

IDEALS OF CONDUCT*

591. Every man has certain ideals of the general description of conduct that befits a rational animal in his particular station in life, what most accords with his total nature and relations. If you think this statement too vague, I will say, more specifically, that there are three ways in which these ideals usually recommend themselves and justly do so. In the first place certain kinds of conduct, when the man contemplates them, have an esthetic quality. He thinks that conduct fine; and though his notion may be coarse or sentimental, yet if so, it will alter in time and must tend to be brought into harmony with his nature. At any rate, his taste is his taste for the time being; that is all. In the second place, the man endeavors to shape his ideals into consistency with each other, for inconsistency is odious to him. In the third place, he imagines what the consequences of fully carrying out his ideals would be, and asks himself what the esthetic quality of those consequences would be.

592. These ideals, however, have in the main been imbibed in childhood. Still, they have gradually been shaped to his personal nature and to the ideas of his circle of society rather by a continuous process of growth than by any distinct acts of thought. Reflecting upon these ideals, he is led to *intend* to make his own conduct conform at least to a part of them — to that part in which he thoroughly believes. Next, he usually formulates, however vaguely, certain *rules of conduct*. He can hardly help doing so. Besides, such rules are convenient and serve to minimize the effects of future inadvertence and, what are well-named, the wiles of the devil within him. Reflection upon these rules, as well as upon the general ideals behind them, has a certain effect upon his disposition, so that what he naturally inclines to do becomes modified. Such being his condition, he often foresees that a special occasion is going to arise; thereupon, a certain gathering of his forces will begin to work and this working of his being will cause him to consider how he will act, and in accordance with his disposition, such as it now is, he is led to form a *resolution* as to how he will act upon that occasion. This resolution is of the nature of a plan; or, as one might almost say, a *diagram*. It is a mental formula always more or less general. Being nothing more than an idea, this resolution does not necessarily influence his conduct. But now he sits down and goes through a process similar to that of impressing a lesson upon his memory, the result of which is that the *resolution*, or mental formula, is converted into a *determination*, by which I mean a really efficient agency, such that if one knows what its special character is, one can *forecast* the man's conduct on the special occasion. One cannot make forecasts that will come true in the majority of trials of them by means of any figment. It must be by means of something true and real.

593. We do not know by what machinery the conversion of a resolution into a determination is brought about. Several hypotheses have been proposed; but they do not much concern us just now. Suffice it to say that the determination, or efficient agency, is something hidden in the depths of our nature. A peculiar quality of feeling accompa-

* From the "Lowell Lectures of 1903", Lecture I, vol. 1, 3d Draught; 611-615 from vol. 2, 2d Draught, which is a continuation of vol. 1, 3d Draught.

nies the first steps of the process of forming this impression; but later we have no direct consciousness of it. We may become aware of the disposition, especially if it is pent up. In that case, we shall recognize it by a feeling of *need, of desire*. I must notice that a man does not always have an opportunity to form a definite resolution beforehand. But in such cases there are less definite but still well-marked determinations of his nature growing out of the general rules of conduct that he has formulated; or in case no such appropriate rule has been formulated, his ideal of fitting conduct will have produced some disposition. At length, the anticipated occasion actually arises.

594. In order to fix our ideas, let us suppose a case. In the course of my reflexions, I am led to think that it would be well for me to talk to a certain person in a certain way. I resolve that I will do so when we meet. But considering how, in the heat of conversation, I might be led to take a different tone, I proceed to impress the resolution upon my soul; with the result that when the interview takes place, although my thoughts are then occupied with the matter of the talk, and may never revert to my resolution, nevertheless the determination of my being does influence my conduct. All action in accordance with a determination is accompanied by a feeling that is pleasurable; but, whether the feeling at any instant is felt as pleasurable in that very instant or whether the recognition of it as pleasurable comes a little later is a question of fact difficult to make sure about.

595. The argument turns on the feeling of pleasure, and therefore it is necessary, in order to judge of it, to get at the facts about that feeling as accurately as we can. In beginning to perform any series of acts which had been determined upon beforehand, there is a certain sense of joy, an anticipation and commencement of a relaxation of the tension of need, which we now become more conscious of than we had been before. In the act itself taking place at any instant, it may be that we are conscious of pleasure; although that is doubtful. Before the series of acts are done, we already begin to review them, and in that review we recognize the pleasurable character of the feelings that accompanied those acts.

596. To return to my interview, as soon as it is over I begin to review it more carefully and I then ask myself whether my conduct accorded with my resolution. That resolution, as we agreed, was a mental formula. The memory of my action may be roughly described as an image. I contemplate that image and put the question to myself. Shall I say that that image satisfies the stipulations of my resolution, or not? The answer to this question, like the answer to any inward question, is necessarily of the nature of a mental formula. It is accompanied, however, by a certain quality of feeling which is related to the formula itself very much as the color of the ink in which anything is printed is related to the sense of what is printed. And just as we first become aware of the peculiar color of the ink and afterward ask ourselves whether it is agreeable or not, so in formulating the judgment that the image of our conduct does satisfy our previous resolution we are, in the very act of formulation, aware of a certain quality of feeling, the feeling of satisfaction — and directly afterward recognize that that feeling was pleasurable.

597. But now I may probe deeper into my conduct, and may ask myself whether it accorded with my general intentions. Here again there will be a judgment and a feeling accompanying it, and directly afterward a recognition that that feeling was pleasurable or painful. This judgment, if favorable, will probably afford less intense pleasure than the other; but the feeling of satisfaction which is pleasurable will be different and, as we say, a *deeper feeling*.

598. I may now go still further and ask how the image of my conduct accords with my ideals of conduct fitting to a man like me. Here will follow a new judgment with its accompanying feeling followed by a recognition of the pleasurable or painful character of that feeling. In any or all of these ways a man may criticize his own conduct; and it is essential to remark that it is not mere idle praise or blame such as writers who are not of the wisest often distribute among the personages of history. No indeed! It is approval or disapproval of the only respectable kind, that which will bear fruit in the future. Whether the man is satisfied with himself or dissatisfied, his nature will absorb the lesson like a sponge; and the next time he will tend to do better than he did before.

599. In addition to these three self-criticisms of single series of actions, a man will from time to time review his *ideals*. This process is not a job that a man sits down to do and has done with. The experience of life is continually contributing instances more or less illuminative. These are digested first, not in the man's consciousness, but in the depths of his reasonable being. The results come to consciousness later. But meditation seems to agitate a mass of tendencies and allow them more quickly to settle down so as to be really more conformed to what is fit for the man.

600. Finally, in addition to this personal meditation on the fitness of one's own ideals, which is of a practical nature, there are the purely theoretical studies of the student of ethics who seeks to ascertain, as a matter of curiosity, what the fitness of an ideal of conduct consists in, and to deduce from such definition of fitness what conduct ought to be. Opinions differ as to the wholesomeness of this study. It only concerns our present purpose to remark that it is in itself a purely theoretical inquiry, entirely distinct from the business of shaping one's own conduct. Provided that feature of it be not lost sight of, I myself have no doubt that the study is more or less favorable to right living.

601. I have thus endeavored to describe fully the typical phenomena of controlled action. *They are not every one present in every case.* Thus, as I have already mentioned, there is not always an opportunity to form a resolution. I have specially emphasized the fact that conduct is determined by what precedes it in time, while the recognition of the pleasure it brings follows after the action. Some may opine that this is not true of what is called the pursuit of pleasure; and I admit that there is room for their opinion while I myself incline to think, for example, that the satisfaction of eating a good dinner is never a satisfaction in the present instantaneous state, but always follows after it. I insist, at any rate, that a *feeling*, as a mere appearance, can have no real power in itself to produce any effect whatever, however indirectly.

602. My account of the facts, you will observe, leaves a man at full liberty, no matter if we grant all that the necessitarians ask. That is, the man can, or if you please is *compelled, to make his life more reasonable*. What other distinct idea than that, I should be glad to know, can be attached to the word liberty?

603. Now let us compare the facts I have stated with the argument I am opposing. That argument rests on two main premisses; first, that it is unthinkable that a man should act from any other motive than pleasure, if his act be deliberate; and second, that action with reference to pleasure leaves no room for any distinction of right and wrong.

604. Let us consider whether this second premiss is really true. What would be requisite in order to destroy the difference between innocent and guilty conduct? The one thing that would do it would be to destroy the faculty of effective self-criticism. As long as that remained, as long as a man compared his conduct with a preconceived

standard and that effectively, it need not make much difference if his only real motive were pleasure; for it would become disagreeable to him to incur the sting of conscience. But those who deluded themselves with that fallacy were so inattentive to the phenomena that they confused the judgment, after the act, that that act satisfied or did not satisfy the requirements of a standard, with a pleasure or pain accompanying the act itself.

605. Let us now consider whether the other premiss is true, that it is unthinkable that a man should act deliberately except for the sake of pleasure. What is the element which it is in truth unthinkable that deliberate action should lack? It is simply and solely the determination. Let his determination remain, as it is certainly conceivable that it should remain, although the very nerve of pleasure were cut so that the man were perfectly insensible to pleasure and pain, and he will certainly pursue the line of conduct upon which he is intent. The only effect would be to render the man's intentions more inflexible — an effect, by the way, which we often have occasion to observe in men whose feelings are almost deadened by age or by some derangement of the brain. But those who have reasoned in this fallacious way have confounded together the determination of the man's nature, which is an efficient agency prepared previously to the act, with the comparison of conduct with a standard, which comparison is a general mental formula subsequent to the act, and, having identified these two utterly different things, placed them in the act itself as a mere quality of feeling.

606. Now if we recur to the defendant argument about reasoning, we shall find that it involves the same sort of tangle of ideas. The phenomena of reasoning are, in their general features, parallel to those of moral conduct. For reasoning is essentially thought that is under self-control, just as moral conduct is conduct under self-control. Indeed reasoning is a species of controlled conduct and as such necessarily partakes of the essential features of controlled conduct. If you attend to the phenomena of reasoning, although they are not quite so familiar to you as those of morals because there are no clergy-men whose business it is to keep them before your minds, you will nevertheless remark, without difficulty, that a person who draws a rational conclusion, not only thinks it to be true, but thinks that similar reasoning would be just in every analogous case. If he fails to think this, the inference is not to be called reasoning. It is merely an idea suggested to his mind and which he cannot resist thinking is true. But not having been subjected to any check or control, it is not deliberately approved and is not to be called reasoning. To call it so would be to ignore a distinction which it ill becomes a rational being to overlook. To be sure, every inference forces itself upon us irresistibly. That is to say, it is irresistible at the instant it first suggests itself. Nevertheless, we all have in our minds certain *norms*, or general patterns of right reasoning, and we can compare the inference with one of those and ask ourselves whether it satisfies that rule. I call it a rule, although the formulation may be somewhat vague; because it has the essential character of a rule of being a general formula applicable to particular cases. If we judge our norm of right reason to be satisfied, we get a feeling of approval, and the inference now not only appears as irresistible as it did before, but it will prove far more unshakable by any doubt.

607. You see at once that we have here all the main elements of moral conduct; the general standard mentally conceived beforehand, the efficient agency in the inward nature, the act, the subsequent comparison of the act with the standard. Examining the phenomena more closely we shall find that not a single element of moral conduct is un-

represented in reasoning. At the same time, the special case naturally has its peculiarities.

608. Thus, we have a general ideal of sound logic. But we should not naturally describe it as our idea of the kind of reasoning that befits men in our situation. How should we describe it? How if we were to say that sound reasoning is such reasoning that in every conceivable state of the universe in which the facts stated in the premisses are true, the fact stated in the conclusion will thereby and therein be true. The objection to this statement is that it only covers necessary reasoning, including reasoning about chances. There is other reasoning which is defensible as probable, in the sense that while the conclusion may be more or less erroneous, yet the same procedure diligently persisted in must, in every conceivable universe in which it leads to any result at all, lead to a result indefinitely approximating to the truth. When that is the case, we shall do right to pursue that method, provided we recognize its true character, since our relation to the universe does not permit us to have any necessary knowledge of positive facts. You will observe that in such a case our ideal is shaped by the consideration of our situation relatively to the universe of existences. There are still other operations of the mind to which the name “reasoning” is especially appropriate, although it is not the prevailing habit of speech to call them so. They are conjectures, but rational conjectures; and the justification of them is that unless a man had a tendency to guess right, unless his guesses are better than tossing up a copper, no truth that he does not already virtually possess could ever be disclosed to him, so that he might as well give up all attempt to reason; while if he has any decided tendency to guess right, as he *may* have, then no matter how often he guesses wrong, he will get at the truth at last. These considerations certainly do take into account the man’s inward nature as well as his outward relations; so that the ideals of good logic are truly of the same general nature as ideals of fine conduct. We saw that three kinds of considerations go to support ideals of conduct. They were, first, that certain conduct seems fine in itself. Just so certain conjectures seem likely and easy in themselves. Secondly, we wish our conduct to be consistent. Just so the ideal [of] necessary reasoning is consistency simply. Third, we consider what the general effect would be of thoroughly carrying out our ideals. Just so certain ways of reasoning recommend themselves because if persistently carried out they must lead to the truth. The parallelism, you perceive, is almost exact.

609. There is also such a thing as a general logical *intention*. But it is not emphasized for the reason that the will does not enter so violently into reasoning as it does into moral conduct. I have already mentioned the logical norms, which correspond to moral laws. In taking up any difficult problem of reasoning we formulate to ourselves a logical resolution; but here again, because the will is not at such high tension in reasoning as it often is in self-controlled conduct, these resolutions are not very prominent phenomena. Owing to this circumstance, the efficient determination of our nature, which causes us to reason in each case as we do, has less relation to resolutions than to logical norms. The act itself is, at the instant, irresistible in both cases. But immediately after, it is subjected to self-criticism by comparison with a previous standard which is always the norm, or *rule*, in the case of reasoning, although in the case of outward conduct we are too often content to compare the act with the resolution. In the case of general conduct, the lesson of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is frequently not much taken to heart and little influences future conduct. But in the case of reasoning an inference which self-criticism disapproves is always instantly annulled, because there is no difficulty in doing this. Finally, all the different feelings which, as we noticed, accompanied the dif-

ferent operations of self-controlled conduct equally accompany those of reasoning, although they are not quite so vivid.

610. The parallelism is thus perfect. Nor, I repeat, could it fail to be so, if our description of the phenomena of controlled conduct was true, since reasoning is only a special kind of controlled conduct.

611. What does right reasoning consist in? It consists in such reasoning as shall be conducive to our ultimate aim. What, then, is our ultimate aim? Perhaps it is not necessary that the logician should answer this question. Perhaps it might be possible to deduce the correct rules of reasoning from the mere assumption that we have some ultimate aim. But I cannot see how this could be done. If we had, for example, no other aim than the pleasure of the moment, we should fall back into the same absence of any logic that the fallacious argument would lead to. We should have no ideal of reasoning, and consequently no norm. It seems to me that the logician ought to recognize what our ultimate aim is. It would seem to be the business of the moralist to find this out, and that the logician has to accept the teaching of ethics in this regard. But the moralist, as far as I can make it out, merely tells us that we have a power of self-control, that no narrow or selfish aim can ever prove satisfactory, that the only satisfactory aim is the broadest, highest, and most general possible aim; and for any more definite information, as I conceive the matter, he has to refer us to the esthetician, whose business it is to say what is the state of things which is most admirable in itself regardless of any ulterior reason.

612. So, then, we appeal to the esthete to tell us what it is that is admirable without any reason for being admirable beyond its inherent character. Why, that, he replies, is the beautiful. Yes, we urge, such is the name that you give to it, but what *is it*? What is this character? If he replies that it consists in a certain quality of feeling, a certain *bliss*, I for one decline altogether to accept the answer as sufficient. I should say to him, My dear Sir, if you can prove to me that this quality of feeling that you speak of does, as a fact, attach to what you call the beautiful, or that which would be admirable without any reason for being so, I am willing enough to believe you; but I cannot without strenuous proof admit that any particular quality of feeling is admirable without a reason. For it is too revolting to be believed unless one is forced to believe it.

613. A fundamental question like this, however practical the issues of it may be, differs entirely from any ordinary practical question, in that whatever is accepted as good in itself must be accepted without compromise. In deciding any special question of conduct it is often quite right to allow weight to different conflicting considerations and calculate their resultant. But it is quite different in regard to that which is to be the aim of all endeavor. The object admirable that is admirable *per se* must, no doubt, be general. Every ideal is more or less general. It may be a complicated state of things. But it must be a *single* ideal; it must have *unity*, because it is an idea, and unity is essential to every idea and every ideal. Objects of utterly disparate kinds may, no doubt, be admirable, because some special reason may make each one of them so. But when it comes to the ideal of the admirable, in itself, the very nature of its being is to be a precise idea; and if somebody tells me it is either this, or that, or that other, I say to him, It is clear you have no *idea* of what precisely it is. But an ideal must be capable of being embraced in a unitary idea, or it is no ideal at all. Therefore, there can be no compromises between different considerations here. The admirable ideal cannot be too extremely admirable. The more thoroughly it has whatever character is essential to it, the more admirable it must be.

614. Now what would the doctrine that that which is admirable in itself is a quality of feeling come to if taken in all its purity and carried to its furthest extreme — which should be the extreme of admirableness? It would amount to saying that the one ultimately admirable object is the unrestrained gratification of a desire, regardless of what the nature of that desire may be. Now that is too shocking. It would be the doctrine that all the higher modes of consciousness with which we are acquainted in ourselves, such as love and reason, are good only so far as they subserve the lowest of all modes of consciousness. It would be the doctrine that this vast universe of Nature which we contemplate with such awe is good only to produce a certain quality of feeling. Certainly, I must be excused for not admitting that doctrine unless it be proved with the utmost evidence. So, then, what proof is there that it is true? The only reason for it that I have been able to learn is that *gratification pleasure*, is the only conceivable result that is satisfied itself; and therefore, since we are seeking for that which is fine and admirable without any reason beyond itself, *pleasure, bliss*, is the only object which can satisfy the conditions. This is a respectable argument. It deserves consideration. Its premiss, that pleasure is the only conceivable result that is perfectly self-satisfied, must be granted. Only, in these days of evolutionary ideas which are traceable to the French Revolution as their instigator, and still further back to Galileo's experiment at the leaning tower of Pisa, and still further back to all the stands that have been made by Luther and even by Robert of Lincoln against attempts to bind down human reason to any prescriptions fixed in advance — in these days, I say, when these ideas of progress and growth have themselves grown up so as to occupy our minds as they now do, how can we be expected to allow the assumption to pass that the admirable in itself is any stationary result? The explanation of the circumstance that the only result that is satisfied with itself is a quality of feeling is that reason always looks forward to an endless future and expects endlessly to improve its results.

615. Consider, for a moment, what Reason, as well as we can today conceive it, really is. I do not mean man's faculty which is so called from its embodying in some measure Reason, or *Νοῦς*, as a something manifesting itself in the mind, in the history of mind's development, and in nature. What is this Reason? In the first place, it is something that never can have been completely embodied. The most insignificant of general ideas always involves conditional predictions or requires for its fulfilment that events should come to pass, and all that ever can have come to pass must fall short of completely fulfilling its requirements. A little example will serve to illustrate what I am saying. Take any general term whatever. I say of a stone that it is hard. That means that so long as the stone remains hard, every essay to scratch it by the moderate pressure of a knife will surely fail. To call the stone hard is to predict that no matter how often you try the experiment, it will fail every time. That innumerable series of conditional predictions is involved in the meaning of this lowly adjective. What ever may have been done will not begin to exhaust its meaning. At the same time, the very being of the General, of Reason, is of such a mode that this being *consists* in the Reason's actually governing events. Suppose a piece of carborundum has been made and has subsequently been dissolved in aqua regia without anybody at any time, so far as I know, ever having tried to scratch it with a knife. Undoubtedly, I may have good reason, nevertheless, to call it hard; because some actual fact has occurred such that Reason compels me to call it so, and a general idea of all the facts of the case can only be formed if I do call it so. In this case, my calling it hard is an actual event which is governed by that law of hardness of the piece of carborundum. But if there were no actual fact whatsoever

ver which was meant by saying that the piece of carborundum was hard, there would be not the slightest meaning in the word hard as applied to it. The very being of the General, of Reason, consists in its governing individual events. So, then, the essence of Reason is such that its being never can have been completely perfected. It always must be in a state of incipency, of growth. It is like the character of a man which consists in the ideas that he will conceive and in the efforts that he will make, and which only develops as the occasions actually arise. Yet in all his life long no son of Adam has ever fully manifested what there was in him. So, then, the development of Reason requires as a part of it the occurrence of more individual events than ever can occur. It requires, too, all the coloring of all qualities of feeling, including pleasure in its proper place among the rest. This development of Reason consists, you will observe, in embodiment, that is, in manifestation. The creation of the universe, which did not take place during a certain busy week, in the year 4004 B.C., but is going on today and never will be done, is this very development of Reason. I do not see how one can have a more satisfying ideal of the admirable than the development of Reason so understood. The one thing whose admirableness is not due to an ulterior reason is Reason itself comprehended in all its fullness, so far as we can comprehend it. Under this conception, the ideal of conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation by giving a hand toward rendering the world more reasonable whenever, as the slang is, it is "up to us" to do so. In logic, it will be observed that knowledge is reasonableness; and the ideal of reasoning will be to follow such methods as must develop knowledge the most speedily...