NEW STUDIES IN ETHICS

Volume Two Modern Theories

PREFACE

This exposition of utilitarian ethics, like comparable monographs in this series, is set out in a historical way. I have taken the paradigm of utilitarianism to be the ethical doctrines of Bentham and John Stuart Mill and, more specifically, I have treated as a utilitarian anyone who agrees with them that the rightness of actions is determined by the value of their consequences and that what determines the value of these consequences is the pleasure or pain that they include.

I argue, by reference to this standard, that Hume is more of a utilitarian than he is nowadays often made out to be. The same standard implies that 'ideal utilitarians' like Moore and Rashdall, who, although consequentialists, do not take pleasure or happiness as the criterion of value, are not really utilitarians at all.

The examination, criticism and, where appropriate, defence from criticism of the arguments and conclusions of Bentham and Mill has left space for no more than the barest survey of those aspects of utilitarian reasoning which most preoccupy ethical theorists at the present time, namely the structure and adequacy of consequentialist arguments in moral thinking. This is intentional and reflects my belief that the hedonistic aspect of traditional utilitarianism, its most widely repudiated ingredient, is equally deserving of consideration.

New Studies in Ethics

Volume Two
MODERN THEORIES

MACMILLAN
Education

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G. J. Warnock 1967, 1974; Mary Warnock 1967, 1974

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The studies presented here were all published originally as separate booklets in a series entitled 'New Studies in Ethics'. The aim of that series was to provide a comprehensive survey of the main types of theory which have arisen in the history of moral philosophy. Each monograph was written by a professional philosopher, who had been invited to contribute a clear exposition and critical assessment of a type of ethical theory on which he was an expert. The series was well-received and the suggestion frequently made that the monographs should be bound up together and published in a composite work. This suggestion has now been implemented, in the form of the present two-volume edition. The text of each study remains as in the original publication, but errata have been corrected and, where appropriate, new material has been added to the bibliographies.

Volume One contains studies of six classical types of theory, viz. Greek Ethics, Aquinas and Natural Law, Ethical Naturalism, Ethical Intuitionism, the Moral Philosophy of Kant, and Hegelian Ethics.

In this, the second volume, some more modern theories are examined.

Utilitarianism is probably the most widely held point of view concerning morality at the present time. On this view, men ought to maximise happiness for themselves and others. Any version of this theory which is practically useful rests on certain presuppositions as to what constitutes human happiness and the ways in which men are capable of achieving it. Should men think first of themselves, or of others? Do they need general rules of conduct, which may in particular applications produce misery for some, or should each individual act be assessed in terms of the pleasure it gives to those immediately concerned? And so on. Anthony Quinton's study explains the thought of the classical Utilitarians, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick and others, with due recognition of more recent discussions of the General Happiness Principle.

Axiological Ethics is a type of ethical theory which, amongst English-speaking students at any rate, does not have the vogue enjoyed by the other types of theory discussed in this volume. J. N. Findlay's conviction that this is a sorry state of affairs is reflected throughout his contribution. He maintains that there is 'an organised framework of values and disvalues within which

our practical decisions must be made' and that the authors whom he discusses have done most to make this clear. Values and dis-values must not be conceived as creations of single individuals or societies. There is a 'value-firmament', just as there is a physical world, and only by discovering what the structure of this value-firmament is can we act with ethical wisdom, just as we can only walk with assurance in the physical world when we see how the land lies.

The theory of Evolution not only revolutionised natural science: it also had a profound effect on ethical thought. Processes of natural selection have undoubtedly resulted in the survival of species best suited to cope with their environments, but have they also led to the emergence of morally better kinds of behaviour? Must we say that the direction of evolution is necessarily good according to any realistic definition of 'good'? Antony Flew investigates these and related questions.

Marx's influence on economic and political thinking in our day has been epoch-making; but has he moral insights worthy of anything approaching the respect which his social philosophy has deservedly earned? Eugene Kamenka analyses Marx's well-known views about individual alienation and social progress with this question in mind.

Philosophical Existentialism has had – and still does have – a powerful influence in two spheres where human conduct is much discussed, namely literature and theology. Some of its foremost exponents have been novelists and playwrights such as Sartre and Camus, or religious thinkers such as Buber and Berdyaev. The essence of morality, Existentialists hold, is that men should live freely as individuals and not inauthentically as types or conformists. But what is it to be free? And how is man's individuality related to his essential sociality? Mary Warnock's study introduces the reader to those Existentialists whose answers to such questions have been most influential.

Since G. E. Moore published his *Principia Ethica* in 1903 analytical moral philosophers have been mainly concerned with the language in which moral judgments are expressed. How is the meaning of such language like, and how unlike, the meaning of the language in which, say, scientific hypotheses, military orders, cries of emotion, or religious beliefs are expressed? G. J. Warnock's study of the main points of view which have emerged in this discussion brings the story of moral philosophy right up to date. The debate between Prescriptivists and Descriptivists, whose opinions he explains and criticises, continues.