

M a r i a O s s o w s k a
MOTYWY POSTĘPOWANIA
Z zagadnień psychologii moralności

Z księgozbioru
M. i ST. OSSOWSKICH

HUMAN MOTIVATION

(ENQUIRY INTO THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MORAL LIFE)

(Summary)

The problems discussed in this book are familiar to those who followed the controversy concerning human nature which held — especially in England — a large place in the ethical writings of the XVIII and XIX centuries. This discussion, started by Hobbes with his pessimistic picture of man, was concerned with the question whether human activity was always determined by the agent's own pleasure or pain, whether in order to bring about our own pleasure we are always apt to ignore and go against other people's interests, or whether — as it was argued by Hobbes' opponents — our social instincts are strong enough to make us take these interests into account and even to sacrifice our own for their sake. Facing the alternative *homo homini lupus* or *frater*, some ethical writers professed the first, and others the second.

The first chapter begins with a review of the principal concepts involved in this controversy. Although the concept of human nature could easily be dispensed with in the present book, the author devotes some introductory remarks to its analysis. It appears that in none of the different meanings connected with the word „natural“ can a sharp line be drawn between what is natural and what is not. In one sense the concept of human nature could be possibly of some use in science. In this sense human „nature“ would consist of characteristics common to all

human beings and to be found in men independently of their physical or social environment.

The analysis of the concept of human nature is followed by an analysis of the term „motive“, „intention“, and the expression „to be guided by something in one's behaviour“. All the ambiguities of the word „motive“ can be reduced to five principal meanings. In none of these senses can the word „motive“ be treated — as it often is done — on the same level with the word „intention“, „motive“ being a functional designation which can be given to any mental experience playing a definite role in human behaviour, while „intention“ denotes a definite volitional experience. Ambiguities of expressions like „to be guided by something“ are illustrated by the example of the different meanings which have been given to the expression „to be guided by reason“.

The second chapter is devoted to theories which consider men's behaviour as being actuated by pleasure or pain, theories known under the name of psychological hedonism. Psychological hedonism can deal either with valuation only or with human behaviour in general. Among hedonistic theories of valuation a distinction has to be drawn between: 1) a theory which claims that we should never arrive at the distinction between good and evil if we were not able to experience pleasure and pain, 2) a theory which holds that any value judgment attributes value to an object on account of its capacity to produce pleasure or pain, and 3) a theory which considers value-judgments as expressions of pleasure or pain. It is not the intention of the author to dwell upon these forms of hedonism but to concentrate on hedonism as general theory of human behaviour.

Neither the partisans of psychological hedonism nor their opponents have usually cared to state explicitly what they have been fighting for, while psychological hedonism can take on different forms which are far from being equivalent.

The author goes on to review a number of possible varieties of the thesis discussed. Each of these varieties can in turn be

interpreted: as a theory which holds pleasure the only determinant, the main factor, the necessary component in the motivating complex, the validity of the arguments put forward by both sides being entirely dependent upon the interpretation given to the theory they are expected to support.

Some varieties of psychological hedonism remain untouched by arguments treated in the history of the problem as absolutely convincing. Some ethical writers fighting against hedonism in one of its forms did in fact accept another, like G. E. Moore who rejected the opinion that a thought of a future pleasure determines our actions and at the same time was willing to admit that a present pleasant thought of the desired object was a necessary component of the motivating complex.

In all this discussion the situation of pleasure and of pain were usually considered symmetrical. Thus most ethical writers, after having formulated their theory and its corresponding arguments in terms of pleasure, did not take the trouble to state it once more in terms of pain. But the situation proves more complicated that it *prima facie* appeared and some of the arguments translated from the language of pleasure into that of pain seem to lose their power of conviction.

Further, psychological hedonism was quite erroneously treated as an affirmation of general egoism and an apology for the grasshopper's life as opposed to that of an ant. Needless to say that „to be guided by pleasure“ in any possible interpretation of the theory leaves men a free choice in the selection of their pleasures which can also be derived from sacrifices. These prejudices made people fight hedonism as a degrading opinion — a misunderstanding which ought to be cleared for ever.

As psychological hedonism is an empirical hypothesis which can only be confirmed or refuted by facts, the author is addressing psychologists for their opinion on the subject discussed. Modern psychologists — especially in U. S. A. — did approach this question and some of them, like P. Th. Young, even discussed it at some length. According to this author, observations done in labo-

ratories, covering very simple cases of pursuit and avoidance in their connection with pleasure or pain, bring no decisive answer for or against psychological hedonism which is concerned with far more complex forms of behaviour. The only thing which can be stated in laboratories is that pain is associated with avoidance and pleasure with the pursuit of a definite object. This statement is called by Young „factual hedonism“.

The problem of hedonism is still the subject of the third chapter, where the author endeavours to find out negative instances, i. e. situations, where people either seek pain or avoid pleasure. These considerations lead to a general view on man's attitude to pain and pleasure.

The cases where we seek pain in order to get more pleasure or avoid more pain constitute a first group of instances where pain is not only not avoided but actively sought. To a second group belong the cases where people resort to suffering because they are moved by a rather strange belief that it can be offered to propitiate a Supreme Being or can compensate a fault committed. Here also pain is not an end in itself. Neither is it an end in itself when purposely inflicted in practices leading to moral improvement. It is a well known fact that people believe in the value of pain as a means of strengthening the character and of enabling us to react with greater sensitiveness to the misfortunes of our neighbours. Ascetics of all times have considered prolonged suffering as a means of experiencing highly valuable states of grace granted them by a Supreme Being. There are also cases where pain is believed to be a duty; as in the case of the death of near relatives, or when a bad deed has been committed. The absence of pain in situations of this kind fills some people with uneasiness; they do their best to suffer. They do it to be entitled to consider themselves as endowed with loving hearts and finer feelings, a conviction necessary for the maintenance of their self-respect.

In many cases when people spoke about voluptuous suffering, as did the Romantic poets, they considered it a proof of superiority. When J. St. Mill chose to be a dissatisfied wise man instead

of a satisfied fool, he simply expressed the opinion that the consciousness of one's own dignity is an important factor in happiness.

But although all the cases mentioned above can be interpreted as cases, where pain plays the part of the means to attain a desirable end, the fact remains that means often become ends and that masochism, in its wider sense (not restricted to sexual life) cannot easily be explained in terms of a hedonistic interpretation. Man's tendency to selfdestruction, whose importance was increasingly stressed in Freud's last writings and whose role is the object of some recent work of French psychologists, constitutes the main obstacle against professing psychological hedonism. On the other hand the fact that the only possibility to induce men to act is to entice them by the prospect of pleasure or frighten them by the prospect of pain constitutes the main argument in its favour.

It would be well to note that, even if psychological hedonism proved to be a plausible hypothesis, this hypothesis would not be very instructive. It would put us in a situation similar to that created by a theory to the effect that every one aims at the satisfaction of their needs. As we learn little from that statement until we know what people's needs are, so we learn little from hedonism in its various forms unless we know what are the main sources of pleasure for men.

The revision of the problem of hedonism suggests some general remarks on man's attitude to pain and pleasure. The author endeavours to find out in what circumstances the belief that suffering is desirable flourishes. It is obvious that this belief gives people some compensating relief, when they are both oppressed and powerless; it gives them a feeling of superiority over the privileged. The value of suffering has also been professed by those who tried to explain its existence in a world created by a benevolent and almighty God (*si deus bonus, unde malum?*).

Like the belief in the value of pain, the belief in the sinfulness of pleasure encountered not only among Puritans, must have a psychological and sociological explanation.

In chapter IV, in connection with the well known controversy on selfishness supposed to be inherent in human „nature“, the characteristics of an action called egoistic are the first to be considered. After mentioning several definitions, obviously inadequate, the author puts forward a definition of an egoistic act as one in which the agent, facing a conflict of other people's interests with his own, chooses the latter. This suggestion, although much more satisfactory than those mentioned before, gives rise to some difficulties which cannot easily be overcome. It is common knowledge that our choice in the case of a conflict is termed egoistic only where there is a definite proportion between our own interests which we choose and those of our neighbours which we ignore. In order to avoid being called an egoist, we are not required to sacrifice something which is of vital importance to us for something which brings but little profit to others. Some people even argue that there are values which can never be sacrificed, as e. g. moral values. Further difficulties arise in connection with the possessive terms involved in the definition of egoism. Interests of mine? What kind of relation is meant here? We speak of „my“ hat, „my“ son, „my“ opinion, „my“ country. In each case a different relation is implied by the word „my“. „My own“ is not only ambiguous but also elastic. Speaking of a great man, we sometimes say that he made the interests of his country his own. What kind of relation has to be understood by „my“ and „our“ when we recommend to people to take into account the interests of other people even if they are in conflict with their own?

Neither does the definition of an egoistic action mentioned above take into account the fact that there are different kinds of social relations; it overlooks the fact that only in some types of human relations does a choice in favour of our own interests, when they are in conflict with those of others, deserve the name of egoism. It does not do so e. g. in a commercial transaction, when A, the owner of certain goods, sells them to B. Their interests are conflicting. A's interest is to get as much as possible,

B's to pay as little as possible. Neither of them is considered an egoist, although each of them looks after himself first. It is in personal relations coloured with feeling that a man can gain the name of an egoist most easily, while he is free to act for himself in different kinds of struggles, whether it be a struggle for life, or a struggle devoid of any danger or ill will e. g. in games and sports.

After a review of some concepts nearest to the notion of egoism, like the concept of egocentrism, egotism etc., the author tries to test the validity of arguments of those who hold egoism as inherent in human nature and the validity of the arguments of their opponents. Here again the thesis discussed can take on different forms. In some of them it owes its plausibility to the ambiguity and elasticity of the possessive terms. Their suitable extension, combined with the vagueness of terms like „interested“ or „disinterested“ helped to make the theory discussed almost a truism, although the mere existence of „disinterested“ malevolence, pointed out by A. Bain, ought to have suggested some doubts to adherents of this theory.

All those who believed that there is in human motivation something beside regard for one's own person stressed — as we know — the part of altruism, of sympathy and of social instincts in human behaviour. These theories are considered in the fifth chapter.

An altruistic action — if common intuitions are to be respected — cannot be characterised by a simple opposition to an egoistic action. Here a conflict does not seem necessary to give people the opportunity of acting as altruists. By merely showing regard for others they can deserve this name. Besides, the definition of altruism, containing common terms with the definition of egoism leads to similar difficulties. Here again e. g. the type of social relation between the agent and the person for whose good he acts ought to be taken into account. The solicitude of parents for the well-being of their offspring, their readiness to sacrifice their interests for those of their children are not usually

considered altruistic. Nor is the eagerness of a lover to secure pleasure for his beloved. The term „altruistic“ does not seem suitable in affective relations, and we use it rather in relations tinged with hostility or in relations, similar to those between a chauffeur of a taxi and a casual passenger, which the author proposes to call impersonal.

After some remarks on different and rather pathological forms of altruism, the author concentrates upon sympathy whose role in moral life, since the time of A. Smith, was considered particularly important. By Smith himself sympathy was used 1) to explain the origin of moral approval and disapproval, 2) to test their validity and 3) was considered the main motive leading men to morally good actions.

An examination of the opinions of A. Smith reveals the ambiguities of the term „sympathy“. Sometimes sympathy is a tendency to react in unison with other people, sometimes it is benevolence and friendliness. Referring to Smith, many authors of the XIX c. endeavoured to show that morally good actions can be explained by morally neutral factors, that we are led to sacrifice by a spontaneous tendency common to all human beings, a tendency to experience „fellow-feelings“ with other people, which by itself is subject neither to approval nor to disapproval. If however we understand the word „sympathy“ in its etymological sense we can only accept that this tendency, combined with the tendency to feel pleasure in harmony and displeasure in disharmony, plays a role in moral life, but the role is not important enough to consider sympathy the principal motive in our ethically good actions. It certainly contributes to the development of inhibitions and emotions desirable from the moralist's point of view. It also makes people care for social approval as symptom of accord and avoid social disapproval as symptom of being at variance with society.

A few words must still be said about the so-called social instincts. „So-called“, as the author fully agrees with the criticism of those who point out that this concept has been abused. Accord-

ing to a popular interpretation, the social instinct is a tendency leading to the formation of groups and their consolidation. Although both the parental and sexual instincts play this double role, they are usually not included in the list of social instincts. We encounter among them first of all: the gregarious instinct, sympathy, the tendency to cooperate, the tendency to secure the approval and avoid the disapproval of one's fellow-men. The latter tendency and sympathy were previously discussed by the author. A few words must now be added about the other two „instincts“. The gregarious instinct has been understood in various ways by different authors. This has led to apparent controversies (e. g. that between W. Mc Dougall and L. L. Bernard). The dread of being excluded from one's group being one of its symptoms, the gregarious instinct can prevent people from doing things of which the group disapproves. Thus it plays a part in moral life. As to the tendency to cooperate, it is morally neutral as people can cooperate in the realisation of ends which are from the moralist's point of view as well desirable as undesirable.

The last chapter is entirely devoted to experiences intimately connected with moral life. It starts with an analysis of the so-called moral sense. After a few historical remarks concerning the ethical writers who contributed to make this notion popular, the author turns to modern psychologists to ask them what they are really concerned with, when they test moral sense in children. The analysis of moral sense leads to an analysis of the so-called moral insanity — a concept still vague and of no great use in science. Next follows an analysis of conscience and of remorse. The question of how conscience develops in man has been the subject of many different theories, which the author discusses one after the other. Remorse, usually treated as its most typical manifestation was considered by W. Mc Dougall as an angry and shameful regret, while Freud saw in it self-agression and fear. Having collected a number of instances of remorse the author shows the variety of its components and its affinity with other

instances of self-disapproval which might have nothing in common with moral life.

While remorse is retrospective, scruple is a manifestation of conscience directed towards the future. The works of the psychoanalysts and those of modern French psychopatologists have greatly contributed to bring to light the conditions in which a scrupulous conscience develops. Its existence cannot be always a proof of a refined moral culture, as scruples sometimes arise to free people from the need to act.

Remorse as well as scruples are usually connected with a definite action. The situation is different with a sense of guilt which can manifest itself in connection with no definite wrong deed and can accompany longer periods of human life as it is e. g. with a vague sense of guilt often connected with sexual life. Different writers agree in seeing in this sense of guilt a manifestation of an inner disharmony. Freud and his followers attributed this disharmony to an ambivalence inherent in man whose love for an object is mixed with hate. Some authors — only so far as sexual life is concerned — attributed this sense of guilt to a disharmony between Sexus and Eros, which in some people can never fall upon the same object. The part of a sense of guilt in some mental diseases has been recently shown by a French physician, H. Baruk. According to this author, the fits of hate noted in some mental diseases are due to a sense of guilt. People invent different reasons for hating a person in order to get rid of a sense of guilt which they feel towards him or her.

The author concludes by collecting some evidence showing the importance of moral experience in human life. People's obstinacy in believing in absolute moral standards, easily traced even in the writings of those who profess to be relativists; the mistrust felt towards those who, when discussing moral matters, adopt a scientific attitude and avoid that of believers; the hostility aroused by the „debunkers“, all these are proofs of the existence of some vital moral needs which do not seem confined to one type of culture only. That they are general is confirmed by the

fact that so is hypocrisy, which La Rochefoucauld rightly considered as the homage paid by vice to virtue. The author does not see any explanation of the importance of these needs, which would fit in all fields of moral life, as our moral beliefs form an inconsistent whole, whose different components ought to be treated separately, since they are often linked with others by tradition only.