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SELF-REALIZATION AS THE MORAL IDEAL.

IF one turn to any of the important ethical discussions of hardly a generation ago, he finds the center of interest in the origin of moral judgments. It was assumed, as matter of course, that ethical theory always has been and always will be divided between two schools—the empiricists and the intuitionists, and that this division exhausts the whole realm. It was assumed that the opposition between utilitarianism and intuitionism is essentially this question of the origin of our knowledge of moral distinctions. Indeed, I do not know a discussion of that period which even suggests the fact so obvious to us, that the division of ethical theories into these two kinds is a cross-division, one relating to the ethical criterion, the other to the method of arriving at knowledge of it. Three main influences were at work, however, in shifting the center of attention to the question of the nature of the moral end itself. Utilitarianism tended to call attention to the character of the end involved in action; the appearance of intuitive utilitarian systems, like that of Sidgwick, showed the insufficiency of the old disjunction; finally the introduction, from Germany, of a mode of ethical thinking which was neither utilitarian nor intuitive, yet agreeing with the former in holding that the morality of all acts is measured by their efficiency in establishing a certain end, and falling in with the latter in holding that moral ideas are not the result of mere association, but of something in the facts themselves, brought in new problems and new controversies.

In the newer contentions regarding the moral end, the idea of 'self-realization' insists upon its claims. The idea seems to me an important one, bringing out two necessary phases of the ethical ideal: namely, that it cannot lie in subordination of self to any law outside itself; and that, starting with the self, the end is to be sought in the active, or volitional, side

rather than in the passive, or feeling, side. Yet with those who use the phrase, there is often a tendency, it seems to me, to rest in it as a finality, instead of taking it as a statement of a problem. As warning off from certain defective conceptions, in pointing to an outline of a solution, it is highly serviceable; whether it has any more positive and concrete value depends upon whether the ideas of self and of realization are worked out, or are left as self-explaining assumptions.

As a part of the attempt to give the conception of 'self-realization' a somewhat more precise content, I propose in this paper to criticize one idea of the self more or less explicit in much of current discussion. I thus hope to bring out, by way of contrast, what appears to me the important factor of the conception of self as the ethical ideal. The notion which I wish to criticize is that of the self as a presupposed fixed *schema* or outline, while realization consists in the filling up of this *schema*. The notion which I would suggest as substitute is that of the self as always a concrete *specific* activity; and, therefore, (to anticipate) of the identity of self and realization. It is extremely difficult to find an explicit statement of the doctrine of the presupposed or schematic self, and of realization as the filling up of this outline, and I am, accordingly, to some extent, under the difficulty of having to build up the notion criticized through the very process of criticism. One or two considerations, however, will show that the notion is not a figment or man of straw. Such a theory as that of T. H. Green, for example, with its assumption of an "eternally complete consciousness" constituting the moral self to be realized by man, illustrates what I mean by a fixed and presupposed self. Any theory which makes the self something *to be* realized, which makes the process of moral experience a process of gradually attaining this ideal self, illustrates the same conception. Any theory which does not make the self always 'there and then,' which does not make it a reality as specific and concrete as a growing tree or a moving planet must, in one form or another, set up a rigid self, and conceive of realization as filling up its empty frame-

work. In a previous number of THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW,¹ I criticized the opposition made by Green between the moral ideal as self-satisfaction in general and all special satisfactions of desire. The present paper may be considered a continuation of that, save that now I desire to discuss the question of realization, rather than the question of the ideal, and to emphasize *the notion of a working or practical self* against that of a fixed or presupposed self.

The idea of realization implies the conception of capacities or possibilities. Upon the basis of a presupposed complete self, the *possibilities* of the present, working or individual self are the *actual* content of this presupposed self.² I do not propose to go into the strictly metaphysical difficulties of this conception. The difficulty, however, bound up with the question why a completely realized self should think it worth while to duplicate itself in an unrealized, or relatively empty, self, how it could possibly do this even if it were thought worth while, and why, after the complete self had produced the incomplete self, it should do so under conditions rendering impossible (seemingly eternally so) any adequate approach of the incomplete self to its own completeness—this difficulty, I say, should make us wary of the conception, provided we can find any working theory concerning unrealized powers (capacities) which will avoid the difficulty.

We may accept as a *practical* fact that we do, at a given time, have unrealized powers, or capacities, and that the realization of these powers constitutes, at the time, our moral goal. The question is as to the interpretation of this 'fact.' As the first objection to the interpretation which makes the capacities simply the blank form corresponding to a presupposed perfect

¹ Vol. I, No. 6, Green's Theory of the Moral Motive.

² *E. g.*, "The one divine mind gradually reproduces itself in the human soul. In virtue of this principle in him man has definite capacities, the realization of which, since in it alone he can satisfy himself, forms his true good. They are not realized, however, in any life that can be observed . . . and for this reason we cannot say with any adequacy what the capabilities are." Green, Prolegomena, p. 189. Here we have it definitely implied, the capacities of man are simply the already realized content of the presupposed self. On p. 181 it is even more explicitly stated.

self, let me point out that the only capacities which demand realization, thus forming our ideal, are *specific* capacities; that, if there is any such thing as capacity in general, it never presents itself to our consciousness, much less imposes an end of action upon us. The capacities of a child, for example, are not simply of *a* child, not of a man, but of *this* child, not of any other. So far as they have to do with the ideal to be realized, it is the precise capabilities existing at that exact moment, capabilities as individualized as that place in space and that portion of time which are concerned. Make the capacities 'infinite,' or the content of some presupposed self, instead of actually then and there, actually knowable, and they furnish no end to be executed. And if it be objected that the child should be trained to act with reference to some 'infinite' capacity, some unlimited and immeasurable power which will keep appearing as he grows older, and that failure to take that into account from the first, means a stunted development for the child, the objection will serve to emphasize the point. If this capacity is anything which may be taken into account, then it is a part of the actual definite situation; it is not infinite in the sense of indefinite, although it may be 'infinite' in value—which means, I suppose, that it is the only thing worth specially considering at the time. Suppose, for example, the self which the child is to realize involves some artistic capacity. Let it be said that this end transcends the child's consciousness, and therefore is not an actually present capacity. None the less, the realization of this artistic self can be made the end only if it is present in *some one's* consciousness. The objection means simply that the situation which the parent or the educator sees, the reality upon which he has his eye, is larger than the one which the child sees. It is not a case of contrast between an actuality which is definite, and a presupposed but unknown capacity, but between *a smaller and a larger view* of the actuality. If the child's real end is different from that which would immediately suggest itself to him, it is not because some capacity transcending his specific self (belonging to some presupposed ideal

self) has been set up for him, but because the child is not adequately aware of his specific self. Furthermore, the wider range of the educator's knowledge would be useless merely as wider. The mere fact that he saw further ahead, that he foresaw a later development would not avail in determining the self to be realized unless the educator were capable of translating this development back into the present activities of the child. In other words, in no sense does the artistic capacity of the child, *in general*, fix his end; his end is fixed by the fact that even *now* he has a certain quickness, vividness, and plasticity of vision, a certain deftness of hand, and a certain motor coördination by which his hand is stimulated to work in harmony with his eye. It is such considerations as these, having absolutely nothing to do with *mere* or with general possibilities, but concerned with existing activities, which determine the end of conduct in the case referred to. Capacity, in any sense in which it requires to be realized for the sake of morality, is not only relative to specific action, *but is itself action*.

If capacity is itself definite activity and not simply possibility of activity, the question arises why we conceive of it as capability, not as complete in itself. If, for example, the artistic capacity of the child is already activity of the eye, hand, and brain, and if the realization of this capacity refer not to some remote attainment, but to the immediate activity of the time, why do we think of it as *capacity* at all?

In answer, we may note that our first conception of our activity is highly vague and indeterminate. We are conscious of the activity of our eye and ear in general, but not of just the way in which they work. We are apt, almost certain, however, to identify this partial and abstract conception of their activity with the real activity. Then, when the more specific factors of the activity force themselves into consciousness, these lie outside of the previous *idea* of the activity, and (the activity having been identified with our consciousness of it) seem, therefore, to be external or indifferent to the activity itself.

One of the many of Professor James's important contributions to psychology is his demonstration of the fact that "the only meaning of essence is teleological, and that classification and conception are purely teleological weapons of the mind."¹ He goes on to state that the essence is that *which is so important for my interests* that, comparatively, other properties may be omitted. Now, in our recognition of our own activity, we are, of course, first conscious (consciousness, as explicit, and immediate interest being one and the same) of that phase of our activity which most interests us. When other parts of the activity force themselves upon consciousness, they seem, to some extent, to be accidental, because lying outside of that which we have conceived as *the* activity. We thus come to divide our activity into parts—one the factor which permanently interests us, the other that in which our interest varies from time to time. The factor of enduring interest comes to be thought of as a sort of fixed permanent core, which is *the* reality, but which may, from time to time, go through more or less external changes, or which may assume new, but more or less transitory operations—these further changes and operations corresponding, of course, to those phases of the activity in which our interest is shifting. In the act of vision, for example, the thing that seems nearest us, that which claims continuously our attention, is the eye itself. We thus come to abstract the eye from all special acts of seeing; we make the eye the *essential* thing in sight, and conceive of the circumstances of vision as indeed *circumstances*; as more or less accidental concomitants of the permanent eye. Of course, there is no such thing as the eye in general; in reality, the actual fact is always an act of seeing, and the 'circumstances' are just as 'necessary' and 'essential' parts of the activity as is the eye itself. Or more truly, there is no such thing as this 'eye'; there is only the seeing. Nevertheless, our continuing interest being in the eye, we cannot surrender our abstraction; we only add to it another one—that of certain 'conditions of exercise' as also necessary

¹ James, *Psychology*, Vol. II, p. 335.

and essential to every act. On this side, too, we carry our abstraction to the utmost possible; we say that light, or vibrations of ether, is the essential condition of the act of vision. *The eye now becomes the capacity of seeing; the vibrations of ether, conditions required for the exercise of the capacity.* That is to say, instead of frankly recognizing that eye and vibrations are pure abstractions from the only real thing, the act of seeing, we try to keep the two in their separateness, while we restore their unity by thinking of one as capacity, or possibility to be realized only when the other is present. Instead of the one organic activity we now have an organ on one side, and environment on the other.

But we cannot stop here. The eye in general and the vibrations in general do not, even in their unity, constitute the act of vision. A multitude of other factors are included. These vary from time to time. Those which continue to attract attention least often are dismissed as merely indifferent; others appear with sufficient frequency so that some account of them has to be taken. The original core which was abstracted and identified with the reality, comes to be conceived as capacity for reaching these things as ends also, while they are conceived as conditions that help realize it.¹

With this in mind let us return to our child possessed of an artistic capacity. I hope the preceding discussion has made it obvious that the recognition of artistic capacity means that we are now becoming more aware of what the concrete reality of the child's activity is. We are not primarily finding out what he *may* be, but what he *is*. But having already identified his self with what we previously knew of it, we try to reconcile our two different conceptions by still keeping our old

¹ In my *Outlines of Ethics*, pp. 97-102, I have developed this same idea by showing that we may analyze individuality into the two sides of 'capacity' and 'environment' (this, of course, being what I have above termed 'conditions of action'), and then destroy the separateness seemingly involved in this analysis by recognizing that either of these, taken in its totality, *is* the other. In an article entitled "The Superstition of Necessity" in the *Monist*, Vol. III, No. 3, I have developed at greater length the idea that necessity and possibility are simply the two correlative abstractions into which the one reality falls apart during the process of our conscious apprehension of it.

idea of the child's powers of his eye, hand, etc., but attributing to them new capacities to be realized under certain conditions — these conditions, in turn, being simply the new factors which we have now found involved in the activity, though external to it *so far as our previous knowledge was concerned*. We call any activity capacity, in other words, whenever we first take it abstractly, or at less than its full meaning, and then add to it further relations which we afterwards find involved in it. We first transform our partial conception into a rigid fact, and then, discovering that there is more than the bare fact which we have so far taken into account, we call this broken-off fact capacity for the something more.

To realize capacity does not mean, therefore, to act so as to fill up some presupposed ideal self. It means to act at the height of action, to realize its full meaning. The child realizes his artistic capacity whenever he acts with the completeness of his existing powers. To realize capacity means to act concretely, not abstractly; it is primarily a direction to us with reference to knowledge, not with reference to performance. It means: do not act until you have seen the relations, the content, of your act. It means: let there be for you all the meaning in the act that there could be for any intelligence which saw it in its reality and not abstractly. The whole point is expressed when we say that no possible future activities or conditions have anything to do with the present action except as they enable us to take deeper account of the present activity, to get beyond the mere superficialities of the act, to see it in its totality. Indeed, if required to go here into the logic of the matter, I think it could be shown that these future acts and conditions *are* simply the present act in its mediated content. But, in any case, to realize capacity means to make the special act which has to be performed an activity of the entire *present* self — so far is it from being one step towards the attainment of a remote ideal self.

One illustration will serve, possibly, to enforce the point practically as well as theoretically. We have to a considerable

extent, given up thinking of this life as merely a preparation for another life.¹ Very largely, however, we think of some parts of this life as merely preparatory to other later stages of it. It is so very largely as to the process of education ; and if I were asked to name the most needed of all reforms in the spirit of education, I should say : "Cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make of it the full meaning of the present life." And to add that only in this case does it become truly a preparation for after life is not the paradox it seems. An activity which does not have worth enough to be carried on for its own sake cannot be very effective as a preparation for something else. By making the present activity the expression of the full meaning of the case, that activity is, indeed, an end in itself, not a mere means to something beyond itself ; but, in being a totality, it is also the condition of all future integral action. It forms the habit of requiring that every act be an outlet of the whole self, and it provides the instruments of such complete functioning.

To suppose that an infant cannot take a complete and present interest in learning to babble simple words because this is not the same as rolling off ponderous polysyllables, or that there is any way for him to attain the mastery of the complexities of language save as his attention is *completely* taken up at the proper time with his babbling, is equivalent to that conception of the realization of capacity which makes it a possibility, with reference to some 'infinite' ideal in general.

¹ This separation of 'this' world and the 'other' world serves itself to illustrate the point. The conception of the other world arose with the dawning conception of spiritual meanings beyond those as yet realized in life. But life had been identified with the previous conceptions of it and thus hardened into a rigid fact which resisted change ; the new meaning could not, therefore, be put into life (or this world), and so was dislocated into another life. But the value of the spiritual ideal thus set off was in deepening the insight into the significance of actual life, until it was read back into this actual existence, transforming its meaning. So far as we are yet half way between the complete separation and the complete identification, we consider this world as preparation, or capacity, for the next. We thus attempt to retain the separateness of the two activities while at the same time we recognize the facts which point to their identity. The conception of capacity, when analyzed, will be found in every case to be just this go-between in our understanding of an activity.

In conceiving of capacity, then, not as mere possibility of an ideal or infinite self, but as the more adequate comprehension and treatment of the present activity, we are enabled to substitute a working conception of the self for a metaphysical definition of it. We are also, I believe, enabled to get rid of a difficulty which everyone has felt, in one way or another, in the self-realization theory. In the ordinary conception of the presupposed self, that self is already there as a fixed fact, even though it be as an eternal self. The only reason for performing any moral act is then *for* this self. Whatever is done, is done for this fixed self. I do not believe it possible to state this theory in a way which does not make action selfish in the bad sense of selfish.¹ When we condemn an act as bad, because selfish, we always mean, I think, exactly this: the person in question acted from interest in his past or fixed self, instead of holding the self open for instruction; — instead, that is, of finding the self in the activity called for by the situation. I do not see that it is a bit better to act to *get* goodness *for* the self, than it is to get pleasure for the self. The selfishness of saints who are bound to maintain their own saintliness at all hazards, is Pharisaism; and Pharisaism is hardly more lovable, or more practically valuable, than is voluptuarianism. *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*, will serve, if it means: Let the needed thing be done, though the heavens of my past, or fixed, or presupposed self fall. The man who interprets the saying to mean: Let me keep my precious self moral, though the heavens of public action fall, is as despicable personally as he is dangerous socially. He has identified himself with his past notions of himself, and, refusing to allow the fructifying pollen of experience to touch them, refusing to revise his conception of himself in the light of the widest situation in which he finds himself, he begins to disintegrate and becomes a standing menace to his community or group. It is not action *for* the self that is required (thus setting up a fixed self which is

¹ Selfish, of course, in one sense, all action is; but the point here is that if the self is there in some fixed sense already, and action takes place for this self, then, logically, action is selfish in that sense of selfish motive for which we condemn any one.

simply going to *get* something more, wealth, pleasure, morality, or whatever), but action *as* the self. To find the self in the highest and fullest activity possible at the time, and to perform the act in the consciousness of its complete identification with self (which means, I take it, with complete interest) is morality, and is realization.

The method with which Green meets the difficulty (though he never, as far as I recall, *specifically* recognizes it) is to split the presupposed self into two parts, one the self so far as realized up to date, the other part the ideal and as yet unrealized self. The realized self then becomes the agent, the ideal self the goal of action. The realized self acts *for* the ideal self. In so acting, its motive is the ideal self, perfection, goodness.¹ We might ask, how, with such a break between the already realized self and the ideal self, the ideal self can possibly become an end at all ; we might ask, that is, how this ethical theory is to be reconciled with Green's psychological theory that the object of desire is always the self. With this complete breach of continuity, it is difficult to see how the 'ideal self' can interest the agent (the realized self) at all. But this might take us too far from our immediate purpose ; and it is enough here to repeat, in changed form, the objection just made. If the particular act is done for the sake of goodness in general, then, and in so far, it is done immorally. For morality consists in not degrading any required act into a mere means towards an end lying outside itself, but in doing it for its own sake, or, again, in doing it *as self*. It is, I think, a simple psychological fact that no act can be completely done save as it absorbs attention.² If, then, while doing the act attention must also be directed upon some outside ideal of goodness, the act must suffer, being divided. Not being done for its own sake, or as self, it is only partially done.³ In other words, acts are to be

¹ See, for example, Prolegomena, pp. 202-205.

² I cannot refrain from saying that to my own mind this statement is purely tautological. The attention is not something outside the act, and then directed upon it, but absorption of attention and fulness of activity are two ways of naming the same thing.

³ We should, then, reverse Kant's statement. Instead of saying that an act

done *as* good, not for the sake of goodness; for to call an act good means that it is the full activity or self.

It will take us back to our starting-point and round out the argument, if we note the fact that this division of the self into two separate selves (one the realized self, the other the ideal self), is again the fallacy of hypostatizing into separate entities what in reality are simply two stages of insight upon our own part. This 'realized self' is no reality by itself; it is simply our partial conception of the self erected into an entity. Recognizing its incomplete character, we bring in what we have left out and call it the 'ideal self.' Then by way of dealing with the fact that we have not two selves here at all, but simply a less and a more adequate insight into the same self, we insert the idea of one of these selves realizing the other. We have an insight which first takes the activity abstractly, and, by cutting off some of its intrinsic relations, arrests it and makes of it a merely realized, or past self; when we perceive these intrinsic relations, instead of using them to correct our previous idea, thus grasping the one continuous activity, we set them off by themselves as ideal — as something *to be* realized. Such is the natural history of the fixed distinction between the realized and the ideal self. It has same source as the process which gives rise to the notion of capacities as possibilities in general.

The more one is convinced that the pressing need of the day, in order to make headway against hedonistic ethics on one side and theological ethics on the other, is an ethics rooted and grounded in the self, the greater is the demand that the self be conceived as a working, practical self, carrying within the rhythm of its own process both 'realized' and 'ideal' self. The current ethics of the self (falsely named Neo-Hegelian, being in truth Neo-Fichtean) are too apt to stop with a metaphysical definition, which seems to solve problems in general, but at the expense of the practical problems which alone really

is moral only when done from consciousness of duty, we should say that it is immoral (because partial) as long as done *merely* from a sense of duty, and becomes truly moral when done for its own concrete sake.

demand or admit solution. The great need of ethical theory to-day is a conception of the ideal as a working ideal — a conception which shall have the same value and which shall play the same part in ethics that the working hypothesis performs for the natural sciences. The fixed ideal is as distinctly the bane of ethical science to-day as the fixed universe of mediævalism was the bane of the natural science of the Renaissance. As natural science found its outlet by admitting no idea, no theory, as fixed by itself, demanding of every idea that it become fruitful in experiment, so must ethical science purge itself of all conceptions, of all ideals, save those which are developed within and for the sake of practice.

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