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My Station and Its Duties

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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS.

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## MY STATION AND ITS DUTIES.\*

IN taking this opportunity, which your committee has given me, of addressing the London Ethical Society, in the honorable but gravely responsible position of their president, I have thought that I could best fulfil the duties of my station by laying before you one or two difficulties which have occurred to my mind, in thinking how we are to realize the declared aims of our society on the basis of its declared principles. I hope, indeed, not merely to put forward difficulties, but to offer at least a partial solution of them; but I am conscious that it is easier to raise questions than to settle them, and that there is a danger lest the effect of my remarks may be to repel some minds from the study that we are combined to promote. Still, after anxious thought, I have determined to face this danger. For I do not think we ought to conceal from ourselves that the task we have proposed to our society is one of which the complete accomplishment is likely to be very difficult. Indeed, were it otherwise, it would hardly have been left for us to accomplish.

I will begin by explaining that the difficulties of which I am to speak only affect a part of the aims and work of our society; there is another part—and a most important part—

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\* An address delivered to the London Ethical Society on April 23, 1893.

which they do not affect. The first and most comprehensive of the aims that we have stated is

“to assist individual and social efforts after right living.”

Now, what are the obstacles to right living? Why does not each of us completely fulfil the duties of his station?

First, I put aside such obstacles as may seem to lie in external circumstances and material conditions. I do not mean that such circumstances and conditions may not *cause* the gravest hinderances to right living, which a society like ours should make the most earnest efforts to remove. But important as it is to diminish these hinderances, it is no less important for an ethical society to lay stress on the old truth,—sometimes apt to be overlooked in ardent efforts for economic improvement,—that it is possible to act rightly under any material conditions. On this point, I need hardly say that there is an overwhelming agreement among moralists. The ancient thinkers went too far, no doubt, in saying that a perfectly wise and good man would be perfectly happy in the extremest tortures. We moderns cannot go so far as that; but we must still maintain, as a cardinal and essential ethical truth, that a perfectly wise and good man could behave rightly even under these painful conditions. In short, the immediate obstacles to right conduct, however they may be *caused*, lie in our minds and hearts, not in our circumstances.

Looking closer at these obstacles, we find that they lie partly in the state of our intellect, partly in the state of our desires and will. Partly we know our duty imperfectly, partly our motives for acting up to what we know are not strong enough to prevail over our inclination to do something else. The two kinds of obstacles are essentially different, and must be dealt with by different methods; each method has its own problems, and the problems require very different treatment. In what I am to say to-day, I shall treat mainly of the intellectual obstacles,—the imperfection of knowledge. But before I proceed to this, I will illustrate the manner in which the two obstacles are combined by recalling an anecdote from the early history

of ethics. It is told of Socrates that he once met a professional teacher of Wisdom, who informed him that he had discovered the true definition of Justice. "Indeed," said Socrates, "that is a splendid discovery. Now we shall have no more contests in the law-courts, and nations will not have to go to war any more. Every one will have his rights and there will be no more wrongs."

Now, the first impression that this remark makes on us is that Socrates is speaking ironically, as no doubt he partly is. We know that men and nations continually commit injustice knowingly; we remember the old fable of the wolf and the lamb,—where the wolf pleads his own cause, and then pronounces and immediately executes sentence of capital punishment on the weaker animal,—and we surmise that the practical result of this famous debate would not have been altered by our supplying the wolf with the clearest possible formula of justice; the argument might have been cut short, but it would have been all the same in the end to the lamb.

But let us look at the matter again, and we shall see that the master's meaning is not entirely ironical. Let us suppose that our notion of justice suddenly became so clear that in every conflict that is now going on between individuals and classes and nations, every instructed person could at once see what justice required with the same absolute certainty and exactness as a mathematician can now see the answer to a problem in arithmetic; so that if might anywhere overbore right, it would have to be mere naked brutal force, without a rag of moral excuse to hide its nakedness; suppose this, and I think we see at once that though all the injustice in the world would not come to an end,—since there is a good deal of the wolf still left in man,—yet undoubtedly there would be much less injustice; we should still want policemen and soldiers, but we should have much less occasion for their services.

Now, let us make a different supposition: let us suppose the state of our knowledge about justice unchanged, but all the obstacles on the side of motive removed; let us suppose that men's ideas of their rights are still as confused and conflicting

as they are now, but that every one is filled with a predominant desire to realize justice strong enough to prevail over every opposing inclination. Here again we must admit that we should not thus get rid of injustice altogether. I am afraid that it would still be true, as the poet says, that

New and old, disastrous feud,  
Must ever shock like armed foes,

and we might have serious and even sanguinary conflicts between nations and parties, conscientiously inscribing on their banners conflicting principles of Right. But though unintentional injustice of the gravest kind might still be done, what a relief it would be to humanity to have got rid of all intended wrong; and how much nobler, less exasperating, more chivalrous would be the conflicts that still had to go on, if each combatant knew that his adversary was fighting with perfect rectitude of purpose.

I have laid stress on this comparison of imaginary improvements because I think that those who are earnestly concerned for the moral amelioration of themselves and others, are often apt to attend too exclusively to one or other of the two sets of obstacles that I have distinguished. They are either impressed with the evils of moral ignorance, and think that if any one really *knew* what the good life was, he must live it; or, what is more common, they are too exclusively occupied with the defects of desire and will, and inclined to say that any one knows his duty well enough if he would only act up to his knowledge. Now, I hope we shall agree that an ethical society worthy of the name must aim at removing both kinds of defects; success in both endeavors is necessary for the complete accomplishment of our task; but as success in either is difficult, it may encourage us somewhat to think how much would be gained by success in only one of these endeavors, even if the other is supposed to fail altogether. In the education of the young and in the practical work of our society the aim of developing the motives to right action, of intensifying the desire for the good life, must always be prominent. This endeavor has its own difficulties

and dangers of failure, and I do not propose to deal with them to-day. But before I pass on to my special subject,—the other endeavors of removing the defects of moral knowledge,—may I say one thing, out of my observation of human life, as to the endeavor I leave on one side. Though the gift of inspiring enthusiasm for duty and virtue is like other gifts, very unequally distributed among well-meaning persons, I do not believe that any one who has himself an ardent love of goodness ever failed entirely to communicate it to others. He may fail in his particular aims, he may use ill-devised methods, meet with inexplicable disappointments, make mistakes which cause him bitter regret; but we shall find that after all, though the methods may have failed, the man has succeeded; somewhere, somehow, in some valuable degree, he has—if I may use an old classical image—handed on the torch of his own ardor to others who will run the race for the prize of virtue.

We are agreed, then, that much may be done if we simply take the current ideal of what is right and earnestly endeavor to develop a desire to realize it in ourselves and others. But this is not the whole of our aim. We are conscious of defects in this current ideal, and it is impossible for us really to care for it and at the same time to sit down content with these defects. Hence we state it as our second aim

“to free the current ideal of what is right from all that is merely traditional and self-contradictory, and thus to widen and perfect it.”

With this view we invite all our members

“to assist in constructing a Theory or Science of Right, which, starting with the reality and validity of moral distinctions, shall explain their mental and social origin, and connect them in a logical system of thought.”

It is to the difficulties involved in the task thus defined that my thoughts have chiefly turned in meditating what I was to say to you to-day.

I think that no instructed person can regard it as other than arduous. Speaking broadly, what we propose to do is what ancient thinkers had been trying to do for many centuries, before the Christian churches monopolized the work of moral-

izing mankind in this quarter of the globe; and it is also what a long line of modern thinkers have been trying to do for several centuries more, since independent ethical thought revived in Europe, after the long mediæval period of submission to ecclesiastical authority.

Yet the phrase we use—"assist in constructing"—implies that after all these efforts the construction yet remains to be effected. We must, then, hardly be surprised if we do not find it easy.

Still there is a Greek proverb that says "the fine things are difficult," and I by no means wish to say a word to dissuade any one from devoting his energies to so noble a cause, especially since a large part of my own life has been spent in working for this end.

And in order that I may be as little discouraging as possible, I will begin with a difficulty which seems to me sufficiently important to be worth discussing, but which I hope to be able to remove completely.

At first sight it might seem as if the task that we have undertaken—the task of "explaining the mental and social origin of moral distinctions, and connecting them in a logical system of thought"—was one that could only be carried out by experts,—*i.e.*, by persons who have gone through a thorough training in psychology, sociology, and logic,—in short, by philosophers. But the plan on which our society has been framed—and I believe the same is true of all other ethical societies which have been founded—invites the co-operation of all thoughtful persons who sympathize with its principles and aims, whether they are experts in psychology and sociology or not. And if our movement succeeds, the element of non-experts is evidently likely largely to outnumber the experts, unless the philosophers of the community shall increase in number more than is to be expected, or perhaps even desired.

The difficulty then arises, can this unphilosophic majority really aid in the task of constructing a Theory of Right which shall eliminate error and contradiction from current morality, reduce all valid moral perceptions and judgments to

their elements or first principles, and present them as connected in a logical system of thought? Ought we not, at least, to divide and distribute our task more clearly and thoroughly? Does not our invitation at present seem to hand over a work of intellectual construction, requiring the highest gifts and the completest training, to persons who are not, and who cannot be expected to become, duly qualified for the work? Will not these untrained builders build with untempered mortar?"

I have stated this difficulty plainly, because I at first felt it strongly myself, and therefore think that others may have felt it. But reflection convinced me that if the ethical societies have been right—and I hope experience will show that they have been right—in undertaking the noble but arduous task they have proposed to themselves, they have also been right in adopting the broad and comprehensive basis which they adopted. The work cannot be done by philosophers alone: because alone they are not likely to have the requisite knowledge of facts; and because their moral judgment on any particular question of duty, even supposing them to have obtained all available information as to the particular facts of the case, is not to be trusted, unless it is aided, checked, and controlled by the moral judgment of persons with less philosophy but more special experience.

First, as I say, the philosopher's knowledge is likely to be inadequate for the accomplishment of our aim. Our aim is to frame an ideal of the good life for humanity as a whole, and not only for some particular section; and to do this satisfactorily and completely we must have adequate knowledge of the conditions of this life in all the bewildering complexity and variety in which it is actually being lived. This necessity is imposed on us by the modern ethical ideal which our Western civilization owes to Christianity: we cannot any longer decline—as Aristotle would have declined—to work out an ideal of good life for mechanics and tradesmen, because such persons are incapable of virtue to any extent worth considering. But if we are to frame an ideal of good life for all, and to show how a unity of moral spirit and principle may manifest itself through the diversity of actions and forbear-

ances, efforts and endurances, which the diversity of social functions renders necessary,—we can only do this by a comprehensive and varied knowledge of the actual opportunities and limitations, the actual needs and temptations, the actually constraining customs and habits, desires and fears, of all the different species of that “general man” who, as Browning says, “receives life in parts to live in a whole.” And this knowledge a philosopher—whose personal experience is often very limited—cannot adequately attain unless he earnestly avails himself of opportunities of learning from the experience of men of other callings.

But, secondly, even supposing him to have used these opportunities to the full, the philosopher's practical judgment on particular problems of duty is liable to be untrustworthy, unless it is aided and controlled by the practical judgment of others who are not philosophers. This may seem to some a paradox: it may be thought that so far as a philosopher has a sound general theory of right, he must be able to apply it to determine the duties of any particular station in life, if he has taken due pains to inform himself as to that station and its circumstances. And this would doubtless be true if his information could be made complete; but this it cannot be. He can only learn from others the facts which they have consciously observed and remembered; but there is an important element in the experience of themselves and their predecessors—the continuous experience of social generations—which finds no place in any statement of facts or reasoned forecast of consequences that they could furnish; it is only represented in their judgments as to what ought to be done and aimed at. Hence it is a common observation that the judgments of practical men as to what ought to be done in particular circumstances are often far sounder than the reasons they give for them; the judgments represent the result of experience unconsciously as well as consciously imbibed; the reasons have to be drawn from that more limited part of experience which has been the subject of conscious observation, information, and memory. This is why a moral philosopher, in my opinion, should always study with reverent care and patience what I am accustomed

to call the Morality of Common Sense. By this I do not mean the morality "of the world,"—*i.e.*, the moral notions and judgments of the persons who have no serious concern about their moral duty,—who are always perhaps in a majority. Such persons, indeed, have a morality, and it is better than their actions; they approve rules which they do not carry out and admire virtues which they do not imitate. Still, taking the morality of the worldly at its best, it would be wasted labor to try to construct it into a consistent system of thought; what there is in it of wisdom and truth is too much intermixed with a baser element, resulting from want of singleness of heart and aim in those whose thought it represents. What the worldly really want—if I may speak of the world that I know—is not simply to realize the good life in virtue of its supreme work to humanity, but to realize it as much as they can while keeping terms with all their appetites and passions, their sordid interests and vulgar ambitions. The morality that they work out in different ages and countries and different sections of society, under the influence of this spirit of compromise, is not without interest for the historian and the sociologist; but it was not to this mixed stuff that I just now referred when I said that the moral philosopher should study with reverent and patient care the Morality of Common Sense. I referred to the moral judgments—and especially the spontaneous unreflected judgments on particular cases, which are sometimes called moral intuitions—of those persons, to be found in all walks and stations of life, whose earnest and predominant aim is to do their duty; of whom it may be said that

"Though they slip and fall,  
They do not blind their souls with clay,"

but after each lapse and failure recover and renew their rectitude of purpose and their sense of the supreme value of goodness. Such persons are to be found, not alone or chiefly in hermitages and retreats,—if there are still any hermitages and retreats,—but in the thick and heat of the struggle of active life, in all stations and ranks, in the churches and outside the churches. It is to them we have appealed for aid

and sympathy in the great task that we have undertaken ; and it is to their judgments on the duties of their station, in whatever station they may be found, that the moral philosopher should, as I have said, give reverent attention, in order that he may be aided and controlled by them in his theoretical construction of the Science of Right.

Perhaps some of my audience may think that in what I have just been saying I have been laboring the wrong point ; that it needs no argument to show that the moral philosopher, if he tries to work out a reasoned theory of duty in which all the particular duties of particular stations may find their places in one harmonious and coherent system, cannot dispense with the aid and guidance of the special moral experience of practical men ; but that what requires to be proved is rather that the practical man, who desires earnestly to know and fulfil the particular duties of his particular station, has any need of the philosopher. And certainly I must admit that there is a wide-spread opinion, supported by moralists of great repute, that he has hardly any such need ; that, as Butler says, "any plain honest man in almost any circumstances, if, before he engages in any course of action, he asks himself, 'Is this I am going about right, or is it wrong?' would answer the question agreeably to truth and virtue." Or if it be granted that such a plain honest man has any need of philosophers, it is said to be only to protect him against other philosophers ; it is because there are bad philosophers—what we call sophists—about, endeavoring to undermine and confuse the plain man's naturally clear notions of duty, that there has come to be some need of right-minded thinkers to expose the sophistries and dispel the confusions. It is held in short, that if any assistance can be obtained from the moral philosopher by a plain man who is making serious efforts after right living, it is not the positive kind of assistance which a physician gives to those who consult him for rules of diet, but a merely negative assistance, such as the policeman gives who warns suspicious characters off the premises.

This view is so often put forward that I cannot but infer that it is really very widely entertained, and that it corre-

sponds to the moral experience of many persons; that many plain honest men really do think that they always know what their duty is,—at any rate, if they take care not to confuse their moral sense by bad philosophy. In my opinion such persons are, to some extent, under an illusion, and that they really know less than they think. But whether I could convince them of this, or whether, if I could convince them, it would be really for their advantage, are questions which I need not now consider, because I think it hardly likely that such persons have joined our ethical society in any considerable numbers. For to practical men of this stamp the construction of a theory or science of right must seem a work of purely speculative interest, having no particular value whatever; a work, therefore, which persons who have not studied psychology or sociology had better leave to those who profess these subjects. It is not to plain men of this type that our appeal is made, but rather to those whose reflection has made them aware that in their individual efforts after right living they have often to grope and stumble along an imperfectly-lighted path; whose experience has shown them uncertainty, confusion, and contradiction in the current ideal of what is right, and has thus led them to surmise that it may be liable to limitation and imperfection, even when it appears clear and definite. Practical men of this stamp will recognize that the effort to construct a theory of Right is not a matter of mere speculative interest, but of the deepest practical import; and they will no more try to dispense with the aid of philosophy than the moral philosopher—if he knows his own limitations—will try to dispense with the aid of moral common sense.

Well, may I say that here is one difficulty removed? But I am afraid that removing it only brings another into view. We have seen how and why philosophers are to co-operate with earnest and thoughtful persons who are not philosophers in constructing an ethical system: but the discussion has made it evident that the main business of construction and explanation—on the basis of psychology and sociology—must be thrown on the philosophers; and then the question arises, how are they to co-operate among themselves? The reason why the work

remains to be done lies in the fundamental disagreement that has hitherto existed among philosophers as to the principles and method of ethical construction; and so long as this disagreement continues, how is co-operation possible? Well, I think it may be said on the hopeful side, that there is more willingness now to co-operate than there has been in other times not very remote. Fundamental disagreements on principles and methods can only be removed by systematic controversy; but it was difficult to conduct philosophical controversy in a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation, so long as philosophers had the bad habit of arguing in as exasperated a tone as if each had suffered a personal injury through the publication of views opposed to his own. This bad habit has now nearly passed away, and a glance at the names of our committee will show that moralists of the most diverse philosophical schools are willing to combine in the work of an ethical society. But this willingness does not altogether remove the difficulty, or rather it removes it as regards a part of our aims, but not as regards another part. It is easy to see how philosophers of diverse schools may, by sympathetic efforts at mutual understanding and interpenetration of ideas, assist each other in constructing a theory or science of right; but even under these favorable conditions the labor of this construction is likely to be long, and how, in the mean time,—so long as their fundamental disagreements are unremoved,—can they effectually combine to assist individual and social efforts after right living? So long as they are not agreed on the ultimate end of action,—so long as one holds it to be Moral Perfection, another “general happiness,” another “efficiency of the social organism,”—how can any counsels they may combine to give, as to the right way of living so as best to realize the end, be other than discordant and bewildering to those who seek their counsels? The difficulty would be avoided if all the philosophers of the Ethical Society belonged to the same school, for then they could assist those who were not philosophers by reasoned deductions from the accepted principles of the school. They would have to admit that other philosophers held fundamentally different principles, but they would explain to their hear-

ers that the other philosophers were wrong. But, then, if our movement flourished and was found to meet a social need, these other philosophers would be led to form ethical societies of their own. The non-philosophic members of the different societies could not be thoroughly competent judges of the philosophical disputes; but loyalty and *esprit de corps* would lead them to stand firmly by their respective philosophers; and the result must be that any assistance rendered by these competing ethical societies to individual and social efforts after right living, would be hampered by the grave drawbacks of sectarian rivalries and conflicts. In short, it seemed to me that the ethical movement was in a dilemma; if each school had its own ethical society, it incurred the dangers of sectarianism; if different schools combined to work in the same society, it incurred the danger of a bewildering discord of counsels.

Well, here again, I think our society has adopted the right course in accepting the difficulty that attaches to combined efforts; and I think that if this difficulty is contemplated fairly and considerately, though we cannot completely remove it, we can find a provisional solution of it sufficient for practical purposes.

I find this solution in the consoling fact, which the great majority of moralists of all schools have not failed to recognize, that there is much greater agreement among thoughtful persons on the question what a good life is, than on the question, why it is good. When they are trying to define the ultimate end of right actions, the conceptions they respectively apply seem to be so widely divergent that the utmost efforts of mutual criticism seem hardly sufficient to enable them even to understand each other. But when, from the effort to define the ultimate end of right conduct, we pass to discuss right conduct itself, whether viewed on its inner or its outer side,—the spirit in which a good life is to be lived, the habits of thought and feeling that it requires, the external manifestations of this inner rectitude in the performance of duty and the realization of virtue,—then the disagreement is reduced to a surprising extent. I do not say that it becomes insig-

nificant,—that there is no important difference of opinion among philosophers as to the details and particulars of morality. Were this so, the task of an ethical society would be less arduous than I have felt bound to represent it; but it is at any rate not sufficient to prevent a broad, substantial agreement as to the practical ideal of a good life. And I think that philosophers of the most diverse schools may combine on the basis of this broad and general agreement—with each other and with earnest and thoughtful persons who are not philosophers—in their practical ideals; and letting their fundamental differences on ultimate principles drop into the background, may hopefully co-operate in efforts to realize the second of our aims,—to free this current ideal from all that is merely traditional and self-contradictory, and thus to widen and perfect it.

But I am afraid you will think that our task, as I conceive it, is like the climbing of a mountain of which the peaks are hidden one after another behind lower peaks; for when one difficulty is surmounted it brings another into view. We have agreed that our business is to “free the current ideal of what is right from all that is merely traditional;” but we are also agreed—it is one of our express principles—that the good life “is to be realized by accepting and acting in the spirit of such common obligations as are enjoined by the relationships of family and society.” But when we look closer at these common obligations, we find that they are actually determined by tradition and custom to so great an extent that if we subtracted the traditional element it would be very difficult to say what the spirit of the obligation was. This is not perhaps clear at first sight, because the moral tradition, familiar to us from childhood upward, blends itself so completely with our conception of the facts that it seems to the unreflecting mind to arise out of them naturally and inevitably; but if we take any such common obligation and compare the different conceptions of it as we find them in different ages and countries, the large space occupied by the traditional element becomes clear through the great range of its variations. Take, for instance, the family relations. As we trace these down the

stream of time we see them undergoing remarkable changes both in extent and content. The mutual claims of kindred more remote than the descendants of the same parents or grandparents, which in primitive times are strong and important, become feeble and evanescent as civilization goes on; while within the narrower circle, within which the tie still remains strong, the element of authority on the one hand and of obedience on the other—authority of husbands over wives and parents over children—is subject to a similar, though not an equal, diminution; on the other hand, the interference of the state in the domestic control and provision for children's welfare, which was at first left entirely to parents, is a marked feature of recent social progress. During the whole of this process of historic change the recognized mutual obligations of members of the family have been determined by the actual state of tradition at any given time; when, then, from this historic survey we turn to scrutinize our own ideal of family duty, how are we to tell how much of it belongs to mere tradition, which the river of progress will sweep away, and how much belongs to the indestructible conditions of the well-being of life, propagated as human life must be propagated? And the same may be said when we pass from domestic to social and political relations: what social classes owe to each other, according to our commonly accepted ideal of morality, depends on traditions which result from a gradual development, are going through a process of change, and are actually assailed by doubts and controversies often of a deep and far-reaching kind; how can we find in this moving, though slowly moving, mass of traditional rules and sentiments, which is the element in which our outward moral life is necessarily lived, any stable foundation on which to build, and to invite others to build, the structure of a good life? And yet, on the other hand, we have pledged ourselves not to acquiesce in "mere tradition," when recognized as such,—for which, indeed, we can hardly feel or inspire any enthusiasm.

Of this difficulty there is, I think, no complete solution possible, until our task of constructing a theory or science of

Right has been satisfactorily accomplished; but a provisional and partial solution is possible, and with that I will now briefly conclude,—

First, in considering difficulties of detail, we must never lose sight of the relation of different parts of morality to other parts and to the whole. If we find anywhere an inconsistency between one part and another, an arbitrary inequality in the treatment of human beings, an arbitrary preference of some to others,—*e.g.*, if to take a simple case we find that we cannot really distinguish what we have judged legitimate for us to do to others from what we have judged illegitimate for others to do to us,—then in this inconsistency we may find a sure sign of error and need of change in our ethical view. Secondly, we should never lose grasp of the importance of that rectitude of purpose, that mental attitude and habit of devotion to universal good, which constitutes the core and centre of the good life. Whatever else shifts, as life and thought changes, this central element is stable and its moral value indestructible; and it not only consoles us to rest on this certitude when practical doubts and perplexities assail us, but it may sometimes afford a solution of these doubts. It is, indeed, a dangerous error, to hold that it does not matter what we do, so long as we do it in the right spirit; but though a dangerous error, it is still only an exaggeration of the truth; for there are many cases where it really does not matter very much to ourselves or to others which of two alternative courses we adopt, so long as we take whichever we do take in a spirit of sincere devotion to the general good, and carry it through in the manner and mood of thought and feeling which belong to this spirit.

Further, we may make this old and abstract conception of the general good more full and definite by combining it with the more modern conception of society as an organism: in which each individual worker in any trade or profession is to be regarded as a member of an organ, having his share of responsibility for the action of this organ. We shall thus recognize that the right condition of any such organ depends on the service it renders to the whole organism; so that if

the accepted moral rules and sentiments of any such social class are seen to tend to the benefit of the part at the expense of the whole, they stand condemned. It does not follow that the rules should be at once set aside—as this might cause a greater evil in the way of disappointment and disturbance—but we must recognize the need of change and begin the process. Similarly, if we find that elements of human good, such as knowledge and art, important in the life of the whole, are not sufficiently recognized in our current moral ideal, the same principle will require us to enlarge and extend this ideal to admit them.

And if it be said that after all is done, the moral ideal of our age, however purged of inconsistencies and inspired and expanded by a steady self-devotion to the most comprehensive notion of good that we can form, is still imperfect and mutable, and that it must be expected to undergo, in the future, transformations now unforeseen, it yet need not painfully disturb us that the best of our possessions should be thus subject to the inexorable conditions of mundane existence. It need not hinder us from cherishing and holding to the best we have, so long as it remains the best. Life is essentially change, and the good life must be essentially life; it is enough if it contain unchanged amid the change that aspiration after the best life, which is itself a chief source and spring of change.

HENRY SIDGWICK.

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND.

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## WHAT JUSTIFIES PRIVATE PROPERTY? \*

WHAT is it that authorizes a person to say of anything with a clear conscience, "This is mine"? The thought is sure at times to press in on the consciousness, "What gives me the right to what I possess?" It is not an issue that pertains exclusively to one element of human society. Strictly speaking we cannot divide the world into a "possessing and a non-

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\* An address read before the Ethical Society of St. Louis, April, 1893.