John Hill Burton (1809-81)

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BRADLEY, FRANCIS HERBERT
(1846-1924)

Francis Herbert Bradley was born on 30 January 1846 in Caphera, London. He was educated at Chelsea College, Marlbrough College, and University College, Oxford. Shortly after graduating in 1869, he was elected a fellow of Magton College. He died on 18 September 1924, three months after being awarded the Order of Merit by King George V.

Bradley began his academic career during the heyday of utilitarianism and carpericism. His major work in ethics, Ethical Studies, was published in 1876. It was both a count- erattack on the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick (whose Methods of Ethics had appeared in 1874) and a positive statement of idealistic ethics. Together with T. H. Green's Prolegomena to Ethics (1883), it became a central point of reference for the British Idealists. In 1877, Bradley published a lengthy pamphlet entitled "Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism," a critical account of Sidgwick's Methods of Ethics. Meanwhile, Sidgwick had reviewed Ethical Studies, sparking a reply from Bradley. There was a fierce debate between the two philosophers, so much so that Andrew Vincent remarks that "Bradley's and Sidgwick's Victorian controversy has all the qualities of finely honed academic viciousness" (Booher and Vincent, p. 56).

In Ethical Studies, Bradley develops his positive theory of the moral end as consisting in self-realization through a critical discussion of various rival conceptions. Among these rivals were hedonism and utilitarianism. What was his rejection of utilitarianism? In short, he does the intelligibility of hedonism, of consequentialism and of the possibility of a calculus. Although he acknowledges different versions of utilitarianism such as "modified utilitarianism," Mill's qualitative variant on Classical Utilitarianism and Sidgwick, he contends that they all in the end rest on an egoism in which the moral end is one's own pleasure. Egoistic hedonism, in his view, conflicts with ordinary moral beliefs, which deny that pleasure is the sole or highest end to life.

Again, hedonism misunderstands the nature of the self. If pleasure is a feeling, it exist only as long as it is felt; if pleasures are "perishing particulars" (Bradley, 1927, p. 96), the notion of happiness as their sum is a fiction and so is the unity of the self which is supposed to be constituted by pleasures. A realizable self must go beyond (and must be reduced to) a string of unrelated pleasures and be a self arising to become a coherent whole. "Modern utilitarianism," which seeks to move beyond the individual, is the ethical aspect of the hypothesis, because if the sum of an individual's pleasure is unattainable, so is the sum of pleasures for all. And, further, it can give no account of how it is possible to make the leap from egocentric hedonism to universalistic hedonism. Sidgwick equivocates by building his theory on egoism and quietly suppressing it in making the transition to universalistic hedonism. In effect, he wants to keep pleasure and drop the reference to "my" pleasure, but fails to show how this can be done.

Finally, neither egoistic nor modern utilitarianism tells us how to act: "increase the pleasure of all" given me, by itself, no answer" (Bradley, 1927, p. 105). Consequentialism provides no useful criterion for action: it is too abstract and pre- mised on the illusion of a calculus and the idea of summing pleasures. It also ignores the self as a moral agent. Bradley points out that Sidgwick employs a false moral categor- ization because he "finds the end, and ... the essence of man by examining a 'single sentient being'" (Bradley, 1935, vol. 2, p. 679). This raises issues which ultimately require recourse to metaphysics. It is certainly difficult (perhaps impossible) to imagine that moral thinking could be conducted on such a basis. Bradley's account of self-realization within a moral community has the contrasting merits of being both reasonable as an account of the moral self and plausible as a moral theory.

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Further Reading

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BUTLER

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BUTLER, JOSEPH (1692–1752)

Joseph Butler, philosopher, theologian and controversialist, was born on 18 May 1692 in Wanstow in Oxfordshire (then Berkshire), the son of a moderately prosperous linen draper. He was brought up a Presbyterian and educated at Samuel Jones’s dissenting academy in Gloucester. In 1714, Butler entered the Church of England and went on to study at Oxen College, Oxford. Taking holy orders, he held a number of ecclesiastical offices, including Chaplain to Queen Catherine, wife of George II. He was subsequently appointed Bishop of Bristol in 1738 and became Bishop of Durham in 1750.

Butler’s most important works are fourteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel (1726) and Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed (1738). His influence has been claimed by authors as diverse as David Hume, Thomas Reid, Adam Smith, John Henry Newman and John Rawls, and his famous epigram “Everything is what it is, and not another thing” has been cited by G. E. Moore and Isaiah Berlin as an insight into the truth of ethical pluralism. Butler died in 1752 in Bats in the county of Somerset.

Butler wrote primarily as a religious controversialist and theologian, and his philosophical insights grew out of his religious concerns, not the least of which was to reconcile the claims of morality and scripture. Ethical themes are to be found in both of his major works the Fifteen Sermons and the Analogy, but it is the former that is the more important source of his moral theory. He was not a utilitarian in any modern sense, but the philosophical ethics that forms a part of his Fifteen Sermons has contributed to the development of the utilitarian tradition. The work is divided into a traditional discussion of the love of self (sermons IV–X), the love of one’s neighbour (XI–XII), and the love of God (XIII–XV). The first three sermons comprise a general philosophical introduction. Butler’s insights do not amount to a theory and this is an important part of his critique of rationalism in morals, especially in its Hobbesian form. In place of Hobbesian rationalism egoism and hedonism, Butler offers a more realistic end, in his view, psychologically accurate account of moral experience. Our moral natures are pluralistic, not monistic, in that we have more than one fundamental desire or source of motives. Where Hobbes reduces all motives to egoistic hedonism, Butler counters by suggesting that it is the distinct object of action that is its primary goal rather than pleasure as such. Indeed, Butler advances an argument taken up by later “indirect utilitarians” to the effect that the undifferentiated pursuit of pleasure would be self-defeating, in that it would produce less pleasure than the pursuit of specific ends for their own sake. Even the idea of self-interest requires a distinction between the idea of basic passion and interest, as the satisfaction of immediate passion is often not in our self-interest. The claim is that reductionism in ethics is self-defeating and also an inaccurate account.