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The Methods of Ethics

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1. Ethics is a department of the Theory or Study of Practice.	1-2
2. It is the study of what ought to be, so far as this depends upon the voluntary action of individuals.	2-4
3. In deciding what they ought to do, men naturally proceed on different principles, and by different methods.	4-6
4. There are two <i>prima facie</i> rational Ends, Excellence or Perfection and Happiness: of which the latter at least may be sought for oneself or universally. It is also commonly thought that certain Rules are prescribed without reference to ulterior consequences. The Methods corresponding to these different principles reduce themselves in the main to three, Egoism, Intuitionism, Utilitarianism.	6-11
5. These methods we are to examine separately, abstracting them from ordinary thought, where we find them in confused	11-14

combination, and developing them as precisely and consistently as possible.

CHAPTER II

ETHICS AND POLITICS

- 1. In considering the relation between Ethics and Politics, we have to distinguish between Positive Law and Ideal Law.
- 15-18
- 2. But at any rate the primary object of Ethics is not to determine what ought to be done in an ideal society: it therefore does not necessarily require as a preliminary the theoretical construction of such a society.

18-22

CHAPTER III

ETHICAL JUDGMENTS

1. By 'Reasonable' conduct— whether morally or prudentially reasonable—we mean that of which we judge that it 'ought' to be done. Such a judgment cannot be legitimately interpreted as a judgment concerning facts, nor as referring exclusively to the *means* to ulterior ends: in particular, the term 'ought,' as used in moral judgments, does not merely signify

23-28

that the person judging feels a specific emotion:

2. nor does it merely signify that	
the conduct in question is	28-31
prescribed under penalties:	

31-35

- 3. The notion expressed by "ought," in its strictest ethical use is too elementary to admit of formal definition, or of resolution into simpler notions; it is assumed to be objectively valid; and judgments in which it is used when they relate to the future conduct of the person judging, are accompanied by a special kind of impulse to action.
- 4. This 'dictate of reason' is also exemplified by merely prudential judgments; and by merely hypothetical imperatives.

 35-38

CHAPTER IV

PLEASURE AND DESIRE

- 1. The psychological doctrine, that the object of Desire is always Pleasure, is liable to collide with the view of Ethical judgments just given: and in any case deserves careful examination.
- 2. If by "pleasure" is meant 42-51 "agreeable feeling," this doctrine is opposed to experience: for

throughout the whole scale of our desires, from the highest to the lowest, we can distinguish impulses directed towards other ends than our own feelings from the desire of pleasure:

pleasure:	
3. as is further shown by the occasional conflict between the two kinds of impulse.	51-52
4. Nor can the doctrine derive any real support from consideration either of the 'unconscious' or the 'original' aim of human action.	52-54
Note	54-56
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FREE WILL	
1. The Kantian identification of 'Free' and 'Rational' action is misleading from the ambiguity of the term 'freedom.'	57-59
2. When, by definition and analysis of voluntary action, the issue in the Free Will Controversy has been made clear, it appears that the cumulative argument for Determinism is almost overwhelming:	59-65
3. still it is impossible to me in acting not to regard myself as free	65-70

to do what I judge to be reasonable. However the solution of the metaphysical question of Free Will is not important—Theology apart—for systematic Ethics generally:

- 4. it seems however to have a special relation to the notion of lustice:
- 5. The practical unimportance of the question of Free Will becomes more clear if we scrutinize closely the range of volitional effects.

CHAPTER VI

71-72

72-76

83-87

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

- 1. The Methods indicated in chap. i. have a *prima facie* claim to proceed on reasonable principles: other principles seem, in so far as they can be made precise, to reduce themselves to these:
- 2. especially the principle of "living according to Nature." 80-83
- 3. In short, all varieties of Method may conveniently be classed under three heads: Intuitionism and the two kinds of Hedonism, Egoistic and Universalistic. The common confusion between the two latter is easily explained, but must be carefully guarded against.

Note 87-88

CHAPTER VII

EGOISM AND SELF-LOVE

To get a clear idea of what is commonly known as Egoism, we must distinguish and exclude 89-93 several possible meanings of the term:

and define its end as the greatest attainable surplus of pleasure over pain for the agent,—
 93-95 pleasures being valued in proportion to their pleasantness.

CHAPTER VIII

INTUITIONISM

1. I apply the term Intuitional—in the narrower of two legitimate senses—to distinguish a method in which the rightness of some kinds 96-98 of action is assumed to be known without consideration of ulterior consequences.

2. The common antithesis between 98-100 Intuitive and Inductive is inexact, since this method does not necessarily proceed from the universal to the particular. We may distinguish Perceptional

3. Dogmatic Intuitionism, in which	
the general rules of Common Sense	100-101
are accepted as axiomatic:	

4. Philosophical Intuitionism, which attempts to find a deeper 101-103 explanation for these current rules.

Note 103-104

CHAPTER IX

GOOD

- 1. Another important variety of Intuitionism is constituted by substituting for "right" the wider notion "good."

 105-106
- 2. The common judgment that a thing is "good" does not on reflection appear to be equivalent to a judgment that it is directly or indirectly pleasant.
- 3. "Good" = "desirable" or "reasonably desired": as applied to conduct, the term does not convey so definite a dictate as "right," and it is not confined to the strictly voluntary.

4. There are many other things 113-115 commonly judged to be good: but reflection shows that nothing is ultimately good except some mode of human existence.

BOOK II

EGOISM

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCIPLE AND METHOD OF EGOISM

119-121

121-122

- 1. The Principle of Egoistic Hedonism is the widely accepted proposition that the rational end of conduct for each individual is the Maximum of his own Happiness or Pleasure.
- 2. There are several methods of seeking this end: but we may take as primary that which proceeds by Empirical-reflective comparison of pleasures.

CHAPTER II

EMPIRICAL HEDONISM

In this method it is assumed that all pleasures sought and pains shunned are commensurable; and can be arranged in a certain scale of preferableness:

2. pleasure being defined as "feeling apprehended as desirable by the sentient individual at the time of feeling it."	125-130
Note	130
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EMPIRICAL HEDONISM (continue	ed)
1. To get a clearer view of this method, let us consider objections tending to show its inherent impracticability: as, first, that "pleasure as feeling cannot be conceived," and that a "sum of pleasures is intrinsically unmeaning":	131-134
2. that transient pleasures cannot satisfy; and that the predominance of self-love tends to defeat its own end:	134-138
3. that the habit of introspectively comparing pleasures is unfavourable to pleasure:	138-140
4. that any quantitative comparison of pleasures and pains is vague and uncertain, even in the case of our own past experiences:	140-144
5. that it also tends to be different at different times: especially through variations in the present	144-146

state of the person performing the	
comparison:	

6. that, in fact, the supposed	
definite commensurability of	146-147
pleasures is an unverifiable	140-147
assumption:	

7. that there is a similar liability to error in appropriating the experience of others; and in inferring future pleasures from past.

CHAPTER IV

147-150

158-161

OBJECTIVE HEDONISM AND COMMON SENSE

1. It may seem that the judgments of Common Sense respecting the Sources of Happiness offer a refuge from the uncertainties of Empirical Hedonism: but there are several fundamental defects in this refuge;	151-153
2. and these judgments when closely examined are found to be perplexingly inconsistent.	153-158
3. Still we may derive from them a	

CHAPTER V

certain amount of practical

guidance.

HAPPINESS AND DUTY

1. It has been thought possible to 162-163

prove on empirical grounds that one's greatest happiness is always attained by the performance of duty.

acts of duty, but a virtuous life as a

whole.

2. But no such complete coincidence seems to result from a consideration either of the Legal Sanctions of Duty:	163-166
3. or of the Social Sanctions:	166-170
4. or of the Internal Sanctions: even if we consider not merely isolated	170-175

CHAPTER VI

DEDUCTIVE HEDONISM

1. Hedonistic Method must ultimately rest on facts of empirical observation: but it might become largely deductive, through scientific knowledge of the causes of pleasure and pain:	176-180
2. but we have no practically available general theory of these causes, either psychophysical,	180-190
3. or biological.	190-192
4. Nor can the principle of 'increasing life,' or that of 'aiming at self-development,' or that of	192-195

'giving free play to impulse,' be so defined as to afford us any practical guidance to the end of Egoism, without falling back on the empirical comparison of pleasures and pains.

BOOK III

INTUITIONISM

CHAPTER I

INTUITIONISM

- 1. The fundamental assumption of Intuitionism is that we have the power of seeing clearly what actions are in themselves right and reasonable.
- 199-201
- 2. Though many actions are commonly judged to be made better or worse through the presence of certain *motives*, our common judgments of right and wrong relate, strictly speaking, to *intentions*. One motive, indeed, the desire to do what is right as such, has been thought an essential condition to right conduct: but the Intuitional method should be treated as not involving this assumption.
- 201-207

3. It is certainly an essential condition that we should not

207-210

believe the act to be wrong; and this implies that we should not believe it to be wrong for any similar person in similar circumstances: but this implication, though it may supply a valuable practical rule, cannot furnish a complete criterion of right conduct.

4. The *existence* of apparent cognitions of right conduct, intuitively obtained, as distinct from their validity, will scarcely be questioned; and to establish their validity it is not needful to prove their 'originality.'

210-214

5. Both particular and universal intuitions are found in our common moral thought: but it is for the latter that ultimate validity is ordinarily claimed by intuitional moralists. We must try, by reflecting on Common Sense, how far we can state these Moral Axioms with clearness and precision.

214-216

CHAPTER II

VIRTUE AND DUTY

1. Duties are Right acts, for the adequate performance of which a moral motive is at least occasionally necessary. Virtuous

217-221

conduct includes the performance of duties as well as praiseworthy acts that are thought to go beyond strict duty, and that may even be beyond the power of some to perform.

- 2. Virtues as commonly recognised, are manifested primarily in volitions to produce particular right effects—which must at least be thought by the agent to be not wrong—: but for the completeness of some virtues the presence of certain emotions seems necessary.
- 3. It may be said that Moral Excellence, like Beauty, eludes definition: but if Ethical Science is 228-230 to be constituted, we must obtain definite Moral Axioms.

CHAPTER III

221-228

THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

- 1. The common conception of Wisdom assumes a harmony of the ends of different ethical methods: all of which—and not one rather than another—the wise man is commonly thought to aim at and attain as far as circumstances admit.
- 2. The Will is to some extent 233-236 involved in forming wise decisions:

but more clearly in acting on them
—whatever we may call the Virtue
thus manifested.

thus manifested.	
3. Of minor intellectual excellences, some are not strictly Virtues: others are, such as Caution and Decision, being in part voluntary.	236-237
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BENEVOLENCE	
1. The Maxim of Benevolence bids us to some extent <i>cultivate</i> affections, and confer happiness	238-241
2. on sentient, chiefly human, beings; especially in certain circumstances and relations, in which affections—which are hardly virtues—prompt to kind services. Rules for the distribution of Kindness are needed,	241-246
3. as claims may conflict; but clearly binding rules cannot be obtained from Common Sense in a definite form;	246-247
4. nor clear principles from which rules may be deduced; as is seen when we examine the duties to Kinsmen, as commonly conceived:	247-250

5. and the wider duties of Neighbourhood, Citizenship, Universal Benevolence; and the duties of cultivating Reverence and Loyalty:	250-254
6. and those springing from the Conjugal relation:	254-256
7. and those of Friendship:	256-259
8. and those of Gratitude: and those to which we are prompted by Pity.	259-263
Note	263
CHAPTER V	
JUSTICE	
1. Justice is especially difficult to define. The Just cannot be identified with the Legal, as laws may be unjust. Again, the Justice of laws does not consist merely in the absence of arbitrary inequality in framing or administering them.	264-268
2. One element of Justice seems to consist in the fulfilment of (1) contracts and definite understandings, and (2) expectations arising naturally out of the established order of Society; but the duty of fulfilling these latter is somewhat indefinite:	268-271

3. and this social order may itself, from another point of view, be condemned as unjust; that is, as tried by the standard of Ideal Justice. What then is this Standard? We seem to find various degrees and forms of it.	271-274
4. One view of Ideal Law states Freedom as its absolute End: but the attempt to construct a system of law on this principle involves us in insuperable difficulties.	274-278
5. Nor does the realisation of Freedom satisfy our common conception of Ideal Justice. The principle of this is rather 'that Desert should be requited.'	278-283
6. But the application of this principle is again very perplexing: whether we try to determine Good Desert (or the worth of services),	283-290
7. or III Desert, in order to realise Criminal Justice. There remains too the difficulty of reconciling Conservative and Ideal Justice.	290-294
CHAPTER VI	
LAWS AND PROMISES	
1. The duty of obeying Laws, though it may to a great extent be	295-297

included under Justice, still requires a separate treatment. We can, however, obtain no *consensus* for any precise definition of it.

any precise definition of it.	
2. For we are neither agreed as to what kind of government is ideally legitimate,	297-299
3. nor as to the criterion of a traditionally legitimate government,	299-301
4. nor as to the proper limits of governmental authority.	301-303
5. The duty of fulfilling a promise in the sense in which it was understood by both promiser and promisee is thought to be peculiarly stringent and certain	303-304
6. (it being admitted that its obligation is relative to the promisee, and may be annulled by him, and that it cannot override strict prior obligations).	304-305
7. But Common Sense seems to doubt how far a promise is binding when it has been obtained by force or fraud:	305-306
8. or when circumstances have materially altered since it was made—especially if it be a promise to the dead or absent, from which no release can be obtained, or if the	306-308

performance of the promise will be harmful to the promisee, or inflict a disproportionate sacrifice on the promiser.

9. Other doubts arise when a promise has been misapprehended: and in the peculiar case where a 308-311 prescribed form of words has been used.

CHAPTER VII

CLASSIFICATION OF DUTIES. TRUTH

- 1. I have not adopted the classification of duties into Social and Self-regarding: as it seems inappropriate to the Intuitional method, of which the characteristic is, that it lays down certain absolute and independent rules: such as the rule of Truth.
- 2. But Common Sense after all scarcely seems to prescribe truth-speaking under all circumstances: nor to decide clearly whether the beliefs which we are bound to make true are those directly produced by our words or the immediate inferences from these.
- 3. It is said that the general 317-319 allowance of Unveracity would be suicidal, as no one would believe the falsehood. But this argument,

though forcible, is not decisive; for (1) this result may be in special circumstances desirable, or (2) we may have reason to expect that it will not occur.

Note 319

CHAPTER VIII

OTHER SOCIAL DUTIES AND VIRTUES

- 1. Common opinion sometimes condemns sweepingly malevolent feelings and volitions: but Reflective Common Sense seems to 320-324 admit some as legitimate, determining the limits of this admission on utilitarian grounds.
- Other maxims of social duty seem clearly subordinate to those already discussed: as is illustrated 324-326 by an examination of Liberality and other cognate notions.

CHAPTER IX

SELF-REGARDING VIRTUES

- 1. The general duty of seeking one's own happiness is commonly recognised under the notion of Prudence.

 327-328
- 2. This as specially applied to the control of bodily appetites is called

Temperance: but under this notion a more rigid restraint is sometimes thought to be prescribed: though as to the principle of this there seems no agreement.

3. Nor is it easy to give a clear definition of the maxim of Purity—but in fact common sense seems averse to attempt this. We must note, however, that suicide is commonly judged to be absolutely wrong.

329-331

CHAPTER X

COURAGE, HUMILITY, ETC.

- 1. The Duty of Courage is subordinate to those already discussed: and in drawing the line between the Excellence of Courage and the Fault of Foolhardiness we seem forced to have recourse to considerations of expediency.
- 332-334
- 2. Similarly the maxim of Humility seems either clearly subordinate or 334-336 not clearly determinate.

CHAPTER XI

REVIEW OF THE MORALITY OF COMMON SENSE

1. We have now to examine the 337-338 moral maxims that have been

defined, to ascertain whether they possess the characteristics of scientific intuitions.

- 3. The maxims of Wisdom and Selfcontrol are only self-evident in so 343-345 far as they are tautological:
- 4. nor can we state any clear, absolute, universally-admitted axioms for determining the duties of the Affections:
- 5. and as for the group of principles that were extracted from the common notion of Justice, we cannot define each singly in a satisfactory manner, still less reconcile them:
- 6. and even the Duty of Good Faith, 352-355 when we consider the numerous qualifications of it more or less doubtfully admitted by Common Sense, seems more like a subordinate rule than an

independent First Principle. Still more is this the case with Veracity:

- 7. similarly with other virtues: even the prohibition of Suicide, so far as rational, seems to rest ultimately on utilitarian grounds.
- 355-357
- 8. Even Purity when we force ourselves to examine it rigorously yields no clear independent principle.
- 357-359
- 9. The common moral maxims are adequate for practical guidance, but do not admit of being elevated into scientific axioms.

359-361

CHAPTER XII

MOTIVES OR SPRINGS OF ACTION AS SUBJECTS OF MORAL JUDGMENT

- 1. It has been held by several moralists that the "Universal Conscience" judges primarily not of 362-365 Rightness of acts, but of Rank of Motives.
- 2. If, however, we include the Moral Sentiments among these motives, this latter view involves all the difficulties and perplexities of the former, yet it is paradoxical to omit these sentiments.
- 3. But even if we leave these out, 367-372

we still find very little agreement as to Rank of Motives: and there is a special difficulty arising from complexity of motive. Nor does Common Sense seem to hold that a "higher" motive—below the highest —is always to be preferred to a "lower."

CHAPTER XIII

PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONISM

1. The Philosopher, as such, attempts to penetrate beneath the surface of Common Sense to some deeper principles:	373-374
2. but has too often presented to the world, as the result of his investigation, tautological propositions and vicious circles.	374-379
3. Still there are certain abstract moral principles of real importance, intuitively known; though they are not sufficient by themselves to give complete practical guidance. Thus we can exhibit a self-evident element in the commonly recognised principles of Prudence, Justice, and Benevolence.	379-384
4. This is confirmed by a reference to Clarke's and Kant's systems:	384-386
5. and also to Utilitarianism: which	386-389