My Early Beliefs

John Maynard Keynes

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A 1938 memoir by Keynes of his time as a philosophy student at Cambridge, how it affected his later career, and what he thought was missing from his early world view.

Introductory Note

By David Garnett[1]

The paper which follows was written as the result of a memoir of mine which was read in Lord Keynes's absence, owing, I think, to his illness. It was afterwards sent to him to read. I am not sure of the date when my paper was read, but the envelope in which it is contained shows that it was returned by him from Tilton at the end of August 1938. His paper, which is printed here, was written at the beginning of September, when my paper was fresh in his mind. The subject of my memoir was the story of my introducing several of my friends to D. H. Lawrence, his intense dislike of them, and my bitter disappointment, which led me to stop seeing Lawrence. Keynes was one of my friends whom Lawrence most disliked. His feeling about them was, in essence, religious intolerance. He was a prophet who hated all those whose creeds protected them from ever becoming his disciples. I brought this out in my memoir and thus led Keynes to the re examination of his early beliefs which follows.

I had got to know Lawrence and Frieda in 1912 owing to my father's friendship with him.

I was extremely fond of him and have no doubt that he liked me. I have never met a writer who appeared to have such genius. I greatly

[1] This paper is not so readily available online, so I've included it here, along with David Garnett's introductory note.

admired, and still admire, his short stories, his poems and several of his novels, particularly his first novel *The White Peacock*. But I was a rationalist and a scientist, and I was repelled by his intuitive and dogmatic philosophy, whereas the ideas of my friends from Cambridge interested and attracted me.

It was thus inevitable that sooner or later Lawrence should spew me out of his mouth, since I could never take his philosophy seriously. The breach was merely hastened by his meeting my friends. After my last visit to stay with Lawrence he wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell, to whom I had also introduced him, in a letter included in his published correspondence:

> We had David Garnett and Francis Birrell here for the week-end. When Birrell comes, tired and a bit lost and wandering-I love him. But, my God, to hear him talk sends me mad. To hear these young people talk really fills me with black fury: they talk endlessly, but endlessly-and never, never a good thing said. They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own and out of this they talk words. There is never for one second any outgoing of feeling and no reverence, not a crumb or grain of reverence. I cannot stand it. I will not have people like this-I had rather be alone. They made me dream of a beetle that bites like a scorpion. But I killed it-a very large beetle. I scotched it and it ran off-but I came on it again, and killed it. It is this horror of little swarming selves I can't stand.

On the same day, the 19 April 1915, Lawrence wrote to me:

> My dear David,
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> Never bring Birrell to see me any more. There is something nasty about him like black beetles. He is horrible and unclean. I feel I should go mad when I think of your set, Duncan Grant and Keynes and Birrell. It makes me dream of beetles. In Cambridge I had a similar dream. I had felt it slightly before in the Stracheys. But it came full upon me in Keynes and in Duncan Grant. And yesterday I knew it again in Birrell ... you must leave these friends, these beetles, Birrell and Duncan Grant are done for forever. Keynes I **am** not sure ... when I saw Keynes

> that morning in Cambridge it was one of the crises of my life. It sent me mad with misery and hostility and **rage** ...

I replied to this letter, which was really an ultimatum telling me to break with him or with my friends, as I thought suitably and I only once saw Lawrence again, by accident, on Armistice Night, the 11 November 1918, in Montague Shearman's rooms in the Adelphi. The breach would no doubt have been healed had Lawrence been more often in England. I continued to see Frieda when she visited England periodically, and in 1928 I wrote to Lawrence to tell him how much I admired *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in a letter which pleased him, and he wrote me a warm and friendly letter in return.

The reader is now in possession of the facts which led Maynard Keynes to re-examine his beliefs and those of his closest friends when they were undergraduates at Cambridge.

My Early Beliefs

I can visualise very clearly the scene of my meeting with D. H. Lawrence in 1914 (Bunny seems to suggest 1915, but my memory suggests that it may have been earlier than that) of which he speaks in the letter from which Bunny quoted at the last meeting of the Club. But unfortunately I cannot remember any fragment of what was said, though I retain some faint remains of what was felt.

It was at a breakfast party given by Bertie Russell in his rooms in Nevile's Court. There were only the three of us there. I fancy that Lawrence had been staying with Bertie and that there had been some meeting or party the night before, at which Lawrence had been facing Cambridge. Probably he had not enjoyed it.[2] My memory is that he was morose from the outset and said very little, apart from indefinite expressions of irritable dissent, all the morning. Most of the talk was between Bertie and me, and I haven't the faintest recollection of what it was about. But it was not the sort of conversation we should have had if we had been alone. It was *at* Lawrence and with the intention, largely unsuccessful, of getting him to participate. We sat round the fireplace with the sofa drawn across. Lawrence sat on the right-hand side in rather a crouching position with his head down. Bertie stood up by the fireplace, as I think I did, too, from time to time. I came

[2] Professor G. E. Moore tells me that he sat next Lawrence in Hall that night and found nothing to say to him, but that afterwards Lawrence was introduced to Professor Hardy, the mathematician, with whom he had a long and friendly discussion. From the moment of Lawrence's introduction to Hardy, the evening was a success. [D. G.]

away feeling that the party had been a failure and that we had failed to establish contact, but with no other particular impression. You know the sort of situation when two familiar friends talk *at* a visitor. I had never seen him before, and I never saw him again. Many years later he recorded in a letter, which is printed in his published correspondence, that I was the only member of Bloomsbury who had supported him by subscribing for *Lady Chatterley*.

That is all I *remember*. But Bunny's story suggests some inferences to me. In the passage of his life which Bunny has described I think that Lawrence was influenced by two causes of emotional disturbance. One of them centred round Ottoline. As always, Ottoline was keeping more than one world. Except for Bertie, the Cambridge and Bloomsbury world was only just beginning to hold her. Lawrence, Gertler, Carrington were a different strand in her furbelows. Lawrence was jealous of the other lot; and Cambridge rationalism and cynicism, then at their height, were, of course, repulsive to him. Bertie gave him what must have been, I think, his first glimpse of Cambridge. It over whelmed, attracted and repulsed him-which was the other emotional disturbance. It was obviously a civilisation, and not less obviously uncomfortable and unattainable for him-very repulsive and very attractive. Now Bunny had come into his life quite independently, neither through Ottoline nor from Cambridge and Bloomsbury; he was evidently very fond of Bunny; and when he saw *him* being seduced by Cambridge, he was yet more jealous, just as he was jealous of Ottoline's new leanings that way. And jealousy apart, it is impossible to imagine moods more antagonistic than those of Lawrence and of pre-war Cambridge.

But when all that has been said, was there something true and right in what Lawrence felt? There generally was. His reactions were incomplete and unfair, but they were not usually baseless. I have said that I have forgotten what the conversation was about. But I expect it was pretty brittle stuff-not so brittle as Frankie Birrell's-but pretty brittle all the same. And although it was silly to take it, or to estimate it, at its face value, did the way of responding to life which lay behind it lack something important? Lawrence was oblivious of anything valuable it may have offered-it was a *lack* that he was violently apprehending. So Bunny's memoir has thrown my mind back to reflections about our mental history in the dozen years before the war; and if it will not shock the club too much, I should like in this contribution to its proceedings to introduce for once, mental or spiritual, instead of sex-

ual, adventures, to try and recall the principal impacts on one's virgin mind and to wonder how it has all turned out, and whether one still holds by that youthful religion.

I went up to Cambridge at Michaelmas 1902, and Moore's *Principia Ethica* came out at the end of my first year. I have never heard of the present generation having read it. But, of course, its effect on *us*, and the talk which preceded and followed it, dominated, and perhaps still dominate, everything else. We were at an age when our beliefs influenced our behaviour, a characteristic of the young which it is easy for the middle-aged to forget, and the habits of feeling formed then still persist in a recognisable degree. It is those habits of feeling, influencing the majority of us, which make this Club a collectivity and separate us from the rest. They overlaid, somehow, our otherwise extremely different characters-Moore himself was a puritan and precisian, Strachey (for that was his name at that time) a Voltairean, Woolf a rabbi, myself a non-conformist, Sheppard a conformist and (as it now turns out) an ecclesiastic, Clive a gay and amiable dog, Sydney-Turner a quietist, Hawtrey a dogmatist and so on. Of those who had come just before, only MacCarthy and Ainsworth, who were much influenced by their personal feelings for Moore, came under his full influence. We did not see much of Forster at that time; who was already the elusive colt of a dark horse. It was only for us, those who were active in 1903, that Moore completely ousted McTaggart, Dickinson, Russell. The influence was not only overwhelming; but it was the extreme opposite of what Strachey used to call *funeste*; it was exciting, exhilarating, the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth, we were the forerunners of a new dispensation, we were not afraid of anything. Perhaps it was because we were so brought up that even at our gloomiest and worst we have never lost a certain resilience which the younger generation seem never to have had. They have enjoyed, at most, only a pale reflection of something, not altogether superseded, but faded and without illusions.

Now what we got from Moore was by no means entirely what he offered us. He had one foot on the threshold of the new heaven, but the other foot in Sidgwick and the Benthamite calculus and the general rules of correct behaviour. There was one chapter in the *Principia* of which we took not the slightest notice. We accepted Moore's religion, so to speak, and discarded his morals. Indeed, in our opinion, one of the greatest advantages of his religion, was that it made morals

unnecessary-meaning by 'religion' one's attitude towards oneself and the ultimate and by 'morals' one's attitude towards the outside world and the intermediate. To the consequences of having a religion and no morals I return later.

Even if the new members of the Club know what the religion was (do they?), it will not do any of us any harm to try and recall the crude outlines. Nothing mattered except states of mind, our own and other people's of course, but chiefly our own. These states of mind were not associated with action or achievement or with consequences. They consisted in timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to 'before' and 'after'. Their value depended, in accordance with the principle of organic unity, on the state of affairs as a whole which could not be usefully analysed into parts. For example, the value of the state of mind of being in love did not depend merely on the nature of one's own emotions, but also on the worth of their object and on the reciprocity and nature of the object's emotions; but it did not depend, if I remember rightly, or did not depend much, on what happened, or how one felt about it, a year later, though I myself was always an advocate of a principle of organic unity through time, which still seems to me only sensible. The appropriate subjects of passionate contemplation and communion were a beloved person, beauty and truth, and one's prime objects in life were love, the creation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience and the pursuit of knowledge. Of these love came a long way first. But in the early days under Moore's influence the public treatment of this and its associated acts was, on the whole, austere and platonic. Some of us might argue that physical enjoyment could spoil and detract from the state of mind as a whole. I do not remember at what date Strachey issued his edict that certain Latin technical terms of sex were the correct words to use, that to avoid them was a grave error, and, even in mixed company, a weakness, and the use of other synonyms a vulgarity. But I should certainly say that this was later. In 1903 those words were not even esoteric terms of common discourse.

Our religion closely followed the English puritan tradition of being chiefly concerned with the salvation of our own souls. The divine resided within a closed circle. There was not a very intimate connection between 'being good' and 'doing good'; and we had a feeling that there was some risk that in practice the latter might interfere with the former. But religions proper, as distinct from modern 'social service' pseudo-religions, have al ways been of that character; and perhaps it

was a sufficient offset that our religion was altogether unworldly-with wealth, power, popularity or success it had no concern whatever, they were thoroughly despised.

How did we know what states of mind were good? This was a matter of direct inspection, of direct unanalysable intuition about which it was useless and impossible to argue. In that case who was right when there was a difference of opinion? There were two possible explanations. It might be that the two parties were not really talking about the same thing, that they were not bringing their intuitions to bear on precisely the same object, and, by virtue of the principle of organic unity, a very small difference in the object might make a very big difference in the result. Or it might be that some people had an acuter sense of judgment, just as some people can judge a vintage port and others cannot. On the whole, so far as I remember, this explanation prevailed. In practice, victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility. Moore at this time was a master of this method-greeting one's remarks with a gasp of incredulity *Do* you *really* think *that*, an expression of face as if to hear such a thing said reduced him to a state of wonder verging on imbecility, with his mouth wide open and wagging his head in the negative so violently that his hair shook. *Oh!* he would say, goggling at you as if either you or he must be mad; and no reply was possible. Strachey's methods were different: grim silence as if such a dreadful observation was beyond comment and the less said about it the better, but almost as effective for disposing of what he called death-packets. Woolf was fairly good at indicating a negative, but he was better at producing the effect that was use less to argue with *him* than at crushing *you*. Dickinson knew how to shrug his shoulders and retreat unconvinced, but it was retreat all the same. As for Sheppard and me we could only turn like worms, but worms who could be eventually goaded into voluble claims that worms have at least the *right* to turn. Yet after all the differences were about details. Broadly speaking we all knew for certain what were good states of mind and that they consisted in communion with objects of love, beauty and truth.

I have called this faith a religion, and some sort of relation of neoplatonism it surely was. But we should have been very angry at the time with such a suggestion. We regarded all this as entirely rational and scientific in character. Like any other branch of science, it was nothing more than the application of logic and rational analysis to

the material presented as sense-data. Our apprehension of good was exactly the same as our apprehension of green, and we purported to handle it with the same logical and analytical technique which was appropriate to the latter. Indeed we combined a dogmatic treatment as to the nature of experience with a method of handling it which was extravagantly scholastic. Russell's *Principles of Mathematics* came out in the same year as *Principia Ethica*; and the former, in spirit, furnished a method for handling the material provided by the latter. Let me give you a few examples of the sort of things we used to discuss.

If A was in love with B and believed that B reciprocated his feelings, whereas in fact B did not, but was in love with C, the state of affairs was certainly not so good as it would have been if A had been right, but was it worse or better than it would become if A discovered his mistake? If A was in love with B under a misapprehension as to B's qualities, was this better or worse than A's not being in love at all? If A was in love with B because A's spectacles were not strong enough to see B's complexion, did this altogether, or partly, destroy the value of A's state of mind? Suppose we were to live our lives backwards, having our experiences in the reverse order, would this affect the value of successive states of mind? If the states of mind enjoyed by each of us were pooled and then redistributed, would this affect their value? How did one compare the value of a good state of mind which had bad consequences with a bad state of mind which had good consequences? In valuing the consequences did one assess them at their actual value as it turned out eventually to be, or their probable value at the time? If at their probable value, how much evidence as to possible consequences was it one's duty to collect before applying the calculus? Was there a separate objective standard of beauty? Was a beautiful thing, that is to say, by definition that which it was good to contemplate? Or was there an actual objective quality 'beauty', just like 'green' and 'good'? And knowledge, too, presented a problem. Were all truths equally good to pursue and contemplate?-as for example the number of grains in a given tract of sea-sand. We were disposed to repudiate very strongly the idea that useful knowledge could be preferable to useless knowledge. But we flirted with the idea that there might be some intrinsic quality-though not, perhaps, quite on a par with 'green' and 'good' and 'beautiful'-which once could call 'interesting', and we were prepared to think it just possible that 'interesting' knowledge might be better to pursue than 'uninteresting' knowledge. Another competing adjective was 'important', provided it was

quite clear that 'important' did not mean 'useful'. Or to return again to our favourite subject, was a violent love affair which lasted a short time better than a more tepid one which endured longer? We were inclined to think it was. But I have said enough by now to make it clear that the problems of mensuration, in which we had involved ourselves, were somewhat formidable.

It was all under the influence of Moore's method, according to which you could hope to make essentially vague notions clear by using precise language about them and asking exact questions. It was a method of discovery by the instrument of impeccable grammar and an unambiguous dictionary. 'What *exactly* do you mean?' was the phrase most frequently on our lips. If it appeared under cross-examination that you did not mean *exactly* anything, you lay under a strong suspicion of meaning nothing whatever. It was a stringent education in dialectic; but in practice it was a kind of combat in which strength of character was really much more valuable than subtlety of mind. In the preface to his great work, bespattered with the numerous italics through which the reader who knew him could actually hear, as with Queen Victoria, the vehemence of his utterance, Moore begins by saying that error is chiefly 'the attempt to answer questions, without first discovering precisely *what* question it is which you desire to answer ... Once we recognise the exact meaning of the two questions, I think it also becomes plain exactly what kind of reasons are relevant as arguments for or against any particular answer to them.' So we spent our time trying to discover *precisely what* questions we were asking, confident in the faith that, if only we could ask precise questions, everyone would know the answer. Indeed Moore expressly claimed as much. In his famous chapter on 'The Ideal' he wrote:

> Indeed, once the meaning of the question is clearly understood, the answer to it, in its main outlines, appears to be so obvious, that it runs the risk of seeming to be a platitude. By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. No one, probably, who has asked himself the question, has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature, are good in themselves; nor if we consider strictly what things are

> worth having *purely for their own sakes*, does it appear probable that any one will think that anything else has *nearly* so great a value as the things which are included under these two heads.

And then there was the question of pleasure. As time wore on towards the nineteen-tens, I fancy we weakened a bit about pleasure. But, in our prime, pleasure was nowhere. I would faintly urge that if two states of mind were similar in all other respects except that one was pleasurable and *the* other was painful there *might* be a little to be said for the former, but the principle of organic unities was against me. It was the general view (though not quite borne out by the *Principia*) that pleasure had nothing to do with the case and, on the whole, a pleasant state of mind lay under grave suspicion of lacking intensity and passion.

In those days X had not taken up women, nor Woolf monkeys, and they were not their present blithe selves. The two of them, sunk *deep* in silence and in basket chairs on opposite sides of the fireplace in a room which was at all times pitch dark, would stop sucking their pipes only to murmur that all good states of mind were extremely painful and to imply that all painful states of mind were extremely good. Strachey seconded them-it was only in his second childhood that Lytton took up pleasure though his sorrow was more fitful than their settled gloom. But with Sheppard and myself cheerfulness could not but break through, and we were in great disgrace about it. There was a terrible scene one evening when we turned insubordinate and reckless and maintained that there was nothing wrong in itself in being cheerful. It was decided that such low habits were particularly characteristic of King's as opposed to the austerity of Trinity.

Socrates had persuaded Protarchus that pure hedonism was absurd. Moore himself was only prepared to accept pleasure as enhancement of a state of affairs otherwise good. But Moore hated evil and he found a place in his religion for vindictive punishment. 'Not only is the pleasantness of a state *not* in pro portion to its intrinsic worth; it may even add positively to its vileness ... The infliction of pain on a person whose state of mind is bad may, if the pain be not too intense, create a state of things that is better *on the whole* than if the evil state of mind had existed unpunished. Whether such a state of affairs can ever constitute a *positive* good is another question.' I call attention

to the qualification 'if the pain be not too intense'. Our Ideal was a merciful God.

Thus we were brought up-with Plato's absorption in the good in itself, with a scholasticism which outdid St Thomas, in calvinistic withdrawal from the pleasures and successes of Vanity Fair, and oppressed with all the sorrows of Werther. It did not prevent us from laughing most of the time and we enjoyed supreme self-confidence, superiority and contempt towards all the rest of the unconverted world. But it was hardly a state of mind which a grown-up person in his senses could sustain literally. When MacCarthy came down for a week-end, he would smile affectionately, persuade Moore to sing his German Lieder at the piano, to hear which we all agreed was a very good state of mind indeed, or incite Bob Trevy to deliver a broken oration which was a frantic travesty of the whole method, the charm of it lying in the impossibility of deciding whether Bob himself meant it, half at least, seriously or not.

It seems to me looking back, that this religion of ours was a very good one to grow up under. It remains nearer the truth than any other that I know, with less irrelevant extraneous matter and nothing to be ashamed of; though it is a comfort to-day to be able to discard with a good conscience the calculus and the mensuration and the duty to know *exactly* what one means and feels. It was a purer, sweeter air by far than Freud cum Marx. It is still my religion under the surface. I read again last week Moore's famous chapter on 'The Ideal'. It is remarkable how wholly oblivious he managed to be of the qualities of the life of action and also of the pattern of life as a whole. He was existing in a timeless ecstasy. His way of translating his own particular emotions of the moment into the language of generalised abstraction is a charming and beautiful comedy. Do you remember the passage in which he discusses whether, granting that it is mental qualities which one should chiefly love, it is important that the beloved person should also be good-looking? In the upshot good looks win a modest victory over 'mental qualities'. I cannot forbear to quote this sweet and lovely passage, so sincere and passionate and careful:

> I think it may be admitted that wherever the affection is most valuable, the appreciation of mental qualities must form a large part of it, and that the presence of this part makes the whole far more valuable than it could have been without it. But it seems very doubtful whether this

appreciation, by itself, can possess as much value as the whole in which it is combined with an appreciation of the appropriate *corporeal* expression of the mental qualities in question. It is certain that in all actual cases of valuable affection, the bodily expressions of character, whether by looks, by words, or by actions, do form a part of the object towards which the affection is felt, and that the fact of their inclusion appears to heighten the value of the whole state. It is, indeed, very difficult to imagine what the cognition of mental qualities *alone*, unaccompanied by *any* corporeal expression, would be like; and, in so far as we succeed in making this abstraction, the whole considered certainly appears to have less value. I therefore conclude that the importance of an admiration of admirable mental qualities lies chiefly in the immense superiority of a whole, in which it forms a part, to one in which it is absent, and not in any high degree of intrinsic value which it possesses by itself. It even appears to be doubtful whether, in itself, it possesses so much value as the appreciation of mere corporeal beauty undoubtedly does possess; that is to say, whether the appreciation of what has great intrinsic value is so valuable as the appreciation of what is merely beautiful.

But further if we consider the nature of admirable mental qualities, by themselves, it appears that a proper appreciation of them involves a reference to purely material beauty in yet another way. Admirable mental qualities do, if our previous conclusions are correct, consist very largely in an emotional contemplation of beautiful objects; and hence the appreciation of them will consist essentially in the contemplation of such contemplation. It is true that the most valuable appreciation of persons appears to be that which consists in the appreciation of their appreciation of other persons: but even here a reference to material beauty appears to be involved, *both* in respect of the fact that what is appreciated in the last instance may be the contemplation of what is merely beautiful, *and* in respect of the fact that the most valuable appreciation of a person appears to *include* an appreciation of his corporeal expression. Though, therefore, we may

> admit that the appreciation of a person's attitude towards other persons, or, to take one instance, the love of love, is far the most valuable good we know, and far more valuable than the mere love of beauty, yet we can only admit this if the first be understood to *include* the latter, in various degrees of directness.

The New Testament is a handbook for politicians compared with the unworldliness of Moore's chapter on 'The Ideal'. I know no equal to it in literature since Plato. And it is better than Plato because it is quite free from *fancy*. It conveys the beauty of the literalness of Moore's mind, the pure and passionate intensity of his vision, unfanciful and undressed-up. Moore had a nightmare once in which he could not distinguish propositions from tables. But even when he was awake, he could not distinguish love and beauty and truth from the furniture. They took on the same definition of outline, the same stable, solid, objective qualities and common-sense reality.

I see no reason to shift from the fundamental intuitions of *Principia Ethica*; though they are much too few and too narrow to fit actual experience which provides a richer and more various content. That they furnish a justification of experience wholly independent of outside events had become an added comfort, even though one cannot live today secure in the undisturbed individualism which was the extraordinary achievement of the early Edwardian days, not for our little lot only, but for everyone else, too.

I am still a long way off from D. H. Lawrence and what he might have been justified in meaning when he said that we were 'done for'. And even now I am not quite ready to approach that theme. First of all I must explain the other facet of our faith. So far it has been a question of our attitude to ourselves and one another. What was our understanding of the outside world and our relation to it?

It was an important object of Moore's book to distinguish between goodness as an attribute of states of mind and rightness as an attribute of actions. He also has a section on the justification of general rules of conduct. The large part played by considerations of probability in his theory of right conduct was, indeed, an important contributory cause to my spending all the leisure of many years on the study of that subject: I was writing under the joint influence of Moore's *Principia Ethica* and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. But for the most

part, as I have said, *we* did not pay attention to this aspect of the book or bother much about it. We were living in the specious present, nor had begun to play the game of consequences. We existed in the world of Plato's *Dialogues*; we had not reached the *Republic*, let alone the *Laws*. This brought us one big advantage. As we had thrown hedonism out of the window and, discarding Moore's so highly problematical calculus, lived entirely in present experience, since social action as an end in itself and not merely as a lugubrious duty had dropped out of our Ideal, and not only social action, but the life of action generally, power, politics, success, wealth, ambition, with the economic motive and the economic criterion less prominent in our philosophy than with St Francis of Assisi, who at least made collections for the birds, it follows that we were amongst the first of our generation, perhaps alone amongst our generation, to escape from the Benthamite tradition. In practice, of course, at least so far as I was concerned, the outside world was not forgotten or forsworn. But I am recalling what our Ideal was in those early days when the life of passionate contemplation and communion was supposed to oust all other purposes whatever. It can be no part of this memoir for me to try to explain why it was such a big advantage for us to have escaped from the Benthamite tradition. But I do now regard that as the worm which has been gnawing at the insides of modern civilisation and is responsible for its present moral decay. *We* used to regard the Christians as the enemy, because they appeared as the representatives of tradition, convention and hocus-pocus. In truth it was the Benthamite calculus, based on an over-valuation of the economic criterion, which was destroying the quality of the popular Ideal. Moreover, it was this escape from Bentham, joined with the unsurpassable individualism of our philosophy, which has served to protect the whole lot of us from the final *reductio ad absurdum* of Benthamism known as Marxism. We have completely failed, indeed, to provide a substitute for these economic bogus-faiths capable of protecting or satisfying our successors. But we our selves have remained-am I not right in saying *all* of us? altogether immune from the virus, as safe in the citadel of our ultimate faith as the Pope of Rome in his.

This is what we gained. But we set on one side, not only that part of Moore's fifth chapter on 'Ethics in relation to Conduct' which dealt with the obligation so to act as to produce by causal connection the most probable maximum of eventual good through the whole procession of future ages (a discussion which was indeed riddled with falla-

cies), but also the part which discussed the duty of the individual to obey general rules. We entirely repudiated a personal liability on us to obey general rules. We claimed the right to judge every individual case on its merits, and the wisdom, experience and self-control to do so successfully. This was a very important part of our faith, violently and aggressively held, and for the outer world it was our most obvious and dangerous characteristic. We repudiated entirely customary morals, conventions and traditional wisdom. We were, that is to say, in the strict sense of the term, immoralists. The consequences of being found out had, of course, to be considered for what they were worth. But we recognised no moral obligation on us, no inner sanction, to conform or to obey. Before heaven we claimed to be our own judge in our own case. I have come to think that this is, perhaps, rather a Russian characteristic. It is certainly not an English one. It resulted in a general, widespread, though partly covert, suspicion affecting ourselves, our motives and our behaviour. This suspicion still persists to a certain extent, and it always will. It has deeply coloured the course of our lives in relation to the outside world. It is, I now think, a justifiable suspicion. Yet so far as I am concerned, it is too late to change. I remain, and always will remain, an immoralist.

I am not now concerned, however, with the fact that this aspect of our code was shocking. It would have been not less so, even if we had been perfectly right. What matters a great deal more is the fact that it was flimsily based, as I now think, on an *a priori* view of what human nature is like, both other people's and our own, which was disastrously mistaken.

I have said that we were amongst the first to escape from Benthamism. But of another eighteenth-century heresy we were the unrepentant heirs and last upholders. We were among the last of the Utopians, or meliorists as they are sometimes called, who believe in a continuing moral progress by virtue of which the human race already consists of reliable, rational, decent people, influenced by truth and objective standards, who can be safely released from the outward restraints of convention and traditional standards and inflexible rules of conduct, and left, from now onwards, to their own sensible devices, pure motives and reliable intuitions of the good. The view that human nature is reasonable had in 1903 quite a long history behind it. It underlay the ethics of self-interest-rational self-interest as it was called just as much as the universal ethics of Kant or Bentham which aimed at the general good; and it was because self-interest was *rational* that the

egoistic and altruistic systems were supposed to work out in practice to the same conclusions.

In short, we repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. We were not aware that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved. We had no respect for traditional wisdom or the restraints of custom. We lacked reverence, as Lawrence observed and as Ludwig with justice also used to say for everything and everyone. It did not occur to us to respect the extraordinary accomplishment of our predecessors in the ordering of life (as it now seems to me to have been) or the elaborate framework which they had devised to protect this order. Plato said in his *Laws* that one of the best of a set of good laws would be a law forbidding any young man to enquire which of them are right or wrong, though an old man remarking any defect in the laws might communicate this observation to a ruler or to an equal in years when no young man was present. That was a *dictum* in which we should have been unable to discover any point or significance whatever. As cause and consequence of our general state of mind we completely misunderstood human nature, including our own. The rationality which we attributed to it led to a superficiality, not only of judgment, but also of feeling. It was not only that intellectually we were pre-Freudian, but we had lost something which our predecessors had without replacing it. I still suffer incurably from attributing an unreal rationality to other people's feelings and behaviour (and doubt less to my own, too). There is one small but extraordinarily silly manifestation of this absurd idea of what is 'normal', namely the impulse to *protest*-to write a letter to *The Times*, call a meeting in the Guildhall, subscribe to some fund when my presuppositions as to what is 'normal' are not fulfilled. I behave as if there really existed some authority or standard to which I can successfully appeal if I shout loud enough-perhaps it is some hereditary vestige of a belief in the efficacy of prayer.

I have said that this pseudo-rational view of human nature led to a thinness, a superficiality, not only of judgment, but also of feeling. It seems to me that Moore's chapter on 'The Ideal' left out altogether some whole categories of valuable emotion. The attribution of rationality to human nature, instead of enriching it, now seems to me to have impoverished it. It ignored certain powerful and valuable

springs of feeling. Some of the spontaneous, irrational outbursts of human nature can have a sort of value from which our schematism was cut off. Even some of the feelings associated with wickedness can have value. And in addition to the values arising out of spontaneous, volcanic and even wicked impulses, there are many objects of valuable contemplation and communion beyond those we knew of-those concerned with the order and pattern of life amongst communities and the emotions which they can inspire. Though one must ever remember Paley's *dictum* that 'although we speak of communities as of sentient beings and ascribe to them happiness and misery, desires, interests and passions, nothing really exists or feels but *individuals*', yet we carried the individualism of our individuals too far.

And as the years wore on towards 1914, the thinness and superficiality, as well as the falsity, of our view of man's heart became, as it now seems to me, more obvious; and there was, too, some falling away from the purity of the original doctrine. Concentration on moments of communion between a pair of lovers got thoroughly mixed up with the, once rejected, pleasure. The pattern of life would sometimes become no better than a succession of permutations of short sharp superficial 'intrigues', as we called them. Our comments on life and affairs were bright and amusing, but brittle-as I said of the conversation of Russell and myself with Lawrence-because there was no solid diagnosis of human nature underlying them. Bertie in particular sustained simultaneously a pair of opinions ludicrously incompatible. He held that in fact human affairs were carried on after a most irrational fashion, but that the remedy was quite simple and easy, since all we had to do was to carry them on rationally. A discussion of practical affairs on these lines was really very boring. And a discussion of the human heart which ignored so many of its deeper and blinder passions, both good and bad, was scarcely more interesting. Indeed it is only states of mind that matter, provided we agree to take account of the pattern of life through time and give up regarding it as a series of independent, instantaneous flashes, but the ways in which states of mind can be valuable, and the objects of them, are more various, and also much richer, than we allowed for. I fancy we used in old days to get round the rich variety of experience by expanding illegitimately the field of aesthetic appreciation (we would deal, for example, with all branches of the tragic emotion under this head), classifying as aesthetic experience what is really human experience and somehow sterilising it by this mis-classification.

If, therefore, I altogether ignore our merits-our charm, our intelligence, our unworldliness, our affection-I can see us as water-spiders, gracefully skimming, as light and reasonable as air, the surface of the stream without any contact at all with the eddies and currents underneath. And if I imagine us as coming under the observation of Lawrence's ignorant, jealous, irritable, hostile eyes, what a combination of qualities we offered to arouse his passionate distaste; this thin rationalism skipping on the crust of the lava, ignoring both the reality and the value of the vulgar passions, joined to libertinism and comprehensive irreverence, too clever by half for such an earthy character as Bunny, seducing with its intellectual *chic* such a portent as Ottoline, a regular skin-poison. All this was very unfair to poor, silly, well-meaning us. But that is why I say that there may have been just a grain of truth when Lawrence said in 1914 that we were 'done for'.