act in it is a good of inestimable value. Everything that exists displays harmonious and purposive co-operation and is worthy of admiration. Even what is apparently bad and evil may, from a higher point of view, be seen to be a good, for it represents an agreeable contrast with the good. We are the more able to appreciate the good when it is clearly contrasted with evil. Moreover, evil is not genuinely real; it is only that we perceive as evil a lesser degree of good. Evil is the absence of good, it has no positive import of its own.



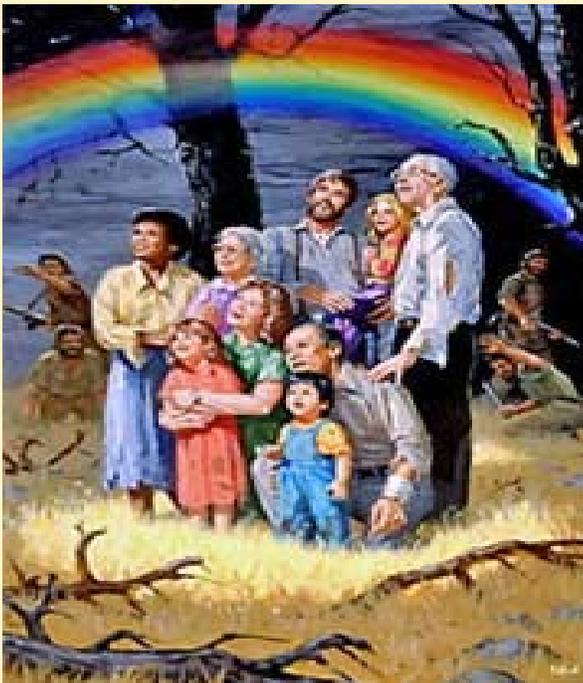
Pessimism and Optimism

[2] The other view maintains that life is full of misery and agony. Everywhere pain outweighs pleasure, sorrow outweighs joy. Existence is a burden, and non-existence would, from every point of view, be preferable to existence.

[3] The chief representatives of the former view, i.e., Optimism, are Shaftesbury and Leibniz; the chief representatives of the second, i.e., Pessimism, are Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann.

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14.1 Best Possible World (cooperative participation)



According to Leibniz, God's people are happy and wanting to cooperate with each other.

[4] Leibniz says the world is the best of all possible worlds. A better one is impossible. For God is good and wise. A good God wills to create the best possible world, a wise God knows which is the best possible. He is able to distinguish the best from all other and worse possibilities. Only an evil or an unwise God would be able to create a world worse than the best possible.



Gottfried Leibniz

[5] Whoever starts from this point of view will find it easy to lay down the direction which human action must follow, in order to make its contribution to the greatest good of the universe. All that man need do will be to find out the counsels of God and to act in accordance with them. If he knows what God's purposes are concerning the world and the human race he will be able, for his part, to do what is right. And he will be happy in the feeling that he is adding his share to all the other good in the world. From this optimistic standpoint, then, life is worth living. It is such as to stimulate us to cooperate with, and enter into, it.

all that we need do is to find out the counsels of God and act according to them

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14.2 Pain Of Striving (universal idleness)



Schopenhauer

[6] Quite different is the picture Schopenhauer paints. He thinks of ultimate reality not as an all-wise and all-beneficent being, but as blind striving or will. Eternal striving, ceaseless craving for satisfaction which yet is ever beyond reach, these are the fundamental characteristics of all will. For as soon as we have attained what we want a fresh need

springs up, and so on. Satisfaction, when it occurs, endures always only for an infinitesimal time. The whole rest of our lives is unsatisfied craving, i.e., discontent and suffering. When at last blind craving is dulled, every definite content is gone from our lives. Existence is filled with nothing but an endless ennui. Hence the best we can do is to throttle all desires and needs within us and exterminate the will. Schopenhauer's Pessimism leads to complete inactivity; its moral aim is universal idleness.



The best we can do is to throttle all desires and needs within us and exterminate the will, says Schopenhauer.

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14.3 Pain Outweighs Pleasure (unselfish service)



Von Hartmann

[7] By a very different argument Von Hartmann attempts to establish Pessimism and to make use of it for Ethics. He attempts, in keeping with the fashion of our age, to base his world-view on experience. By observation of life he hopes to discover whether there is more pain or more pleasure in the world. He passes in review before the tribunal of reason whatever men consider to be happiness and a good, in order to show that all apparent satisfaction turns out, on closer inspection, to be nothing but illusion. It is illusion when we believe that in health, youth, freedom, sufficient income, love (sexual satisfaction), pity, friendship and family life, honour, reputation, glory, power,

religious edification, pursuit of science and of art, hope of a life after death, participation in the advancement of civilization, that in all these we have sources of happiness and satisfaction. Soberly considered, every enjoyment brings much more evil and misery than pleasure into the world. The disagreeableness of "the morning after" is always greater than the agreeableness of intoxication. Pain far outweighs pleasure in the world. No man, even though relatively the happiest, would, if asked, wish to live through this miserable life a second time.

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Now since Hartmann does not deny the presence of an ideal factor (wisdom) in the world, but, on the contrary, grants to it equal rights with blind striving (will), he can attribute the creation of the world to his Absolute Being only on condition that He makes the pain in the world subserve a world-purpose that is wise. But the pain of created beings is nothing but God's pain itself, for the life of Nature as a whole is identical with the life of God. An All-wise Being can aim only at release from pain, and since allexistence is pain, at release from existence. Hence the purpose of the creation of the world is to transform existence into the non-existence which is so much better. The world-process is nothing but a continuous battle against God's pain, a battle which ends with the annihilation of all existence. The moral life for men, therefore, will consist in taking part in the annihilation of existence.



According to Von Hartmann, the pursuit of pleasure (Egoism) is folly. We ought to be guided by unselfish service to a noble cause.

The reason why God has created the world is that through the world he may free himself from his

infinite pain. The world must be regarded, "as it were, as an itching eruption on the Absolute," by means of which the unconscious healing power of the Absolute rids itself of an inward disease; or it may be regarded "as a painful drawing-plaster which the All-one applies to itself in order first to divert the inner pain outwards, and then to get rid of it altogether." Human beings are members of the world. In their sufferings God suffers. He has created them in order to split up in them his infinite pain. The pain which each one of us suffers is but a drop in the infinite ocean of God's pain (Hartmann, *Phanomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins*, pp. 866 ff.).

[8] It is man's duty to permeate his whole being with the recognition that the pursuit of individual satisfaction (Egoism) is a folly, and that he ought to be guided solely by the task of assisting in the redemption of God by unselfish service of the world-process. Thus, in contrast with the Pessimism of Schopenhauer, that of Von Hartmann leads us to devoted activity in a sublime cause.

[9] But what of the claim that this view is based on experience?

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14.4 Pleasure Of Striving (future goal)

[10] To strive after satisfaction means that our activity reaches out beyond the actual content of our lives. A creature is hungry, i.e., it desires satiety, when its organic functions demand for their continuation the supply of fresh life-materials in the form of nourishment. The pursuit of honour consists in that a man does not regard what he personally does or leaves undone as valuable unless it is endorsed by the approval of others from without. The striving for knowledge arises when a man is not content with the world which he sees, hears, etc., so long as he has not understood it. The fulfilment of the striving causes pleasure in the individual who strives, failure causes pain. It is important here to observe that pleasure and pain are attached only to the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of my striving. The striving itself is by no means to be regarded as a pain. Hence, if we find that, in the very moment in which a striving is fulfilled, at once a new striving arises, this is no ground for saying that pleasure has given birth to pain, because enjoyment in every case gives rise to a desire for its repetition, or for a fresh pleasure. I can speak of pain only when desire runs up against the impossibility of fulfilment.

Even when an enjoyment that I have had causes in me the desire for the experience of a greater, more subtle, and more exotic pleasure, I have no right to speak of this desire as a pain caused by the previous pleasure until the means fail me to gain the greater and more subtle pleasure. I have no right to regard pleasure as the cause of pain unless pain follows on pleasure as its consequence by natural law, e.g., when a woman's sexual pleasure is followed by the suffering of child-birth and the cares of nursing. If striving caused pain, then the removal of striving ought to be accompanied by pleasure. But the very

reverse is true. To have no striving in one's life causes boredom, and boredom is always accompanied by displeasure. Now, since it may be a long time before a striving meets with fulfilment, and since, in the interval, it is content with the hope of fulfilment, we must acknowledge that there is no connection in principle between pain and striving, but that pain depends solely on the non-fulfilment of the striving. Schopenhauer, then, is wrong in any case in regarding desire or striving (will) as being in principle the source of pain.



To have no striving in one's life causes boredom, and boredom is always accompanied by displeasure. Striving (desire) is in itself pleasurable.

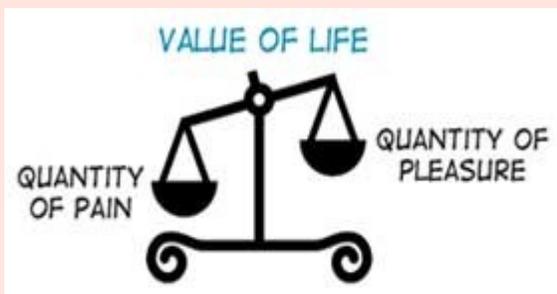
[11] In truth the very reverse of this is correct. Striving (desire) is in itself pleasurable. Who does not know the pleasure which is caused by the hope of a remote but intensely desired enjoyment? This pleasure is the companion of all labour, the results of which will be enjoyed by us only in the future. It is a pleasure which is wholly

independent of the attainment of the end. For when the aim has been attained, the pleasure of satisfaction is added as a fresh thrill to the pleasure of striving. If anyone were to argue that the pain caused by the non-attainment of an aim is increased by the pain of disappointed hope, and that thus, in the end, the pain of non-fulfilment will still always outweigh the utmost possible pleasure of fulfilment, we shall have to reply that the reverse may be the case, and that the recollection of past pleasure at a time of unsatisfied desire will as often mitigate the displeasure of non-satisfaction. Whoever at the moment when his hopes suffer shipwreck exclaims, "I have done my part," proves thereby my assertion. The blessed feeling of having willed the best within one's powers is ignored by all who make every unsatisfied desire an occasion for asserting that, not only has the pleasure of fulfilment been lost, but that the enjoyment of the striving itself has been destroyed.

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14.5 Quantity Of Pleasure (rational estimation of feeling)

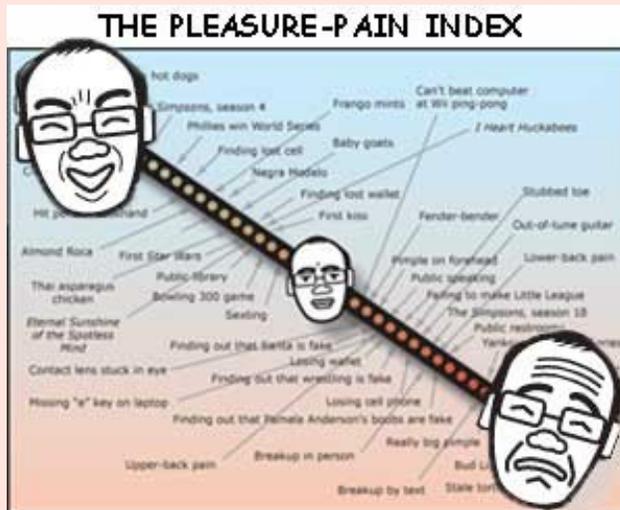
[12] The satisfaction of a desire causes pleasure and its non-satisfaction causes pain. But we have no right to infer from this fact that pleasure is nothing but the satisfaction of a desire, and pain nothing but its non-satisfaction. Both pleasure and pain may be experienced without being the consequence of desire. All illness is pain not preceded by any desire. If anyone were to maintain that illness is unsatisfied desire for health he would commit the error of regarding the inevitable and unconscious wish not to fall ill as a positive desire. When some one receives a legacy from a rich relative of whose existence he had not the faintest idea, he experiences a pleasure without having felt any preceding desire.



[13] Hence, if we set out to inquire whether the balance is on the side of pleasure or of pain, we must allow in our calculation for the pleasure of striving, the pleasure of the satisfaction of striving, and the pleasure which comes to us without any striving whatever. On the debit side we shall have to enter the displeasure of boredom, the displeasure of unfulfilled striving, and, lastly, the displeasure which comes to us without any striving on our part. Under this last heading we shall have to put also the displeasure caused by work that has been forced upon us, not chosen by ourselves.

[14] This leads us to the question, What is the right method for striking the balance between the credit and the debit columns? Eduard von Hartmann asserts that reason holds the scales. It is true that he says (Philosophie des Unbewussten, 7th edition, vol. ii. p. 290): "Pain and pleasure exist only in so far as they are actually being felt." It follows that there can be no standard for pleasure other than the subjective standard of feeling. I must feel whether the sum of my disagreeable feelings, contrasted with my agreeable feelings, results in me in a balance of pleasure or of pain. But, notwithstanding this, van Hartmann maintains that

"though the value of the life of every being can be set down only according to its own subjective measure, yet it follows by no means that every being is able to compute the correct algebraic sum of all the feelings of its life —or, in other words, that its total estimate of its own life, with regard to its subjective feelings, should be correct." But this means that rational estimation of feelings is reinstated as the standard of value.



For Hartmann we calculate the "quantity of pleasure" by means of a rational estimation of feelings to establish the value of life.

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14.6 Quality Of Pleasure (critical examination of feeling)

[15] It is because Von Hartmann holds this view that he thinks it necessary, in order to arrive at a correct valuation of life, to clear out of the way those factors which falsify our judgment about the balance of pleasure and of pain. He tries to do this in two ways: first, by showing that our desire (instinct, will) operates as a disturbing factor in the sober estimation of feeling-values; e.g., whereas we ought to judge that sexual enjoyment is a source of evil, we are beguiled by the fact that the sexual instinct is very strong in us, into pretending to experience a pleasure which does not occur in the alleged intensity at all. We are bent on indulging ourselves, hence we do not acknowledge to ourselves that the indulgence makes us suffer. Secondly, Von Hartmann subjects feelings to a criticism designed to show, that the objects to which our feelings attach themselves reveal themselves as illusions when examined by reason, and that our feelings are destroyed from the moment that our constantly growing insight sees through the illusions.



We are misled by instinctual desires that conjure up the prospect of a pleasure that does not occur in the expected intensity at all.

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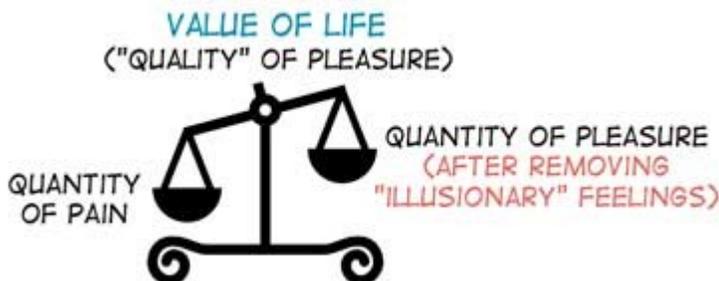
[16] Von Hartmann, then, conceives the matter as follows. Suppose an ambitious man wants to determine clearly whether, up to the moment of his inquiry, there has been a surplus of pleasure or of pain in his life. He has to eliminate two sources of error that may affect his judgment. Being ambitious, this fundamental feature of his character will make him see all the pleasures of the public recognition of his achievements larger than they are, and all the insults suffered through rebuffs smaller than they are. At the time when he suffered the rebuffs he felt the insults just because he is ambitious, but in recollection they appear to him in a milder light, whereas the pleasures of recognition to which he is so much more susceptible leave a far deeper impression. Undeniably, it is a real benefit to an ambitious man that it should be so, for the deception diminishes his pain in the moment of self-analysis. But, none the less, it falsifies his judgments. The sufferings which he now reviews as through a veil were actually experienced by him in all their intensity. Hence he enters them at a wrong valuation on the debit side of his account. In order to arrive at a correct estimate an ambitious man would have to lay aside his ambition for the time of his inquiry. He would have to review his past life without any distorting glasses before his mind's eye, else he will resemble a merchant who, in making up his books, enters among the items on the credit side his own zeal in business.



An ambitious person sees all the pleasures of public recognition as larger than they actually are.

[17] But Von Hartmann goes even further. He says the ambitious man must make clear to himself that the public recognition which he craves is not worth having. By himself, or with the guidance of others, he must attain the insight that rational beings cannot attach any value to recognition by others, seeing that "in all matters which are not vital questions of development, or which have not been definitely settled by science," it is always as certain as anything can be "that the majority is wrong and the minority right." "Whoever makes ambition the lode-star of his life puts the happiness of his life at the mercy of so fallible a judgment" (Philosophie des Unbewussten, vol. ii, p. 332). If the ambitious man acknowledges all this to himself, he is bound to regard all the achievements of his ambition as illusions, including even the feelings

which attach themselves to the satisfaction of his ambitious desires. This is the reason why Von Hartmann says that we must also strike out of the balance-sheet of our life-values whatever is seen to be illusory in our feelings of pleasure. What remains after that represents the sum-total of pleasure in life, and this sum is so small compared with the sum-total of pain that life is no enjoyment and non-existence preferable to existence.



[18] But whilst it is immediately evident that the interference of the instinct of ambition produces self-deception in striking the balance of pleasures and thus leads to a false result, we must none the less challenge what Von Hartmann says concerning the illusory character of the objects to which pleasure is attached. For the elimination, from the credit-side of life, of all pleasurable feelings which accompany actual or supposed illusions would positively falsify the balance of pleasure and of pain. An ambitious man has genuinely enjoyed the acclamations of the multitude, irrespective of whether subsequently he himself,

the elimination of all "illusory" feelings from life's balance actually cancels out life feelings that were genuinely there

or some other person, recognizes that this acclamation is an illusion. The pleasure, once enjoyed, is not one whit diminished by such recognition. Consequently the elimination of all these "illusory" feelings from life's balance, so far from making our judgment about our feelings more correct, actually cancels out of life feelings which were genuinely there.

[19] And why are these feelings to be eliminated? Because they are connected with objects which turn out to have been illusions. But this means that the value of life is made dependent, not on the quantity of pleasure, but on the quality of pleasure, and this quality is made dependent on the value of the objects which cause the pleasure. But if I am to determine the value of life only by the quantity of pleasure or pain which it brings, I have no right to presuppose something else by which first to determine the positive or negative value of pleasure. If I say I want to compare quantity of pleasure and quantity of pain, in order to see which is greater, I am bound to bring into my account all pleasures and pains in their actual intensities, regardless of whether they are based on illusions or not. If I credit a pleasure which rests on an illusion with a lesser value for life than one which can justify itself before the tribunal of reason, I make the value of life dependent on factors other than mere quantity of pleasure.



The "quality" of pleasure depends on the value of the objects that cause the pleasure.

[20] Whoever, like Eduard von Hartmann, puts down pleasure as less valuable when it is attached to a worthless object, is like a merchant who enters the considerable profits of a toy-factory at only one-quarter of their real value on the ground that the factory produces nothing but playthings for children.

[21] If the point is simply to weigh quantity of pleasure against quantity of pain, we ought to leave the illusory character of the objects of some pleasures entirely out of account.

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14.7 Pursuit Of Pleasure (hopelessness of egotism)

[22] The method, then, which Van Hartmann recommends, viz., rational criticism of the quantities of pleasure and pain produced by life, has taught us so far how we are to get the data for our calculation, i.e., what we are to put down on the one side of our account and what on the other. But how are we to make the actual calculation? Is reason able also to strike the balance?

[23] A merchant makes a miscalculation when the gain calculated by him does not balance with the profits which he has demonstrably enjoyed from his business or is still expecting to enjoy. Similarly, the philosopher will undoubtedly have made a mistake in his estimate, if he cannot demonstrate in actual feeling the surplus of pleasure or, as the case may be, of pain which his manipulation of the account may have yielded.

[24] For the present I shall not criticize the calculations of those Pessimists who support their estimate of the value of the world by an appeal to reason. But if we are to decide whether to carry on the business of life or not, we shall demand first to be shown where the alleged balance of pain is to be found.

[25] Here we touch the point where reason is not in a position by itself to determine the surplus of pleasure or of pain, but where it must exhibit this surplus in life as something actually felt. For man reaches reality not through concepts by themselves, but through the interpenetration of concepts and percepts (and feelings are percepts) which thinking brings about (cp. p. 56). A merchant will give up his business only when the loss of goods, as calculated by his accountant, is actually confirmed by the facts.



If there is no hope of future pleasure to help get over the pain, the bankruptcy of life will follow.

If the facts do not bear out the calculation, he asks his accountant to check the account once more. That is exactly what a man will do in the business of life. If a philosopher wants to prove to him that the pain is far greater than the pleasure, but that he does not feel it so, then he will reply: "You have made a mistake in your theorizings; repeat your analysis once more." But if there comes a time in a business when the losses are really so great that the firm's credit no longer suffices to satisfy the creditors, bankruptcy results, even though the merchant may avoid keeping himself informed by careful accounts about the state of his affairs. Similarly, supposing the quantity of pain in a man's life became at any time so great that no hope (credit) of future pleasure could help him to get over the pain, the bankruptcy of life's business would inevitably follow.

[26] Now the number of those who commit suicide is relatively small compared with the number of those who live bravely on. Only very few men give up the business of life because of the pain involved. What follows? Either that it is untrue to say that the quantity of pain is greater than the quantity of pleasure, or that we do not make the continuation of life dependent on the quantity of felt pleasure or pain.

[27] In a very curious way, Eduard von Hartmann's Pessimism, having concluded that life is valueless because it contains a surplus of pain, yet affirms the necessity of going on with life. This necessity lies in the fact that the world-purpose mentioned above (p. 127) can be achieved only by the ceaseless, devoted labour of human beings. But so long as men still pursue their egoistical appetites they are unfit for this devoted labour. It is not until experience and reason have convinced them that the pleasures which Egoism pursues are incapable of attainment that they give themselves up to their proper task. In this way the pessimistic conviction is offered as the fountain of unselfishness. An education based on Pessimism is to exterminate Egoism by convincing it of the hopelessness of achieving its aims.

[28] According to this view, then, the striving for pleasure is fundamentally inherent in human nature. It is only through the insight into the impossibility of satisfaction that this striving abdicates in favour of the higher tasks of humanity.

[29] It is, however, impossible to say of this ethical theory, which expects from the establishment of Pessimism a devotion to unselfish ends in life, that it really overcomes Egoism in the proper sense of the word. The moral ideas are said not to be strong enough to dominate the will until man has learnt that the selfish striving after pleasure cannot lead to any satisfaction. Man, whose selfishness desires the grapes of pleasure, finds them sour because he cannot attain them, and so he turns his back on them and devotes himself to an unselfish life. Moral ideals, then, according to the opinion of Pessimists, are too weak to overcome Egoism, but they establish their kingdom on the territory which previous recognition of the hopelessness of Egoism has cleared for them.

[30] If men by nature strive after pleasure but are unable to attain it, it follows that annihilation of existence and salvation through non-existence are the only rational ends. And if we accept the view that the real bearer of the pain of the world is God, it follows that the task of men consists in helping to bring about the salvation of God. To commit suicide does not advance, but hinders, the realization of this aim. God must rationally be conceived as having created men for the sole purpose of bringing about his salvation through their action, else would creation be purposeless. Every one of us has to perform his own definite task in the general work of salvation. If he withdraws from the task by suicide, another has to do the work which was intended for him. Somebody else must bear in his stead the agony of existence. And since in every being it is, at bottom, God who is the ultimate bearer of all pain, it follows that to commit suicide does not in the least diminish the quantity of God's pain, but rather imposes upon God the additional difficulty of providing a substitute.



An education based on Pessimism is to exterminate Egoism by convincing it of the hopelessness of achieving its aims, only then do they devote themselves to the higher tasks of humanity.

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14.8 Value Of Pleasure (satisfaction of needs)

[31] This whole theory presupposes that pleasure is the standard of value for life. Now life manifests itself through a number of instincts (needs). If the value of life depended on its producing more pleasure than pain, an instinct would have to be called valueless which brought to its owner a balance of pain. Let us, if you please, inspect instinct and pleasure, in order to see whether the former can be measured by the latter. And lest we give rise to the suspicion that life does not begin for us below the sphere of the "aristocrats of the intellects" we shall begin our examination with a "purely animal" need, viz., hunger.

[32] Hunger arises when our organs are unable to continue functioning without a fresh supply of food. What a hungry man desires, in the first instance, is to have his hunger stilled. As soon as the supply of nourishment has reached the point where hunger ceases, everything has been attained that the food-instinct craves. The pleasure which is connected with satiety consists, to begin with, in the removal of the pain which is caused by hunger. But to the mere food-instinct there is added a further need. For man does not merely desire to restore, by the consumption of food, the disturbance in the functioning of his organs, or to get rid of the pain of hunger, but he seeks to effect this to the accompaniment of pleasurable sensations of taste. When he feels hungry, and is within half an hour of a meal to which he looks forward with pleasure, he avoids spoiling his enjoyment of the better food by taking inferior food which might satisfy his hunger sooner. He needs hunger in order to get the full enjoyment out of his meal. Thus hunger becomes for him at the same time a cause of pleasure. Supposing all the hunger in the world could be satisfied, we should get the total quantity of pleasure which we owe to the existence of the desire for nourishment. But we should still have to add the additional pleasure which gourmets gain by cultivating the sensibility of their taste-nerves beyond the common measure.

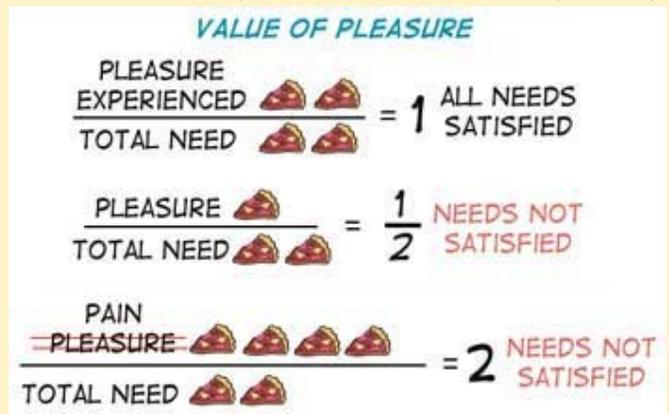


Gourmets cultivate the pleasurable sensations of taste to increase the quantity of pleasure.

[33] The greatest conceivable value of this quantity of pleasure would be reached, if no need remained unsatisfied which was in any way connected with this kind of pleasure, and if with the smooth of pleasure we had not at the same time to take a certain amount of the rough of pain.

[34] Modern Science holds the view that Nature produces more life than it can maintain, i.e., that Nature also produces more hunger than it is able to satisfy. The surplus of life thus produced is condemned to a painful death in the struggle for existence. Granted that the needs of life are, at every moment of the world-process, greater than the available means of satisfaction, and that the enjoyment of life is correspondingly diminished, yet such enjoyment as actually occurs is not one whit reduced thereby. Wherever a desire is satisfied, there the corresponding quantity of pleasure exists, even though in the creature itself which desires, or in its fellow-creatures, there are a large number of unsatisfied instincts. What is diminished is not the quantity but the "value" of the enjoyment of life. If only a part of the needs of a living creature find satisfaction, it experiences still a corresponding pleasure. This pleasure is inferior in value in proportion as it is inadequate to the total demand of life within a given group of desires.

We might represent this value as a fraction, the numerator of which is the actually experienced pleasure, whilst the denominator is the sum-total of needs. This fraction has the value 1 when the numerator and the denominator are equal, i.e., when all needs are also satisfied. The fraction becomes greater than 1 when a creature experiences more pleasure than its desires demand. It becomes smaller than 1 when the quantity of pleasure falls short of the sum total of desires. But



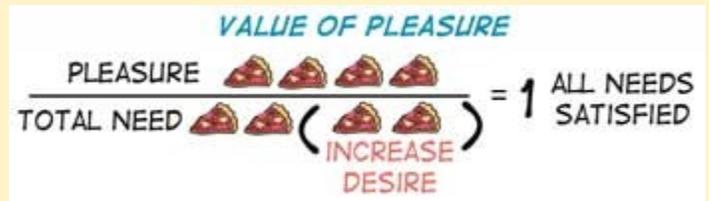
the fraction can never have the value 0 so long as the numerator has any value at all, however small.

If a man were to make up the account before his death and to distribute in imagination over the whole of life the quantity belonging to a particular instinct (e.g., hunger), as well as the demands of this instinct, then the total pleasure which he has experienced might have only a very small value, but this value would never become altogether nil. If the quantity of pleasure remains constant, then with every increase in the needs of the creature the value of the pleasure diminishes. The same is true for the totality of life in nature. The greater the number of creatures in proportion to those which are able fully to satisfy their instincts, the smaller is the average pleasure-value of life.

The cheques on life's pleasure which are drawn in our favour in the form of our instincts, become increasingly less valuable in proportion as we cannot expect to cash them at their full face value. Suppose I get enough to eat on three days and am then compelled to go hungry for another three days, the actual pleasure on the three days of eating is not thereby diminished. But I have now to think of it as distributed over six days, and this reduces its "value" for my food-instinct by half. The same applies to the quantity of pleasure as measured by the degree of my need. Suppose I have hunger enough for two sandwiches and can only get one, the pleasure which this one gives me has only half the value it would have had if the eating of it had stilled my hunger. This is the way in which we determine the value of a pleasure in life. We determine it by the needs of life. Our desires supply the measure; pleasure is what is measured. The pleasure of stilling hunger has value only because hunger exists, and it has determinate value through the proportion which it bears to the intensity of the hunger.

[35] Unfulfilled demands of our life throw their shadow even upon fulfilled desires, and thus detract from the value of pleasurable hours. But we may speak also of the present value of a feeling of pleasure. This value is the smaller, the more insignificant the pleasure is in proportion to the duration and intensity of our desire.

[36] A quantity of pleasure has its full value for us when its duration and degree exactly coincide with our desire. A quantity of pleasure which is smaller than our desire diminishes the value of the pleasure. A quantity which is greater produces a surplus which has not been demanded and which is felt as pleasure only so long as, whilst enjoying the pleasure, we can correspondingly increase the intensity of our desire.



If we are not able to keep pace in the increase of our desire with the increase in pleasure, then pleasure turns into displeasure. The object which would otherwise satisfy us, when it assails us unbidden makes us suffer. This proves that pleasure has value for us only so long as we have desires by which to measure it. An excess of pleasurable feeling turns into pain. This may be observed especially in those men whose desire for a given kind of pleasure is very small. In people whose desire for food is dulled, eating easily produces nausea. This again shows that desire is the measure of value for pleasure.

[37] Now Pessimism might reply that an unsatisfied desire for food produces not only the pain of a lost enjoyment, but also positive ills, agony, and misery in the world. It appeals for confirmation to the untold misery of all who are harassed by anxieties about food, and to the vast amount of pain which for these unfortunates results indirectly from their lack of food. And if it wants to extend its assertion also to non-human nature, it can point to the agonies of animals which, in certain seasons, die from lack of food. Concerning all these evils the Pessimist maintains that they far outweigh the quantity of pleasure which the food-instinct brings into the world.

[38] There is no doubt that it is possible to compare pleasure and pain one with another, and determine the surplus of the one or the other as we determine commercial gain or loss. But if Pessimists think that a surplus on the side of pain is a ground for inferring that life is valueless, they fall into the mistake of making a calculation which in actual life is never made.

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14.9 Will For Pleasure (intensity of desire)

[39] Our desire, in any given case, is directed to a particular object. The value of the pleasure of satisfaction, as we have seen, will be the greater in proportion as the quantity of the pleasure is greater relatively to the intensity of our desire. It depends, further, on this intensity how large a quantity of pain we are willing to bear in order to gain the pleasure. We compare the quantity of pain, not with the quantity of pleasure, but with the intensity of our desire. He who finds great pleasure in eating will, by reason of his pleasure in better times, be more easily able to bear a period of hunger than one who does not derive pleasure from the satisfaction of the instinct for food. A woman who wants a child compares the pleasures resulting from the possession of a child, not with the quantities of pain due to pregnancy, birth, nursing, etc., but with her desire for the possession of the child.

[40] We never aim at a certain quantity of pleasure in the abstract, but at concrete satisfaction of a perfectly determinate kind. When we are aiming at a definite object or a definite sensation, it will not satisfy us to be offered some other object or some other sensation, even though they give the same amount of pleasure. If we desire satisfaction of hunger, we cannot substitute for the pleasure which this satisfaction would bring a pleasure equally great but produced by a walk. Only if our desire were, quite generally, for a certain quantity of pleasure, would it have to die away at once if this pleasure were unattainable except at the price of an even greater quantity of pain. But because we desire a determinate kind of satisfaction, we experience the pleasure of realization even when, along with it, we have to bear an even greater pain.

The instincts of living beings tend in a determinate direction and aim at concrete objects, and it is just for this reason that it is impossible, in our calculations, to set down as an equivalent factor the quantities of pain which we have to bear in the pursuit of our object. Provided the desire is sufficiently intense to be still to some degree in existence even after having overcome the pain—however great that pain, taken in the abstract, may be—the pleasure of satisfaction may still be enjoyed to its full extent. The desire, therefore, does not measure the pain directly against the pleasure which we attain, but indirectly by measuring the pain (proportionately) against its own intensity. The question is not whether the pleasure to be gained is greater than the pain, but whether the desire for the object at which we aim is greater than the inhibitory effect of the pain which we have to face. If the inhibition is greater than the desire, the latter yields to the inevitable, slackens, and ceases to strive. But inasmuch as we strive after a determinate land of satisfaction, the pleasure we gain thereby acquires an importance which makes it possible, once satisfaction has been attained, to allow in our calculation for the inevitable pain only in so far as it has diminished the intensity of our desire.

If I am passionately fond of beautiful views, I never calculate the amount of pleasure which the view from the mountain-top gives me as compared directly with the pain of the toilsome ascent and descent; but I reflect whether, after having overcome all difficulties, my desire for the view will still be sufficiently intense.

Thus pleasure and pain can be made commensurate only mediately through the intensity of the desire. Hence the question is not at all whether there is a surplus of pleasure or of pain, but whether the desire for pleasure is sufficiently intense to overcome the pain.



The question is not whether there is a surplus of pleasure or of pain, but whether the desire for pleasure is sufficiently intense to overcome the pain.

[41] A proof for the accuracy of this view is to be found in the fact, that we put a higher value on pleasure when it has to be purchased at the price of great pain than when it simply falls into our lap like a gift from heaven. When sufferings and agonies have toned down our desire and yet after all our aim is attained, then the pleasure is all the greater in proportion to the intensity of the desire that has survived. Now it is just this proportion which, as I have shown (p. 137), represents the value of the pleasure. A further proof is to be found in the fact that all living creatures (including men) develop their instincts as long as they are able to bear the inhibiting pains and agonies. The struggle for existence is but a consequence of this fact. All living creatures strive to expand, and only those abandon the struggle whose desires are throttled by the overwhelming magnitude of the difficulties with which they meet. Every living creature seeks food until sheer lack of food destroys its life. Man, too, does not turn his hand against himself until rightly or wrongly, he believes that he cannot attain those aims in life which alone seem to him worth striving for. So long as he still believes in the possibility of attaining what he thinks worth striving for he will battle against all pains and miseries. Philosophy would have to convince man that striving is rational only when pleasure outweighs pain, for it is his nature to strive for the attainment of the objects which he desires, so long as he can bear the inevitable incidental pain, however great that may be. Such a philosophy, however, would be mistaken, because it would make the human will dependent on a factor (the surplus of pleasure over pain) which, at first, is wholly foreign to man's point of view. The original measure of his will is his desire, and desire asserts itself as long as it can.



It is his nature to strive for the attainment of the objects that he desires, so long as he can bear the inevitable pain.

The original measure of his will is his desire, and desire asserts itself as long as it can.



If I am compelled, in purchasing a certain quantity of apples, to take twice as many rotten ones as sound ones —because the seller wishes to clear out his stock— I shall not hesitate a moment to take the bad apples as well, if I put so high a value on the smaller quantity of good apples that I am prepared, in addition to the purchase price, to bear also the expense for the transportation of the rotten goods. This example illustrates the relation between the quantities of pleasure and of pain which are caused by a given instinct. I determine the value of the good apples, not by subtracting the sum of the good from that of the bad ones, but by the fact that, in spite of the presence of the bad ones, I still attach a value to the good ones.

[42] Just as I leave out of account the bad apples in the enjoyment of the good ones, so I surrender myself to the satisfaction of a desire after having shaken off the inevitable pains.

[43] Supposing even Pessimism were in the right with its assertion that the world contains more pain than pleasure, it would nevertheless have no influence upon the will, for living beings would still strive after such pleasure as remains. The empirical proof that pain overbalances pleasure is indeed effective for showing up the futility of that school of philosophy which looks for the value of life in a surplus of pleasure (Eudaemonism), but not for exhibiting the will, as such, as irrational. For the will is not set upon a surplus of pleasure, but on whatever quantity of pleasure remains after subtracting the pain. This remaining pleasure still appears always as an object worth pursuing.

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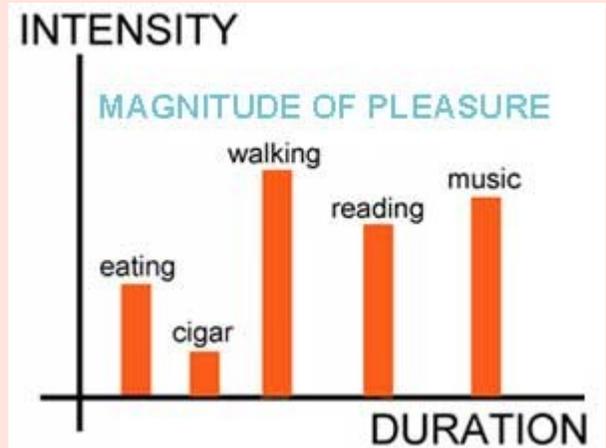
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14.10 Magnitude Of Pleasure (amusement)

[44] An attempt has been made to refute Pessimism by asserting that it is impossible to determine by calculation the surplus of pleasure or of pain in the world. The possibility of every calculation depends on our being able to compare the things to be calculated in respect of their magnitudes. Every pain and every pleasure has a definite magnitude (intensity and duration). Further, we can compare pleasurable feelings of different kinds one with another, at least approximately, with regard to their magnitudes. We know whether we derive more pleasure from a good cigar or from a good joke. No objection can be raised against the comparability of different pleasures and pains in respect of their magnitudes. The thinker who sets himself the task of determining the surplus of pleasure or pain in the world, starts from presuppositions which are undeniably legitimate. It is possible to maintain that the Pessimistic results are false, but it is not possible to doubt that quantities of pleasure and pain can be scientifically estimated, and that the surplus of the one or the other can thereby be determined. It is incorrect, however, to assert that from this calculation any conclusions can be drawn for the human will. The cases in which we really make the value of our activity dependent on whether pleasure or pain shows a surplus, are those in which the objects towards which our activity is directed are indifferent to us.

If I am to amuse myself after the day's work, then I simply ask myself, What gives me the greatest surplus of pleasure?

the scales incline towards the side of displeasure. If we are buying a toy for a child we consider, in selecting, what will give him the greatest pleasure, but in all other cases we are not determined exclusively by considerations of the balance of pleasure.



Every pain and every pleasure has a definite magnitude (intensity and duration).

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14.11 Highest Pleasure (realization of moral ideals)

[45] Hence, if Pessimistic thinkers believe that they are preparing the ground for an unselfish devotion to the work of civilization, by demonstrating that there is a greater quantity of pain than of pleasure in life, they forget altogether that the human will is so constituted that it cannot be influenced by this knowledge. The whole striving of men is directed towards the greatest possible satisfaction that is attainable after overcoming all difficulties. The hope of this satisfaction is the basis of all human activity. The work of every single individual and the whole achievement of civilization have their roots in this hope. The Pessimistic theory of Ethics thinks it necessary to represent the pursuit of pleasure as impossible, in order that man may devote himself to his proper moral tasks. But these moral tasks are nothing but the concrete natural and spiritual instincts; and he strives to satisfy these notwithstanding all incidental pain. The pursuit of pleasure, then, which the Pessimist sets himself to eradicate is nowhere to be found. But the tasks which man has to fulfil are fulfilled by him because from his very nature he wills to fulfil them.

The Pessimistic system of Ethics maintains that a man cannot devote himself to what he recognizes as his task in life until he has first given up the desire for pleasure. But no system of Ethics can ever invent other tasks than the realization of those satisfactions which human desires demand, and the fulfilment of man's moral ideas. No Ethical theory can deprive him of the pleasure which he experiences in the realization of what he desires. When the Pessimist says, "Do not strive after pleasure, for pleasure is unattainable; strive instead after what you recognize to be your task," we must reply that it is human nature to strive to do one's tasks, and that philosophy has gone astray in inventing the principle that man strives for nothing but pleasure. He aims at the satisfaction of what his nature demands, and the attainment of this satisfaction is to him a pleasure.

Pessimistic Ethics, in demanding that we should strive, not after pleasure, but after the realization of what we recognize as our task, lays its finger on the very thing which man wills in virtue of his own nature. There is no need for man to be turned inside out by philosophy, there is no need for him to discard his nature, in order to be moral. Morality means striving for an end so long as the pain connected with this striving does not inhibit the desire for the end altogether; and this is the essence of all genuine will. Ethics is not founded on the eradication of all desire for pleasure, in order that, in its place, bloodless moral ideas may set up their rule where no strong desire for pleasure stands in their way, but it is based on the strong will which attains its end even when the path to it is full of thorns.

[46] Moral ideals have their root in the moral imagination of man. Their realization depends on the desire for them being sufficiently intense to overcome pains and agonies. They are man's own intuitions. In them his spirit braces itself to action. They are what he wills, because their realization is his highest pleasure. He needs no Ethical theory first to forbid him to strive for pleasure and then to prescribe to him what he shall strive for. He will, of himself, strive for moral ideals provided his moral imagination is sufficiently active to inspire him with the intuitions, which give strength to his will to overcome all resistance.



Moral ideals are his own intuitions and their realization is his highest pleasure.



He will strive for moral ideals provided his moral imagination is active enough to inspire him with intuitions that give his will the strength to overcome all resistance.

[47] If a man strives towards sublimely great ideals, it is because they are the content of his will, and because their realization will bring him an enjoyment compared with which the pleasure which inferior spirits draw from the satisfaction of their commonplace needs is a mere nothing. Idealists delight in translating their ideals into reality.

[48] Anyone who wants to eradicate the pleasure which the fulfillment of human desires brings, will have first to degrade man to the position of a slave who does not act because he wills, but because he must. For the attainment of the object of will gives pleasure. What we call the good is not what a man must do, but what he wills to do when he unfolds the fullness of his nature. Anyone who does not acknowledge this must deprive man of all the objects of his will, and then prescribe to him from without what he is to make the content of his will.

[49] Man values the satisfaction of a desire because the desire springs from his own nature. What he attains is valuable because it is the object of his will. If we deny any value to the ends which men do will, then we shall have to look for the ends that are valuable among objects which men do not will.

[50] A system of Ethics, then, which is built up on Pessimism has its root in the contempt of man's moral imagination. Only he who does not consider the individual human mind capable of determining for itself the content of its striving can look for the sum and substance of will in the craving for pleasure. A man without imagination does not create moral ideas; they must be imparted to him. Physical nature sees to it that he seeks the satisfaction of his lower desires; but for the development of the whole man the desires which have their origin in the spirit are fully as necessary. Only those who believe that man has no such spiritual desires at all can maintain that they must be imparted to him from without. On that view it will also be correct to say that it is man's duty to do what he does not will to do. Every Ethical system which demands of man that he should suppress his will in order to fulfil tasks which he does

moral action consists, not in the eradication of one's individual will, but in the fullest development of human nature

not will, works, not with the whole man, but with a stunted being who lacks the faculty of spiritual desires. For a man who has been harmoniously developed, the so-called ideas of the Good lie, not without, but within the range of his will. Moral action consists, not in the eradication of one's individual will, but in the fullest development of human nature. To regard moral ideals as attainable only on condition that man destroys his individual will, is to ignore the fact that these ideals are as much rooted in man's will as the satisfaction of the so-called animal instincts.

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14.12 Joy Of Achievement (measure achievement against aims)

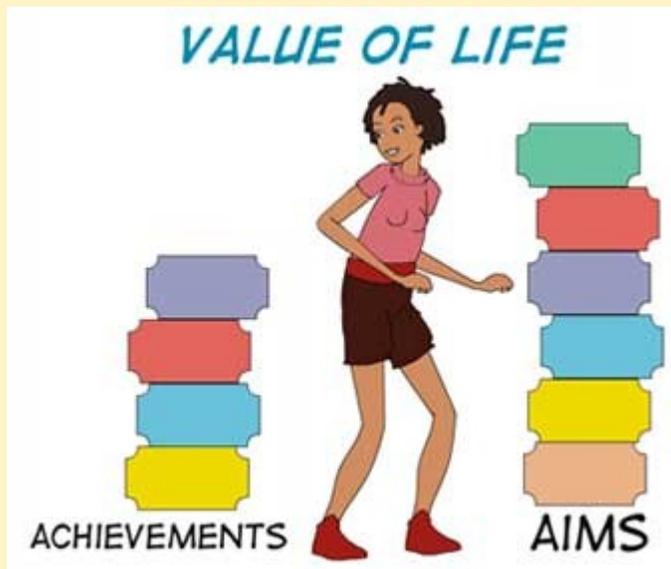
[51] It cannot be denied that the views here outlined may easily be misunderstood. Immature youths without any moral imagination like to look upon the instincts of their half developed natures as the full substance of humanity, and reject all moral ideas which they have not themselves originated, in order that they may "live themselves out" without restriction. But it goes without saying that a theory which holds for a fully developed man does not hold for half-developed boys. Anyone who still requires to be brought by education to the point where his moral nature breaks through the shell of his lower passions, cannot expect to be measured by the same standard as a mature man. But it was not my intention to set down what a half-fledged youth requires to be taught, but the essential nature of a mature man.

[52] Every mature man is the maker of his own value. He does not aim at pleasure, which comes to him as a gift of grace on the part of nature or of the Creator; nor does he live for the sake of what

he does not aim at pleasure, which comes to him as a gift of grace, nor does he live for the sake of duty he recognizes as duty, after he has put away from him the desire for

pleasure. He acts as he wills, that is, in accordance with his moral intuitions; and he finds in the attainment of what he wills the true enjoyment of life. He determines the value of his life by measuring his achievements against his aims. An Ethical system which puts "ought" in the place of "will," duty in the place of inclination, is consistent in determining the value of man by the ratio between the demands of duty and his actual achievements. It applies to man a measure that is external to his own nature. The view which I have here developed points man back to himself. It

recognizes as the true value of life nothing except what each individual regards as such by the measure of his own will. A value of life which the individual does not recognize is as little acknowledged by my views as a purpose of life which does not spring from the value thus recognized. My view looks upon the individual as his own master and the assessor of his own value.



He determines the value of life by measuring his achievements against his aims.