

CHAPTER XV

11. THE LAW OF THE IDEAL OF PERSONALITY

1. THE LAW OF THE IDEAL OF PERSONALITY AND ITS PLACE IN THE SYSTEM

STATEMENT of the Law of the Ideal of Personality: *All persons ought to judge and guide all of their acts by their ideal conception (in harmony with the other Laws) of what the whole personality ought to become both individually and socially.*

This Law brings the System of Moral Laws to its climax. It prescribes the construction and use of a goal or ideal to guide the direction of moral development. It adds to the Laws of Individualism and of Altruism a definitely concrete unity of purpose, an aesthetic fact which calls on the individual to create out of the materials of his life the plan of a harmonious whole which he aims to realize. It makes the ideal more specific than did the Law of the Most Inclusive End. It presupposes and correlates all of the previous Laws, and, as was shown in connection with the discussion of the place of the Law of Ideal Control in the System (Chapter XII), it is at once the synthesis and the supplementation of the two Laws of ideals with which the Logical Laws and the Axiological Laws culminated, namely, the Law of Autonomy (that self-imposed ideals are imperative) and the Law of Ideal Control (that ideal values should control empirical values). The Personalistic Laws and the whole System now find their ultimate unity and consummation in the obligation to form and to apply a conception of a life purpose, which

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is not only self-imposed and ideal, but also concrete and unified. The Law might read: "Know your own mind," or: "Have a consistent life plan," or: "Be aware of your highest possibilities." But none of these brief formulas brings out the full force which is found in the formal statement of the Law.

2. PROOF OF THE LAW OF THE IDEAL OF PERSONALITY

If the Law of the Ideal of Personality were not true, the unification of value-experience would not be obligatory, which would violate the Axiological Law; the highest attainable ideal would not be obligatory, which would violate the Law of Ideal Control; and the realization of that ideal in individual and social experience would not be obligatory, which would violate the Laws of Individualism and of Altruism. Hence the Law of the Ideal of Personality is true.

3. ITS BASIS IN EXPERIENCE AND HISTORY

The primary empirical basis of the Law of the Ideal of Personality is the experienced fact of a unity of consciousness as the immediate datum of all experience, the implications of which lead us to acknowledge a whole self—a total personality. Experiences of obligation and of rational law, which supply the ground for our belief in a past and a future self lying beyond the immediate present, also point toward the conception of an ideal that ought to be attained. Moreover, the activity that is constantly going on in our experience needs to be directed by a plan of action, an ideal, which should, in the last analysis, be a unity because the self is a unity.

The conception of an ideal of personality is an ancient one. Heroes and gods embodied various ideals. The caste system of India, with all its disadvantages, sufficed to set a certain standard for each caste, as did

Plato in the *Republic*; Confucius pictured the "superior man"; the Greeks had one ideal of the "wise man" and the Hebrews another. It was in Jesus that the ideal of personality had its highest historical illustration. The knight, the crusader, the Cavalier, the Puritan, the saint, the reformer, the soldier, the inventor, the scientist, the poet, the artist, the husband, the wife, the king, the subject, the president, the citizen, the farmer, the laborer, the capitalist—each of these words suggests a historical type of personality which embodies a specific ideal.¹

But it was in the Eighteenth Century that the ideal of humanity was made a specific theoretical interest and problem.² It is conspicuous in such writers as Rousseau, Kant, and Herder. The capacity for reason, for science and art, for morality and law, and for friendship, are some of the marks of their ideal of humanity. Kant, in a very interesting passage, points out that everything in the universe—plants, animals, the structure of the world—embodies "*Ideen*" (ideals), yet that no being conforms to the ideal of the perfection of its kind, not even man, who bears in his soul the ideal of humanity as the pattern for his acts.³ Elsewhere, Kant remarks that the "faculty of acting purposively is the characteristic of humanity,"⁴ a view strikingly similar to William James's contention that the self is a "fighter for ends."⁵

The conception of an ideal of humanity or personality has been prominent in many other thinkers. Schleiermacher presented it in the form of the Ideal

¹ See Spranger, I, p.

² See Kant, GMS (edited by Otto), 199-204. Kinkel, HG, is a valuable German study of the ideal of humanity.

³ Kant, KdrV (A), 317-318.

⁴ Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, in *Werke*, III (PhB), 283.

⁵ James, POP, I, 141.

of the Wise Man, in whom moral force and purpose is uninterruptedly and exclusively active.⁶ The ideal of personality likewise occupies a prominent place in T. H. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* and in Borden P. Bowne's *Principles of Ethics*. Nietzsche's Superman or Beyond-Man (as *Übermensch* is sometimes translated) is an ideal of a personality of great courage, strength, and creativity. One's ideal of personality affects one's whole being; "tell me what kind of man you are," says Fichte in a much-quoted phrase, "and I will tell you what kind of philosophy you hold." Steinthal makes "the moral personality" the "first ideal" of ethical theory.⁷ William Stern and Max Scheler and Otmár Dittrich (the historian of ethics) all call their ethical standpoint personalistic, thus putting personality in the foreground.

Further illustrations of the recognition of the ideal of personality as a fundamental ethical principle could readily be multiplied. That ideal is an established result of the development of ethical science.

4. PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL IDEALS

When an ethicist asserts that the Law of the Ideal of Personality is the supreme and culminating ethical principle, he appears to be running counter to one very important achievement of the race, namely, the ability to be impersonal. It is often said that there are three levels of conversation; the lowest deals with personalities, a higher with things, and the highest with ideas. Science is impersonal; it does not consult the preferences or the moral character of individuals, but it seeks for impersonal, objective truth—a truth that is above "the personal equation" and that eliminates or seeks

⁶ Schleiermacher, *Werke*, I, 151.

⁷ Steinthal, AE, 97.

to eliminate all factors due to the personality of the scientist. In his famous essay on genius, Schopenhauer maintains, with well-supported arguments, that genius is objectivity.

Are we then, perhaps, in error when we regard the Law of the Ideal of Personality as the highest unification of moral law? While the thought of Plato is ambiguous, there are many who regard his "Ideas" as impersonal realities, which are the objects of knowledge and the criterion of goodness; and we give unstinted admiration to those who, like Plato, put the cause which they serve above their own personality. In Chapter XIV we found that Schwarz places social values above individual ones; but he also places the impersonal—truth and objective value—above the social, "higher," he says, "than the works of love, courtesy, and mercy."⁸

There is undoubtedly a truth underlying this protest against personalistic ethics. Devotion to right should stand above personal preferences; personalistically stated, if the individual does not prefer right to his fancies and desires, he ought to. But no love of right or truth, no scientific or Platonic objectivity, should conceal from us the fact that disciplined devotion to truth or beauty or goodness is itself a personal achievement, an experience of personal value. We say that a man's fondness for calf's liver is personal, whereas his proof of the first proposition of Euclid is impersonal. Yet this is a very loose use of terms. The act of proving a proposition in geometry is a personal act which is recognized as valid by all persons who think. We use the word "impersonal" in this connection not to mean that the proof has no relation to persons, but that it has a relation to all persons.

It is, however, probably a fact that if one concen-

⁸ Schwarz, SL, 372.

trates all of one's attention, or the bulk of it, on truths which concern all persons in general and no one person in particular more than another, there is a natural psychological tendency to underestimate the individual and to ignore the requirements of the Law of Specification in human relations. This is, in some respects, a gain; it frees the person who is thus minded from many of the admittedly annoying obligations of ordinary life. Yet this gain comes only at a great loss to himself. When the impersonal admirer of pure objectivity takes account of what he has contributed to the world, it may turn out that he has lost the quality of humanness and almost of humanity; and in the long run the knowledge of objective truth would be self-defeating and useless if it were possessed by a race of beings like him.

Paul Ernst doubtless expresses this point of view in an extreme form in one of his dialogues, but he is describing a danger that is felt by most responsible men of science, as well as by their poet-critics, when he makes The Poet say to The Scholar: "You will not deny that the scientific methods of today have, it is true, carried the sciences rapidly forward in the way in which you desire, but that among men of science today there are fewer outstanding personalities and more block-heads than there used to be."⁹ The scientific machine age has tended to depersonalize us. Can that seriously be counted as a gain? Is not Treitschke nearer right than the advocates of purely impersonal value when he says that "the name of no man endures in history if he was not greater than his deeds?"¹⁰

As opposed, then, to a mistaken overemphasis on the impersonal, it must be said that there are no strictly impersonal ethical ideals. There are ethical proposi-

⁹ Ernst, EG, 58.

¹⁰ Treitschke, DL, 28.

tions about "What I ought to do (or be or think)" and about "What *we* ought to do (or be or think)," but none about "What *it* ought to be." There are no impersonal moral causes; all moral causes aim at personal values—for all persons, for some persons, or for one person. But if no person is benefited, then there is no moral value; this follows from the very nature of value-experience. The legislator or the scientist who has no particular persons in mind as his beneficiaries, really is giving values to an entire nation or to all humanity. The "eternal values" are not values merely because they are eternal, but, rather, because they satisfy and ennoble all persons who are loyal to them.

This personalistic aspect of the moral good accounts for the familiar fact that example is often more effective than precept. The former is a personal deed, the latter an impersonal concept. Hence comes the significance of "heroes and hero worship," hence also the fact that most great religions have personal founders and personal gods. The chief advantage of Christianity over Mohammedanism is the personal superiority of Jesus to Mohammed. Or, to take a very different illustration, one chief source of the power of corrupt political organizations is the strong personality of the "boss." A trivial, but illuminating, modern instance of the personal nature of ideals is found in the list of qualifications of the ideal policeman, drawn up by August Vollmer, professor of police administration in the University of Chicago, as reported in the press. It consists of "The wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, the tolerance of Confucius, the patience of Job, the strategy of Napoleon." Wisdom, courage, tolerance, patience, and strategy are ideals; but they are mere conceptual abstractions until they are realized as values in the personal experience of Confucius or Patrolman Schmidt.

5. PERSONALITY AS EMPIRICAL AND AS IDEAL

Life as we actually live it is the empirical personality of each one of us, our datum self. This empirical personality with its actual combination of good and bad, of rational and irrational, is what we now are. The moral problem arises from the inconsistency between the empirical personality as a whole and the ideals which it recognizes. This we have learned both from the Law of Autonomy and from the Law of Ideal Control. But it is worth noting that the conflict between empirical values and ideal values takes place within the empirical personality and not merely between it and some external authority. It is an autonomous, and not a heteronomous struggle.

Within the empirical personality there is a tendency to prefer one type of action to another. What we wish to be is in most cases not identical with what we are. Not merely environmental conditions, but our own habits and impulses often interfere with the fulfillment of "the preferred personality" by "the empirical personality."

But the preferred personality is not necessarily our ideal. Most sincere persons who are not perfectly disciplined Socrates-natures are able to detect a difference between what they actually prefer and what they ought to prefer. What we actually prefer is a new organization of our empirical personality; what we ought to prefer is a new organization of our actual preferences themselves and of our choices and conduct. The distinction between what we approve and what we ought to approve is necessary for anyone who exercises his reason; for our actual approvals conflict with each other and only a rational ideal—a self-consistent and coherent one—can satisfy the thinking person. Thus there are three

stages in the movement of personality toward the ideal: The empirical personality, the preferred personality, and the ideal personality.

6. THE VARIETY OF IDEALS

By this time some readers will doubtless have become impatient with so much indefinite talk about the ideal. They will say: "Show us the ideal, and it sufficeth us. Tell us what this ideal of personality is, or say no more about it."

This natural and apparently justified demand is based on a misunderstanding. The Law of the Ideal of Personality does not define any specific ideal; it prescribes only that the ideal shall be in harmony with the other Laws and that each person shall frame an ideal. The particular form that the ideal shall take in the life of any individual or group is, within the limits set by the Moral Laws, a matter of individual creative imagination and aesthetic taste. The number of possible ideals is indefinitely great. Each individual differs in some way from others; and it would be far from ideal if a uniform standard were to be imposed on all in such a way as to erase these differences. Each family, each group, each nation, has a unique contribution to humanity and so a distinctive ideal to fulfill.¹¹ There are likewise differences in the ideal for man and for woman, although not the burdensome and obnoxious differences which tradition has often imposed.

Thus we may say that the Law of the Ideal of Personality is a law of free creativity and of personal diversification. It introduces a large factor of aesthetic variety into the moral life. It also implies very clearly

¹¹ Note the discussion of the different types of character by Rudolf Uitz, "Charakterologie und Ethik," *Jahrbuch der Charakterik*, 4 (1927), 100-101. See Royce, RQP, Lecture II, on provincialism.

that the ideal is in process of development. Ideals could justly become static only when the life of thought and action had become static and the powers of creative imagination had failed. This would be a stage of senility and approaching death.

7. CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE IDEAL

An important problem in the ethics of ideals takes the form, Ought we to be clearly conscious of our ideals or is it better to leave them undefined?

If we recall the paradox of hedonism, we may be tempted to apply it to ideals. He who seeks pleasure directly and consciously loses it; the best pleasures are unsought by-products of normal activities. "Don't pursue culture," said Elbert Hubbard, "you'll scare her to death." Do the same considerations apply to ideals?

There are some cases in life where they plainly do not apply. If we wish to build a house, the construction will not occur as an unsought by-product of our doing something else, however noble. We must have a definite plan for the house. What applies to architecture applies, in the main, to all of the arts. A unitary and harmonious work of art can result only from a unitary and harmonious plan. Does it not follow that a unitary and harmonious personality, which is also a work of art, can result only from a unitary and harmonious plan? And how can the plan function if it is not consciously present before the mind?

Yet, in spite of these considerations, George Herbert Palmer doubts the desirability of having a definite life ideal. It is only, he thinks, in small matters that a definite plan of action can be formed in advance. "But in profounder matters I more wisely set out from the thought of the moment and the patent need of

improving it than from the future with its ideal perfection.¹¹² As a protest against too fixed and detailed a conception of what I hope my future self will become and too exclusive concentration on it, Professor Palmer's words are a timely warning. We cannot predict the course of events or of our own growth, and the ideal must be left plastic. Yet we dare not overlook the value of consciously purposeful living. The man who can see furthest ahead is the man whose life will probably attain the highest value. Moreover, Palmer's reference to "the patent need of improving" the present is meaningless unless the word "improving" has a meaning. Its only rational meaning would be that of "bringing nearer to what is good"; and if we have no clear conception of what is good for us, we shall have no idea of whether we are improving. It is true that there is something very futile in constant thought about ideal purposes, if no attempt is made to use them in the guidance of actual conduct. But it is also true that there is something equally futile in the most active and energetic attempts to improve the individual and society which are unenlightened by any clear idea of the meaning of improvement. Without such an idea the development of personality is likely to be guided by accidental pressure from without instead of by ideal purpose from within. No means are useful without an end.

The conclusion seems to be that, while a proper balance should obviously be maintained between thought about ideals and work on their realization, it is clear that all persons ought to devote some time—and most persons more than they do—to clear and intelligent formulation of their ideal for themselves and for the groups with which they are associated. We should be conscious

¹¹² Palmer, *NOG*, 137, and the discussion in Everett, *MY*, 220-221.

of the ideal without being "self-conscious" or excessively introspective.

8. THE TWOFOLD FUNCTION OF THE IDEAL

An ideal of personality has a twofold function: On the one hand, it guides the conduct of the person who holds it as his plan of action and goal; on the other hand, it is an instrument of criticism, used to point out both the meaning of and also the defects in the present situation.

The person who is especially interested in the function of guidance is of the practical type, while he who is especially interested in criticism is of the idealistic type. It is a common belief in Europe that Americans are typically practical, while Europeans are typically idealistic. The truth or error in that estimate need not concern us now; but the estimate itself serves to illustrate the large scale on which the twofold function of ideals is recognized.

Impartial thought cannot fail to perceive that guidance and criticism are equally necessary in the good life. This is shown by an examination of the consequences of an exaggeration of either aspect. If the function of ideals as plans of action be made to overshadow their function as principles of criticism, the result is a thoughtless optimism that rushes into hasty action without sufficient reflection. The excessively practical emphasis turns out in the long run to involve wasted effort and disappointed hopes. Not Wall Street and "boom" towns and the fact of overproduction alone are evidences of this; but the constitutional inability of human nature to maintain a pace of incessant, feverish action dooms the attempt in advance to failure.

The difference between the city of Washington and the city of Chicago shows the twofold function of ideals

very well. Washington was built from the start in accordance with a plan, which, of course, has experienced modifications, yet was purposively present at the founding of the city. It has become America's loveliest city, and many think it to be the most beautiful capital in the world. Chicago, until recently, has grown planlessly, and, as a whole, is a huge, sprawling mass, although with attractive spots. Now, a Chicago city plan is in process of being carried out, which it is hoped will transform an ugly city into a beautiful one. In the case of Washington a proper balance between action and criticism has prevailed, with admirable results. In the case of Chicago action long prevailed over criticism, and now an extraordinary amount of critical destruction and reconstruction is necessary in order to save the day.

As principles of guidance ideals function to encourage and cheer men, to assure them that there is a way of life, a meaning and value in human endeavor. On the other hand, as principles of criticism they may serve to condemn and even to discourage men. This is the truer, the higher and nobler the ideals are. If the Law of the Best Possible be used as a pretext for bringing the ideal down to the level of inclination, then ideals will not disturb us seriously. But if that same Law be used as it was intended, to spur man on to the highest of which he is capable, then the ideal is a source of humiliation to man as he is. The noblest spirits have said, with Emerson, "Hitch your wagon to a star" and have responded to Nietzsche's call to *Fernsternliche* (love of the furthest, the most distant ideal) as the loftiest principle of life.

Religion has faced, perhaps more explicitly than any other aspect of man's life, the implications of this discrepancy between the actual and the ideal. Pauline,

Lutheran, and Calvinistic Christianity, in particular, have confronted the situation in which man finds himself—condemned by the law of the ideal which he recognizes, yet unable to conform to the ideal. A conspicuous tendency in contemporary German thought, called, from its founder, the Barthian theology, or the theology of crisis ("crisis" being the Greek word for "judgment"), is based on this same situation. The practical question is whether man can draw from purely ethical sources the strength for his moral endeavor, or whether he should find the needed strength for life from other sources—esthetic, intellectual, or religious. The race as a whole cannot be said to have made up its mind on this fundamental point. Some of the theoretical problems which underlie this extremely difficult practical question will be discussed in Chapter XVI on "The Autonomy of Moral Laws." Having surveyed the System of Moral Laws, we are forced to ask whether moral laws and moral values are independent, or are in some senses dependent on other types of law and value. To this question we now turn our attention.

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